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NEW

ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR,

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

A ROMANCE.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

"DARNLEY," "DE L'ORME," "THE FALSE HEIR,"
&c., &c., &c.

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ROSE D'ALBRET;

OR

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

Whatever effect the institution of chivalry might have upon the manners and customs of the people of Europe; however much it might mitigate the rudeness of the middle ages, and soften the character of nations just emerging from barbarism, there was one point which it left untouched by its softening influence, and which remained, till within a few years of the present period, as a case of great hardship upon those who are supposed to have benefited more particularly by the rise of chivalrous feeling. Women, to whose defence the knights of old devoted their swords: women, for whose honour and renown so many a gallant champion has shed his blood: women, for whose love so many wars have been kindled and so many deeds done, were, till within a short period of the present day, mere slaves in those matters where their own happiness was concerned. Their influence, it is true, might be great over the heart and mind, but in person, at least till after their marriage, they were simply bondswomen; they ruled without power even over themselves, and had no authority whatsoever in those transactions which were of the most importance to them.

Where parents were living—although even then it was thought scarcely necessary to consult a young woman upon the disposal of her own hand,—yet we may suppose that parental affection might occasionally enable her to exercise some influence, however small, in the acceptance or rejection of a lover. But where the parents were dead, she had for many centuries, especially in France, no voice whatever in the matter, and was consigned, often against her inclination, to the arms of one whom perhaps she had never seen, whom she often regarded with indifference, and often with hate. It is little to be wondered at that such a state of things produced gross immorality. The first act of a young woman's life, the act alone by which she obtained comparative freedom, being one by which all the fine and delicate sensibilities, planted by God in the female heart, were violated at once,—it is little to be wondered at, I say, that the vows by which men endeavoured to supply the place of principles, should be violated likewise at the voice of inclination.

The fault, however, was in the feudal system; and the manner in which lands were first acquired in Europe, produced regulations for their transmission which generated the greatest social evils,—from the consequences of which indeed we are not yet altogether free. Each feof was required to be held by a man who could do service to his sovereign in the field; and, consequently, when any vassal or vavasor died, leaving behind him one or more daughters, the law required that the feof should be managed by a guardian till such a time as, by marriage, the heiress or heiresses could present men to do homage for their lands, and perform military service to the superior lord. Thus, an heiress could not marry without her lord's approbation; and by the constitutions of St. Louis it was enacted, that, even where a daughter was left under the care of her mother, the lord might require security that she should not form an alliance without his consent; and the good king, in the rule which he lays down for the choice of a husband for a ward, directs the guardian simply, if there be two or three who offer, to take the richest.

As the feudal system declined in France, however, the power of the lord over his vassals of course diminished, and long before the end of the sixteenth century it was but little exercised by one nobleman over another. In cases where large inheritances fell to daughters, their marriages were made up in their own families; and though they themselves had, in general, as little choice allowed them as ever, yet their own relations were the persons who selected the future companions of their life. Thus fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, had all far more to do with the marriage than the person whose weal or woe was to be affected by it.

When a father died, however, leaving his daughter to the care of a guardian, he transmitted to him the great power he himself possessed; and if the young lady were the heiress of great wealth, it generally happened that the person selected for her husband was a son or near relation of her guardian. Very often, indeed, her hand was made a matter of merchandise and sold to the best bidder, so that the guardianship of an heiress was not unfrequently a profitable speculation.

During the last half of the sixteenth century, indeed, almost all these rules and regulations were broken through, in the midst of the civil contentions which then existed in France; and we find several instances, even in the highest ranks of society, of children marrying against the will of their parents, when an opportunity was afforded them of escaping parental rule. Such was the case with the daughter of the Duke of Montpensier; but in this as in many other instances, religious differences had the

share, and the principle of liberty, which rose with the Protestant religion, affected even the relations of domestic life. To guard against the opportunities thus afforded, by the troubles of the times, for ladies to choose as they thought fit, many very violent and tyrannical acts were committed; and on the other hand, where power could venture to outstep the law, shameful breaches of right and justice took place to get possession of the person of an heiress, who was looked upon and treated by all parties merely as the chief title-deed of the estate. Thus the celebrated Duke of Mayenne himself carried off by force out of Guienne, from the care of her own mother, Mademoiselle de Caumont, in order to marry her to one of his own sons, though she had been already contracted to another person from the very cradle.

Such a strange state of things was farther complicated by the rights of the monarch to certain privileges of guardianship, known by the name of *gardes nobles*, by which he was entitled, by himself or his officers, to take into his charge the estates and persons of certain orphans under age; and, according to the corrupt practices of the times, the tutelage of the royal wards, in particular provinces, was often made a matter of merchandise, and still more frequently was bestowed upon unworthy persons, and obtained by the most corrupt means.

To all these complicated and evil arrangements must be added another custom of those times, which perhaps was devised for the purpose of obviating some of the bad consequences of the existing state of things. I allude to the habit of affiancing at a very early period. Sometimes this engagement between the children of two noble houses was confirmed by every ceremony which could render the act inviolable in the eyes of the church and the eyes of the law: sometimes, however, a less solemn compact was entered into by the parents, subject to certain conditions, and these were frequently rescinded, changed, or modified, according to circumstances. In many instances the heiress of a noble house was left by a dying parent to the guardianship of a friend, under contract to marry that friend's heir on arriving at a fixed period of life; and in such circumstances, whatever might be her inclination to break this engagement, when her reason or her heart led her towards another union, she would have found it very difficult to escape from the trammels imposed upon her, even to take shelter within the walls of a convent.

It has seemed necessary to give these explanations in this introductory chapter, that the reader may clearly understand the circumstances of the parties in the following tale; and I shall only farther add, that at the time when the history is supposed to commence, a long period of strife and confusion had thrown the country into a state of anarchy, in which law was daily set at defiance, even for the pettiest objects; every evil passion found indulgence under the shield of faction; the most violent, the most unjust, and the most criminal proceedings took place in every part of the realm; might made right throughout the country; and the bigoted priesthood were generally found *ready to assist in any dark plot or cunning scheme, where the interests of their patrons* might be served, or the objects of their own order advanced.

At the same time, though tranquillity was in no degree recovered, everything was tending to its restoration. Henry III. who had sanctioned, instigated, or committed every sort of crime, had fallen under the knife of the assassin. Henri Quatre was daily strengthening his tottering throne by victory, clemency, and policy. The battle of Arques had been fought and won, and the king, with a small but veteran and gallant army, had advanced towards the capital and was besieging the town of Dreux.

CHAPTER II.

On the confines of Normandy, towards that part of Maine which joins the Orleanois, and nearly on a straight line between Mortagne and Orleans, lies a track of wild common land, unfit for cultivation. It is now covered with low bushes, stunted trees, gorse, fern, and brushwood, though often presenting patches of short grass, which serve as pasture-ground for the sheep and cattle of the neighbouring villages, which are few and far between.

The extent of this somewhat dreary district is about five miles in one direction and six in another, and it is broken by hill and dale, deep pits and quarries, rushy pools and swamps, over which at night hovers the will-o'-the-wisp, while every now and then a tall beech or wide spreading oak attests the existence in former days of an extensive forest, now only traditionary. On one of the hills towards Chartres appear the ruins of an old castle, which, though not referrible to any very remote period, must have been a place of some strength, and below is a little hamlet, with a small church, containing several curious monuments, where knights are seen stretched in well sculptured armour, and leaguers in starched-ruffs and slashed pourpoints, lie recumbent in grey stone.

Here, however, in times not very long gone, stretched one of those forests for which France was once famous, though the woods had been cut down some years before the Revolution, and, converted into gold, had furnished many a luxurious banquet, or been spent in revelry and ostentation. It never, indeed, was very extensive, when compared with many of the forests that surrounded it, but still, towards the end of the sixteenth century it possessed scenes of wild beauty rarely to be met with, and some of the finest trees in the country. Through a portion of the wood ran one of the many windings of the river Huisne; and the ground being hilly, as I have said, from the principal eminences, the winding course of that stream might be discovered for several smiles, while here and there many a château, or *maison forte*, appeared in sight, filled with branches of the families of Sourdis, Estrées, Chazeul, de Harault, Liancourt, and others.

One or two village spires also graced the scene, but the eye could catch no town of any great magnitude, which was probably one of the reasons why that district had suffered less severely during the wars of the league than almost any other in France. Several causes, however, had combined to obtain for it this happy im-

munity. No Protestants were to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, and though all the gentlemen possessing property on the banks of the river were steady Catholics. yet they were in general attached to the cause of order and loyalty, and, while withheld by a feeling of bigotry from supporting in arms a monarch whom they considered a heretic, were unwilling to give the slightest aid to a faction, which they well knew had anything at heart but the maintenance of a religion which they used as a pretext for rebellion.

Thus the tide of war had rolled up the valleys of the Seine and of the Loire; Orleans had been a scene of strife and bloodshed; Alençon had been taken and retaken more than once; Dreux and Chartres had seen armies frequently under their walls; but the track I speak of, with the country round for several miles, had escaped the scourge of civil contention, and a truce, or convention, existed amongst the noblemen of that part of the country, by virtue of which each enjoyed his own in peace with his neighbours, and feared little the approach of hostile armies, as the ground was unfavourable to military evolutions; and nothing was to be obtained by marching through a country where no wealthy cities afforded an object either to cupidity or ambition.

When any great event was imminent, indeed, and the fortunes of France seemed to hang upon the result of an approaching battle, small bands of armed men hurrying up to join this force or that, would cross the district, carefully watched by the retainers of the different lords in the vicinity of the forest in order to prevent any outrage, and often the little village church would be thronged with soldiery, who in a few days after left their bones upon some bloody field; or at other times the wild hymns of the Huguenots would rise up at nightfall from the woodlands, in a strain of strange and scarcely earthly harmony. Then too, in the open field, the Calvinistic preacher would harangue his stern and determined brethren in language full of fiery enthusiasm, and often the Roman Catholic peasant would pause to listen, and go away almost convinced that the traditions to which he had so long clung were false and superstitious.

Few acts of violence, however, were heard of; and when any of the many bands of plunderers, who taking advantage of the anarchy of the times, scoured the country, pillaging and oppressing both parties alike, appeared in the woods and fields, the gentry, making common cause against them, soon drove them out to carry on their lawless trade elsewhere. Some severe acts of retribution too had been practised on those who were taken, and sometimes for weeks the old oaks were decorated with the acorns of Tristan the Hermit, as a warning to others of the same class to avoid the dangerous vicinity.

It was not wonderful, therefore, that, on a cold clear day, of the frosty spring of the year 159–, a stout, homely man, about forty years of age, dressed in a plain brown peasant's coat, with a black cloak and large riding boots, should ride along upon a strong bay horse, apparently quite at his ease, though night was not far distant. His dress and his whole appearance bespoke him a farmer well to do in the world; but farmers in those days were not above any of the acts required by their calling; and over the crupper of the horse was thrown a large sack of corn, either for sale or for provender.

I have said that the good peasant appeared quite at his ease, and so indeed he was, utterly unconscious of danger; but that did not imply that he went unprepared for defence, for those were times when such precautions had become habitual with all men. The very labourer went to the field with pike, or large knife, or arquebuse, if he could get it, and the good man we speak of had a long, broad, straight sword, with iron hilt and clasps, by his side, and two pistols at his saddle-bow. He was a strong, and seemingly an active man, too, though of no very bulky proportions, and somewhat short in stature; and there was an air of determination and vigour about him which would have made a single opponent think twice before he attacked him. Moreover, his countenance displayed a good deal of cool self-possessed *nonchalance*, if I may be permitted for once to use a foreign word, which showed that he was not one to sell either his corn or his life very cheap, and he rode his horse like one well accustomed to its back, and who found no difficulty in managing it at his will.

The evening, though, as I have said, very cold, was beautifully clear; the western sky was all gold and sunshine, the blades of grass, and the leaves that still hung upon the branches—which, like the ungrateful world, had cast off so many of their green companions in the dull moment of adversity—were all white with frost, and the road, though somewhat sandy in its materials, was as hard as adamant.

With a quick habitual motion of the eyes, the farmer glanced from right to left, marking everything around him as he advanced, and once, where the scene was more open and unencumbered with trees, halted for an instant and looked round. He still showed the careless confidence of his heart by humming from time to time snatches of a common song of the day, and once or twice laughed lightly at some thoughts which were passing in his own mind. His features were good, though somewhat too strongly marked, his eyes bright, and clear, his complexion ruddy with health and exposure, and his limbs well knit and strong from labour and hard exercise.

At length the worthy man, trotting on at no very quick pace, began to descend the side of one of the hills of the forest and entered a sort of wild dell, where small broken spots of turf were interspersed with clumps of younger trees, principally ashes and elms, while the older tenants of the wood hung upon the slopes higher up. At the bottom was a small stream of very clear water, flowing on towards the Huisne, through water-cresses and other plants of the brook, but now nearly frozen over, though towards the mid-course the quickness of the current, and perhaps the depth from which the fountain rose at no great distance, kept the water free from ice. A little wooden bridge spanned it over, leaving room for two horses abreast, but the old and congealed ruts at the side showed that the carts, which occasionally came along the road, passed through the stream

itself; and some vehicle which had traversed the valley not long before had so far broken away the frozen surface of the rivulet, that the traveller had clear space to let his horse drink, before he crossed the bridge.

As he paused to do so, however, and slackened his rein for that purpose, he gazed round, and his eyes were quickly attracted by the sight of some objects *not* very pleasant to contemplate for a wayfarer in those days. About two hundred yards farther down the stream sat a party of some eight or nine men, with their horses tied by the foot, and feeding on the frosty grass as well as they could. Though the number was so small, a cornet, or ensign of a troop of cavalry, rested against a tree, for the ground was too hard to plant it in the earth in the usual manner; and the steel caps, corslets, and arms which each man bore, plainly showed the farmer that one of the wandering bands of soldiery, who were constantly marching hither and thither, to plunder or to fight, as the case might be, was now before him.

From the force they seemed to muster, the good farmer at once concluded that such an inefficient body was more likely to be engaged in a marauding expedition than in a march to join either the army of the King or the Duke of Mayenne; but the green and red scarfs which they wore evinced that, when engaged in regular military operations, it was to the party of the latter they were attached, though the district in which they now were generally favoured the royal cause.

However, as he himself, whatever his private opinions might be, bore no distinctive signs of either faction about him, the traveller hoped that he might be suffered to pass unmolested, especially as his dress and appearance offered no great show of wealth; and, therefore, without displaying the slightest concern or apprehension, he suffered his horse to conclude his draught, and then was preparing to resume his journey, when, after a brief consultation, one of the soldiers advanced at a quick pace on foot, and planted himself on the opposite side of the bridge, while another ran higher up the hill, and the rest rose slowly from the ground, and began to untie their horses.

All these movements were remarked by the traveller; but still he maintained his air of easy carelessness, till the soldier who had placed himself opposite advanced a step or two towards him, exclaiming in an impatient tone, as if irritated by his apathy, "*Qui vive?*"

The farmer was not without his reply, however, though, to say "Long live the king," which he might be inclined to do, would have been a dangerous experiment, and he therefore replied, without the least hesitation, "*Vive la France!*"

"Come, come, master peasant, that will not do," exclaimed the other, advancing upon him, pistol in hand; thou art some accursed *Politic!* Are you for the Holy Union or Henry of Bourbon?"

"Nay, good sir, do not be angry," replied the farmer; "I am a poor man of no party, I have nothing to do with these matters at present, and mind only my own concerns."

"If thou art of no party," said the soldier, "*thou art an enemy to both. So, get off thy horse; I have a fancy for him.*"

"Nay, I pray you," cried the other, "do not take my beast. How am I to carry my corn?"

"We will save you that trouble," rejoined the soldier, with the courtesy usual on such occasions; "and if you have any weight of gold upon you, we will deliver you of that burden also. So, get off at once, Master What's-your-name, or I will send you off with a pistol-shot."

"My name is Chasseron," answered the peasant, "and a name well known for wronging no man; but if I must get off and part with my poor beast, I pray you help me down with the corn, for I cannot dismount till it is away. But if you will leave me the nag," he added, "I will pay you his full value, if you will come to my place. He and I have been old friends, and I would fain not part with him."

"Get down! get down!" cried the soldier, impatiently. "Clumsy boor, can't you dismount with a sack behind you?" and at the same moment he came nearer and laid his hand upon the load.

The instant he did so, the farmer thrust his strong hand between his cuirass and his neck, half strangling him with his large knuckles; and with his right drawing a pistol from his saddle-bow, he brought the muzzle close to his ear, exclaiming, "Now, master, I see you have some command, by your scarf. So if the way be not cleared very speedily, you shall go up or down as the case may be, without any brains in your skull. I've got one life under my fist, and they can but take one in return, so now we shall see how they love you. Don't struggle, or you shall soon struggle no more; but turn round, tell them to get out of the way, and then march on with me to the top of hill."

"I can't turn," said the soldier, in a rueful tone.

"Oh, then, I'll turn you," answered Chasseron with a laugh; and without quitting his hold, he whirled his adversary round with prodigious strength, lifting him nearly off the ground as he did so. "Now drop your pistol," he continued. "Drop it this instant!"

The man did so; and, touching his horse gently with his heel, the stout farmer put him into a slow walk, while several of the marauders ran forward to see what was going on.

"Bid them back!" cried Chasseron, jogging his companion's head with the muzzle of his weapon. "Bid them back, or you are a dead man, without shrift."

"Keep off! keep off, Beauvois," cried his adversary. "Keep off, La Motte, or by the Holy Virgin he will kill me!"

"That I will," muttered Chasseron heartily; and the soldiers halted for an instant as if to consult. But your good companion of those days was not very careful of a comrade's life; and it seemed to be soon agreed that the insolence of the farmer was not to be tolerated out of any consideration for the gentleman in his hands. There was, therefore, some cocking of pistols and looking at pans, with various other indications of coming strife.

Chasseron, however, continued to advance, dragging his captive along, and keeping a watchful eye upon all the proceedings of the enemy, while the poor fellow in his hands shouted again and again to the hard ears of his companions to hold back for God's sake. They on their part

paid little attention to his petitions; and, in a moment or two, several of the soldiers began to creep closer, in order to get within pistol-shot, while the rest mounted their horses as if to make an attack on the rear of the enemy. No sooner had the foremost of those on foot reached a fitting distance, than he began to take a deliberate aim at the horseman; but the latter, muttering to himself, "This is unpleasant, Pardie!" turned suddenly towards him, withdrew the pistol from the ear of the fellow whom he held, levelled it at the other, and fired. The man went down in a moment, his weapon discharging itself in the air as he fell.

At the same time the captive struggled hard in the hands of Chasseron, and, by a sudden effort, grasped his dagger to stab him before he could resist. But the farmer was still quicker in his movements, his other pistol was drawn in an instant and once more at his friend's head, and while two shots from the enemy passed close to him, one grazing his arm, the other going through his hat, he exclaimed, "Throw down the *dague*, or you are a dead man!"

The order was obeyed in an instant; but it was repeated with regard to the sword, which was also cast to the ground at a word; and then, to the surprise of the Leaguer, he was instantly set free.

"Now," cried Chasseron, "I give you your life. Run back as hard as you can to your comrades; and, if you have any command over them, bid them leave off attacking a man who never did them any harm."

His prisoner required not two biddings to take to his heels; and the good farmer, setting spurs to his horse, galloped up the hill as hard as he could go, while the men who had mounted pursued him, at full speed, firing at him as he went, and the soldier, who had at first ran on upon the road, cast himself in the way, prepared to stop his advance.

As it was now a flight and pursuit, one moment was a matter of life and death to the farmer; and as he rode on upon the enemy before him, he levelled his remaining pistol and fired. Though now at full speed, his aim was not less true than before; but the ball, striking his adversary's steel cap in an oblique direction, glanced off without wounding him, and the soldier fired in turn without effect. Drawing his sword, the farmer galloped on; but he had to do with a resolute and powerful opponent in the man who barred the way; the others were coming up at a furious pace, and the life of poor Master Chasseron was in no light peril, when suddenly a party of four horsemen, well mounted and armed, appeared on the top of the hill, riding quickly, as if attracted by the report of the firearms.

Now they might be friends, or they might be enemies; but Chasseron determined to look upon them as the former, till they proved themselves otherwise; and, waving his hand towards them, he cried, "Help! help! Hurrah!" and, as his antagonist in front turned to see who they were, he let fall a blow on his cap, which brought him on his knee. The farmer was obliged instantly to wheel, however, to defend himself against those who followed; and with wonderful strength and agility he crossed swords with one, threw his discharged pistol at the face of another, knocking out some of his front teeth, and watched a third, who was somewhat behind.

However unequal might be the combat, he maintained it gallantly, while the appearance of the fresh party, now galloping down at full speed, made his enemies hesitate in their operations. Nor was the cry of "Vive le Roy!" which came from the advancing cavaliers, nor the sight of the white scarfs with which they were decorated, calculated to reassure the Leaguers. The men who had remained below on foot, however, now rushed up; and, withdrawing from the attack upon the farmer to meet the more honourable adversaries who were by this time close upon them, they attempted to give some little array to their front, and to recharge their pistols.

But before this could be done, the new comers were amongst them; Chasseron turned to give his powerful aid; white scarfs and green were mingled together in a moment; and, after a brief struggle, the Leaguers were driven down into the valley with the loss of two of their number. After attempting to make a stand at the bridge, they were put to flight; and, springing from their horses, the men who had mounted followed the example of those on foot, and took refuge in the wood, whither the victors did not think fit to pursue them. As soon as it was clear that resistance had ceased, the successful party halted by the stream, surrounding the good peasant with whom the strife began; while he, on his part, hat in hand, thanked them heartily for his deliverance.

"Parbleu!" he exclaimed, "if you had not come up, Monsieur, I should have lost my wheat and my money too. I had killed one of them, and might have got the better of two more; but I do not think I could have managed all the seven."

These words were addressed to a young gentleman apparently not more than one or two and twenty years of age. His complexion was pale, but clear; his eyes dark and thoughtful; his deep brown hair waving from under his hat, for he wore no defensive arms, and his short beard curling round his mouth and chin. All the features of his face were remarkably fine and delicate, but the forehead was broad and high, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His whole air, and the expression of his countenance, were grave and thoughtful; and although he had led the others in their charge with gallant determination, yet it had been with calm coolness which displayed not the slightest sign of vehemence or emotion. The quick-eyed farmer had remarked also that he had contented himself with driving back the enemy, and defending his own person, without striking at any one or using the pistols with which his saddlebow was garnished. In person he was tall and well made, though neither much above the ordinary height, nor apparently particularly robust. His carriage, however, was graceful; and he sat his horse with ease and power, managing it during the combat as if well accustomed to the tilt yard, if not to the battle field, and drawing it suddenly up by the side of the stream when he saw that the other party had betaken themselves to the wood.

To the address of the good countryman he

replied briefly, saying, "You are very welcome, my good sir; though I am not fond of such affairs, nor much habituated to them. Neither are you, I should suppose; and yet you seem to have defended yourself skilfully and vigorously. Are you not hurt?"

"Not a whit!" answered the farmer; "and as to defending myself, that's an old trade of mine; I have borne arms in my day, though I have given that occupation up for the present; but there is many a man in the army remembers Michael Chasseron. I did not wish to hurt any one, if they would have let me pass quietly; so what they have got is their own fault. And now we may as well see to their baggage: there may be curious things amongst it."

"That you may do if you like," replied the young gentleman; "neither I nor my servants can have anything to do with plunder."

"Nor I either," answered the farmer; "I am always content with my own, if I could but get it; but these good men may have other things upon them besides gold and silver. Papers, young gentleman, papers which may be serviceable to the King; and for those, by your good leave, I will look, begging you to stand by me for a minute or two, lest our friends come out from their hiding-holes again."

"Willingly, willingly," said his companion, "that is a laudable object, and in that we will help you." Thus saying, he dismounted himself, and bidding two of his servants do the same, proceeded with Chasseron to search the bodies of those who had fallen, three horses which remained tied to a tree, and some baggage which had been left on the ground where the Leaguers had been sitting.

In a small leather bag buckled on the back of one of the chargers was found a packet of letters and papers regarding the movements of various bodies of men, which the good farmer examined with a curious eye. He then handed them to the young gentleman, who had come down to his assistance, saying, "You had better take them to the King, sir."

"Nay," replied the stranger, "take them yourself, my good friend; I am not going to the camp; and if this intelligence be of importance you may get rewarded."

The farmer shook his head, laughing. "His Majesty," he said, "has scarcely money, I hear, to buy himself a dinner. But I will take them, for if I don't go myself, I will ensure that he gets them; and now let us look at that fellow I cut over the head upon the hill, if we leave him there, he will be frozen to death to-night, and that would be scarce Christian."

On approaching the spot where the man lay, they found him still alive, though bleeding and stunned by the blow he had received. After some consultation they took him up and placed him across one of the Leaguers' horses; and Chasseron then laid his hand upon his brow, saying thoughtfully, "Where shall we take him! The nearest place is Marzay, M. de Liancourt's château; but I don't rightly know whether they will give me shelter there for the night; and this business has stopped me so, that I shall not be able to get to Marolles before dark."

"Oh, I will answer for your welcome, my good friend," replied the young gentleman, "I am going to Marzay myself; M. de Liancourt is my uncle."

"Well, then, we will come along," replied the farmer, mounting his horse again; and, the wounded man being given into the charge of one of the gentleman's servants, they rode on up the hill, Chasseron keeping in front with the leader of the party.

After they had gone about two hundred yards at a slow pace, the farmer turned towards his companion, who had fallen into a silent reverie, and, looking in his face for a moment, he said, "I could almost swear I have seen you somewhere before; but yet I know that can't be, for it is some fifteen years ago."

"I must have been a child then," replied the cavalier, "for I have yet to see three-and-twenty."

"It was your father, I suppose," continued Chasseron, "he was then a young man, and you are as like him as one leaf on a tree is to another."

"What might be his name!" asked the stranger, with a faint smile; "give me that, and I will soon tell you if it was my father."

"That is easily done," replied the farmer; "his name was Louis de la Grange, Baron de Montigni. He was a good soldier, and a good man."

"You are right," said the young gentleman; "such was my father's name, and such was his character; but he has been dead now more than ten years."

"Ah, so I heard," answered Chasseron; "we must all die, and the great reaper generally takes the best ears, and leaves the worthless ones standing. I am glad to see his son, however. But how comes it, sir, that you are not with the King? Many a man younger than you fought at Arques, I believe."

"That is not improbable," replied De Montigni; "but my uncle sent me to Padua to study, and laid his injunctions on me to remain there. Neither, to say the truth, did I feel much inclination to take part in all this strife, at least so long as the present King was in arms against his sovereign."

"Parbleu! I do not see how he could help it," cried Chasseron; "if he could not believe the Catholic doctrines, and they held a dagger to his throat and bade him swear he did believe them, he had but one choice, either to tell a lie, or knock the dagger out of their hands."

"I do not blame him," replied the young nobleman, "and for that very reason I felt unwilling either to take arms for my King or against him. Besides, I have friends on both sides, am not very fond of shedding blood, and, to tell the truth, my friend, I found better society amongst the dead than amongst the living, I mean—"

"Oh, I understand what you mean," answered the farmer; "you mean you loved your books better than hard blows."

The young gentleman's cheek grew somewhat red; "I am not afraid of blows," he said; "and I think you have had no occasion to suppose so."

"Pardie, no!" replied Chasseron frankly; "and I should not blame you if you were. I am a very peaceable man myself, when men will let me alone; and I desire nothing but to

enjoy my own in tranquillity; so if you could find peace at Padua with Horace, and Cicero, and Virgil, you were quite right to take it."

"You seem to know something of such studies," said the young Baron de Montigni, with a smile.

"Oh, yes," replied Chasseron; "I see you judge by externals alone, my young friend; and because I am here a poor cultivator of the soil, you think that I am a mere peasant; but I am of gentle blood like yourself—hold my own land, what is left of it; and your friend Virgil should have taught you that there is no degradation in agriculture; so that, though I have for a time beaten my sword into a reaping-hook, I am not a bit the worse gentleman for that."

"Nay, God forbid," replied the young gentleman, "I hold it one of the most honourable employments a man can follow; but you must not censure me for seeking occupation in my books, as you say, while you seek occupation in your fields."

"There is some difference, however," replied Chasseron; "in living with the dead, as you say, you cut yourself off from doing good to the living, which ought to be the great object of each man's life. You may tell me, that amongst those great men, those sages of antiquity, you can best learn how to live, and gain precepts to be applied to your future conduct; but there is a danger in being too long a learner; and, in studying precepts all your life, you may forget ever to apply them. Each man has duties, and those of busy times like these are active ones. One's king, one's country, one's friends, one's relations, one's fellow-citizens, all have claims upon us which the dead have not; and the exercise of our abilities affords lessons for our conduct, to which all the maxims of philosophers and moralists are but bubbles."

"Methinks," replied De Montigni, "that the cultivator of the soil is not much more called into active life than the cultivator of letters."

"Your pardon, your pardon, worthy sir," answered the farmer; "he is always mingling with his fellow-creatures; he is ever ready to take his part with the rest when need shall be; he is daily benefiting mankind, and not spending his life in studying how; he is still learning more, even while he is enacting much; and, by the practice of what is right, he learns to do it well."

The young gentleman smiled gaily, but changed the subject, saying, "Perhaps you are right; but now tell me, as you seem to have studied all these things deeply, and most likely have lived with your eyes open to all that has taken place, what has been doing here of late, and what is the real state of France? for, but imperfect and maimed accounts reach us in foreign lands, perverted by the prejudices of men, and coloured by all the passions of the relators. Nor have I indeed paid much attention to what I heard, till I was summoned back by my uncle; for the only tidings that reached us came through the League, except once or twice, when some Royalists passed by Venice."

"Your question is a wide one," replied Chasseron, "and I should have to write a history to tell you. It is but needful to say, that France is growing tired of the League; men are recovering from the fever which had driven them mad. The King, now with many, now with few, is still gaining ground on his enemies; but his friends are sometimes more mischievous to him than his foes. Half the Catholics serve him coldly, intrigue in his very camp, his court, and at his table, because he is a heretic. The Huguenots murmur and complain because he is obliged to buy, bribe, and reward their adversaries. Both fight well when there is a battle or a siege, but both are well inclined to leave him when he is obliged to spend his time in those slow and difficult movements, which are no less necessary in a campaign than the combat or the storming party. In the meanwhile, fed with foreign gold, supported by foreign troops, confederated with the implacable enemies of the land, and slaughtering Frenchmen with the swords of the Spaniard, the only hold which the League have upon the people of France is the frail pretext of religion, the almost incurable anarchy into which they have thrown the country, and the possession of a number of towns and fortresses, lands, governments, and territories, which those who have grasped them are unwilling to resign, and know they can only retain so long as this great serpent of the League remains uncrushed."

"But let me hear," rejoined the young baron, "if you can tell me why, when the King had Paris at his mercy, he did not make himself master of it. If I have been informed aright, he could have taken it in an hour!"

"Perhaps he might," replied Chasseron, "and yet he did not. I think it was very foolish of him, for my part; but still there would have been terrible bloodshed, many thousands of good citizens would have perished, the capital would have been a scene of slaughter, violence, and devastation, such as the world has seldom witnessed. After all, perhaps it is as well for a King not to do all that a king can do; and yet the Parisians deserved no great mercy at his hands. But he, poor foolish man, chose rather to wander about fighting here and fighting there, sleeping hard, sometimes half starved, and working day and night, than take their beds from under these rebellious citizens, or give their wives and daughters up to his soldiers."

"And he was right," cried Montigni warmly, "and God will bless him for it. If I am not much mistaken, that act will set him firmly on the throne of France."

"Perhaps so," said the farmer, "but old soldiers get hardened to such things, and men do marvel and grumble too, that when he could have terminated this long and desolating war by one bold and severe stroke, he should have hesitated for the sake of the most rebellious race in France. There is much to be said on either side, and I am inclined to think myself that the King was wrong, though I was of a different opinion at the time."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his young companion, "what has made you change your views so quickly then?"

"Thought," answered the farmer, "thought, which may be as often the comrade of the soldier in the camp or on the march, or of the farmer in the field, if he likes to seek it, as of the pale student over his book. No man need be without thought; and the active man, the man

of life and movement, acquires often a power of rapid, but no less certain calculation, which the slow ponderer of the cabinet can never gain. I now believe, Monsieur de Montigni, upon farther consideration, that though there might have been much bloodshed in the streets of Paris, had it been taken when it was besieged, though even the Catholic soldiers would have been difficult to restrain, and the Huguenots would have remembered St. Bartholomew, yet the amount of slaughter will be greater,—nay, perhaps has been greater already, by the protraction of the war, than if Henry had blown the gates open, and led his army into the heart of the capital."

"It was an amiable weakness, if it was one," replied De Montigni; "but see, what a splendid scene we are coming upon, while the evening sun pours such a flood of purple over the grey waves of the wintry forest."

"Ay, indeed, it is a lovely land, this France," said Chasseron, "and rich as it is lovely, if men would but be content to enjoy the bounties which God gives, without carving out for themselves miseries and contentions which frustrate all the benevolent purposes of the Most High. Who that looks over such a prospect as that, would think, that in every village and in every field, in the wood and in the plain, is strife and bloodshed, anarchy and crime, sown by the virulent passions and intolerant bigotry of those for whose especial blessing such glories were created? Out upon it! it almost makes one a misanthrope. However, there stands Marzay, not half a mile distant, with people walking on the ramparts. Who may they be, I wonder?"

"I can divine without seeing their faces," answered the young baron; "there are the garments of a lady, and a priest's robes, and a pourpoint, on the gold lace of which the sun's setting rays are glistening. They are sweet Rose d'Albret, daughter of the Count de Marennes, who was killed at Poictiers, and good father Walter de la Tremblade; and either my uncle De Liancourt or the good old commander, or, more likely still, my cousin Chazeul."

"Well," rejoined Chasseron, after a short pause, "I trust to your warranty, Monsieur de Montigni; for I am not very sure that my having killed a Leaguer or two will be my best recommendation; no, nor, *ventre saint gris*, your white scarf the surest passport to favour in Marzay. Your uncle is one of those we call *Politics*, who are more afraid to espouse openly a cause they know to be just, than the Leaguers to uphold one they know to be unjust; and, as for Monsieur de Chazeul, why he is one of the pillars of the Holy Union."

"I'll be your surety," replied De Montigni, who was beginning to take no slight pleasure in the conversation of his frank companion. "They shall give you a hearty welcome, or I will hardly take one for myself, which they would not like; so never fear."

"Nay, I fear not," answered his companion, drily: and they accordingly rode on towards the gates, which lay straight before them.

De Montigni, however, fell into a fit of deep musing as they approached, and bent his eyes stedfastly upon the ground, though the persons who were walking on the ramparts above stopped as he drew near, and a fair lady waved her hand as if in welcome.

CHAPTER III.

By the reader's good leave, we must go up for a moment or two to the ramparts of the Chateau of Marzay, and introduce him to the party there, before the new comers arrive. Nay, more, we must return for nearly an hour, and listen to the conversation which was taking place while all the events we have just narrated were occurring in the wood that lay beneath the eyes of those upon the castle walls, though it must be premised, that those events had been completely hidden from their sight by the thin veil of forest boughs, as the various turns of fate, upon which the fortunes of our whole future life depend, are often going on close by us, concealed from our gaze, whether anxious or unconscious, by the ripple of an idle current of trifling things that affect us not permanently in any way.

The Baron de Montigni, though five or six years had elapsed since he last saw any of the party there assembled, had, by his previous knowledge of the circumstances divined aright the names of the persons of which it was composed. About an hour and a half before sunset, a very beautiful girl of eighteen or nineteen had come forth upon the walls for her afternoon walk, having on one hand a gentleman dressed in the height of the extravagant fashions of the day, with a high starched ruff, or *fraise*, as it was called, which made his head look like that of John the Baptist in a charger, and with a slashed and laced pourpoint of yellow velvet, stiffly embroidered with silver. His shoes were of white satin, enriched with a rosette of yellow; and in his girdle hung a small dagger knife with a fretted hilt of gold, while far behind hung his sword, as if put out of reach of his hand lest he should use it too frequently. His beard was pointed, and neatly trimmed; his hair curled, and turned back from his face; and on the top of his head he wore a small velvet toque, with a single long feather. In person he was tall and not ungraceful, though somewhat stiff; and his features were all good, though there was certainly something in the disposition of them which gave a sinister and unpleasant expression to his countenance. Perhaps this effect was produced by the closeness of the eyes and the narrowness of the brows, which produced a shrewd and confined look, though his face might otherwise have been prepossessing.

Though dressed with such scrupulous care, his air and manner was not that of a fop. It was not easy and unrestrained, indeed, but it was bold and confident; and if one might judge—as we almost all do judge—from manner and appearance, pride, rather than vanity, was his prevailing folly; shrewd ambition, rather than levity the characteristic vice. Yet, as we shall see, he was not without lightness, too; but it was often used in those days as a means to an end, and covered too frequently intense selfishness under an air of idle indifference.

On the other side of the young lady walked, to and fro with her upon the rampart, a man, considerably past the middle age, dressed in the habit of the clergy. His hair was almost white, though here and there a streak of a darker hue showed that it had been once jet

black. His features were fine, though apparently worn with care and thought; and the expression of his countenance was grave, calm, and almost stern. His large dark eyes were, indeed, full of light, but it was not of that kind which illuminates what is within for the gaze of others, but it rather fell dazzling upon those who were his companions for the time, searching the secrets of their hearts, and displaying none of his own. His lips were thin and pale; his cheek delicate and hollow, but with a slight tinge of red, which by its varying intensity, from time to time gave the only indication to be obtained of strong emotions in his bosom.

But we must speak of the lady, for truly she deserves some notice, were it but for her beauty. There were, however, other things to be remarked in her besides the fine and delicate features, the graceful and rounded limbs, the bright complexion, the fair skin, the tangles of her luxuriant dark brown hair, the heaving bosom, or the perfect symmetry of the neck and shoulders. In the large, soft hazel eyes, under their jetty fringes, on the warm arching lips, and in the dimple of the cheek, shone forth a gay and bright spirit, which, perhaps, under some circumstances might have been full of playful jest and light-hearted merriment; but, as it was, the light was subdued and shaded almost to sad thoughtfulness. It seemed as if cares and anxieties, if not sorrows and misfortunes, had come upon her young, or as if those with whom her early years had been spent, had laboured to repress, rather than moderate, the joyous buoyancy of youth, and had brought a cloud over the sunshine of girlhood.

It was not exactly so, indeed; but living in troublous times, when the mind became familiar with great but tragic acts, and every day brought some subject for deep and anxious thought, and passing her life in comparative seclusion with people older than herself,—not very wise nor very considerate, though not actually domineering and austere,—her cheerfulness had been repressed, though not extinguished, and a shade of sadness brought over her demeanour, rendering it various and changeful like an April day. Her dress was rich and tasteful, according to the fashion of the times, but more in the style of the fair and unhappy queen of Scotland than of the harsh and masculine Elizabeth. There were no gaudy colours; indeed there was no great display of embroidery; but the lace which waved over her fair bosom and rose round her snowy neck, was of the finest and most costly kind; and the black velvet of her dress was here and there looped with pearls.

When first she came forth, by a door that led over a small bridge to the inner parts of the dwelling, she paused at the edge of the wall for a moment, and gazed over the scene around. Youth is generally more fond of contemplating nature's handiwork than age. Mature life is usually spent in dealing with man and man's acts; the face of nature comes upon us then as an impression rather than a subject of contemplation. To the young it is full of interest and of wonder; imagination robes it in her own garmenture of light, peoples each shady dell, fills the forest with her own creations, and calls up in each village or church or tower a wild and agitated throng of feelings and sensations, of hopes and fears, all the beings of the fancy, ephemeral, though bright, confused though lively, impalpable though vivid. Youth sees more than the landscape,—age sees it as it is; the one has its own sunshine to adorn all it looks upon; the other views every thing under the shady cloud.

Rose d'Albret stopped to gaze; then, notwithstanding the chilliness of the wintry air, she turned her eyes to the east over the gray lines where the vanguard of the night was marching forward over the sky, and then looked round to the west, where the rear of day was all glittering with golden light. What made her sigh? what made her fix her eyes upon a thin white film of mist that rose up from the deeper parts of the forest, like the smoke of a heath-burner's fire! Who can say? who can trace along the magic chain of association, link by link, and tell how the objects within her sight connected themselves in her mind with her own situation, and made her remember that she had much to regret.

"You are thoughtful to-night, Rose," said the Marquis de Chazeul.

"And may a woman never be thoughtful, Chazeul?" asked Rose d'Albret. "If such be your creed, pray seek another wife, for you will often find me so, I assure you."

"Nay," replied Chazeul, "I would not disappoint you so for the world, sweet Rose; it would break your little heart if I were to take you at your word."

"No, indeed," replied the young lady, with perfect calmness; "you are quite mistaken, Chazeul, my heart is not so easily broken; and, as for disappointment, it would be none at all; I am in that happy state, that, whatever be the event, I can bear it with calmness."

"Or at all events, with affected indifference," replied her companion, a little nettled, "is it not so, Rose?"

"Not at all," she answered; "you never saw me affect anything that I did not feel. Here is father Walter, who has known me as long and better than yourself, can witness for me. Did you ever see me pretend to anything that is not real, Monsieur de la Tremblade?"

"Never, my dear child," replied the priest; "and I should think Monsieur de Chazeul should be very well content to see you willing to give your hand to him according to your guardian's commands. In the first place, it shows that obedient disposition, on which so much of a husband's happiness depends; and in the next place, it leaves him the sweet task of teaching you to love him."

"That is, if he can," said Rose d'Albret, with a smile; "but do you know, my good father," she continued, "I would draw another inference from the facts, which is simply this, that it would be better for Monsieur de Chazeul to give me longer time to learn that same lesson of love, and not to press forward this same marriage so hastily."

"Nay, on my life," answered Chazeul, "it is Monsieur de Liancourt's doing, not mine; but I will acknowledge, sweet Rose, that my eagerness to possess so fair a flower may make me anxious to gather it without delay,

though my impatience may make me prick my fingers with the thorns, as I have done just now."

"Well, I am in the hands of others," said Rose d'Albret; "I have nothing to do but to obey; and doubtless, in hurrying this matter forward, my guardian does what he thinks best for me."

"He may have many reasons, dear daughter," said the priest; "he is old; times are troublesome and dangerous; none can tell what a day may bring forth; and it is a part of his duty to see you married and under the protection of a younger and more active man than myself, before he is called to quit this busy scene."

"Oh, I think, good father, I could protect myself," replied Rose d'Albret. "Those thorns my cousin De Chazeul talks of, would be quite hedge enough, I should imagine—but hark, there are guns in the wood—and there again!"

All listened, and two or three more shots were distinctly heard.

"I thought we had a truce here?" said Rose d'Albret.

"True, amongst ourselves," answered the Marquis de Chazeul; "but we cannot get others always to observe it; and 'tis not unlikely that these are a party of Henry de Bourbon's heretic soldiers wandering about, and committing some of their usual acts of violence and plunder. He is now besieging Dreux, I find."

"Why, I have always heard," said Rose d'Albret, "that the King is strict and scrupulous in restraining his soldiers from such excesses."

"The King?" exclaimed Chazeul, with his lip curling. "Pray call him some other name, sweet Rose. He may be a king of heretics, but he is no king of mine, nor of any other Catholics."

"Hush, hush!" cried Walter de la Tremblade, "you must not let Monsieur de Liancourt hear you make such rash speeches. He acknowledges him as King of right, though not in fact—his religion being the only bar."

"And that an insurmountable one," said the Marquis; "if he were to profess himself converted to-morrow, who would believe him? I am sure not I."

"Nay cousin," replied Rose d'Albret, "one who is so frank and free, so true to all men, so strict a keeper of his word as the King is reported to be, would never falsify the truth in that. Remember, too, I am his humble cousin; for the counts of Marennes come from the same stock as the old kings of Navarre."

"Ay, a hundred degrees removed," said Chazeul; "I have no fear, dear Rose, of your blood being contaminated by his."

"Well, it matters not," replied Rose d'Albret, with a laugh; "I intend to fall in love with him whenever I see him."

"It might be better," observed Chazeul, "to try that with your husband."

"Oh no," cried his fair companion, gaily; "that would be quite contrary to all rule, Chazeul, especially amongst the ladies and gentlemen of the League. As far as I have heard, they have done away with all such foolish old customs; and loyalty to their king, or love between husband and wife are amongst the errors *of the past*, which they quite repudiate."

Chazeul bit his lip, and she went on, "I should like to see this King, he is so gallant and so noble, I am sure I should love him—is he very handsome, Monsieur de Chazeul?"

"I never saw him, Mademoiselle," answered the Marquis, somewhat bitterly, "except at such a distance that one could discover nothing but the white plume in his hat, and on his horse's head."

"I have seen him often, long ago," said the priest, "when he was a mere youth, at the court of the Queen Mother; and then he was as handsome a boy as ever my eyes lighted upon, with a skin so delicately soft, and such a warm colour in his cheek, one would have thought him little fitted for the rough, laborious, and perilous life he has since led.

"Hark! there are guns again," exclaimed Rose d'Albret; and a sudden cloud came over her brow. "I hope these people," she continued, after a moment's pause, "are not attacking my cousin De Montigni."

"They will soon make an end of him if they do," said Chazeul; "at least I should suppose so."

"You seem very indifferent to the matter," observed the lady quickly; "why do you imagine so?"

"Simply because a book-read student, who has been passing the best part of his life within the walls of a college, can be no match for men of courage and of action," replied Chazeul.

"Fie," replied Rose d'Albret, warmly; "Louis de Montigni has as much courage as any one. I can remember him before he went abroad, a wild, rash boy, who used to frighten me by the daring things he did. But if you had any kindness in your nature, Chazeul, you would go out to help him—in case it be he who is attacked. He must be on the road even now; I wonder he is not arrived."

"I will go and speak with Monsieur de Liancourt about it," replied Chazeul; and, leaving the priest and the lady together, he retired for a short time from the walls.

"Let us listen," said Rose d'Albret; and, leaning her arm upon the stone-work, she turned her ear towards the wood, bending down her bright eyes upon the ground, while the priest advanced, and, standing beside her, gazed at her for a moment, and then looked out over the country beyond.

During the whole conversation which had taken place, he had watched her closely; and, well acquainted with her character from infancy, he had read aright all that was passing in her mind. He saw that the coldness which she displayed towards the man selected for her future husband was no assumed indifference, none of that coquettish excitement which many a woman learns too early to administer to the passion of a favoured lover, none of that holding back which is intended to lead forward; none of that reluctance which is affected but to be overcome. He perceived clearly enough that she was indifferent to him, and perhaps somewhat more; that she felt for him no respect—but little esteem; and, though accustomed for some years to his society from time to time, and, habituated to look upon her marriage with him as an act that was to be, that she now began to feel repugnance as the time approached

for performing the contract, which had been entered into by others without her knowledge or consent. In short, he saw that, though she would obey, it would be unwillingly.

The priest regretted that it was so; for he felt no slight affection towards her, though, as too often happens, he was ready to do all he could, from other considerations, to promote a sacrifice which might destroy the happiness of one he loved almost as a child. The knowledge that she was indifferent towards Chazeul might grieve him, but it did not in the least induce him to pause in the course he had determined to pursue; and he proceeded, after a few moments given to thought, to draw forth her sentiments further, while, at the same time, he endeavoured to work some change in her opinions.

"He is certainly very handsome," said the priest, abruptly; "do you not think so?"

"Who?" cried D'Albret, with a start. "Oh, Chazeul! Yes, perhaps he is; and yet not handsome either."

"Indeed," said Walter de la Tremblade, "I think I never saw finer features, or a more graceful form."

"No, not graceful, surely," said the young lady. "Well-proportioned, perhaps, and his features are all good, it is true; but yet, father, there is something that makes him not handsome."

"What?" asked the priest.

"Nay, I cannot well tell," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret: "perhaps it is that his eyes are too close together—but I was thinking of De Montigni, good father; I hope no mischance has befallen him."

"Oh, I trust not!" answered her companion. "And so, Rose, this is the only fault you can find with your lover's beauty, that his eyes are too close together! I can assure you, sweet lady, that the fair dames of Paris do not perceive that defect, and that you may have some trouble to keep the heart you have won."

"I wish—" said Rose d'Albret, but then she broke off suddenly, leaving the sentence unconcluded, and beginning again afresh, she added, "Heaven knows, good father, that I took no pains to win his love; and perhaps the best way to retain it when I am his wife, if ever that happens, will be to take no pains to keep it."

"It will then be a duty to take pains," answered the priest, somewhat sternly; we are not born, my daughter, in this life, to seek nothing but our own pleasure and happiness. We are here to fulfil the important tasks assigned us by the Almighty, and clearly pointed out to us by the circumstances in which we are placed. To neglect them is sinful, to perform them coldly is reprehensible; and it is our greatest wisdom, as well as our strictest duty, to labour that our inclinations may go hand in hand with the performance of that which God has given us to do."

"Nay," said Rose, laying her hand gently on the sleeve of his gown, "you speak severely, good father. I do not see how it is so clearly pointed out that I should marry Nicholas de Chazeul: and I do wish that the ceremony were not hurried in this way. However, if I do wed him, depend upon it I shall follow your counsel, and do my best to love him. At all events," she added, raising her head somewhat proudly, "you may be sure that, under no circumstance, will I forget what is due to him and to myself. I may be an unhappy wife, but I will never be a bad one."

"That I doubt not, that I doubt not," said the priest, warmly; "but what I wish to point out to you is, the way to happiness, daughter; and depend upon it you can but find it in doing your duty cheerfully."

"I know it, my excellent friend," answered Rose, "and it shall be my endeavour so to act; but I could much desire before I take a vow to love any one, that I had some better means of knowing how far I can fulfil it."

"Oh! if you have the will to do so," answered father Walter, "it may easily be done."

"What!" she cried, eagerly, "easy to love a man one cannot esteem or respect! I say not that such is the case in the present instance, father," she continued, seeing her companion fix his eyes upon her with a look of surprise and inquiry; "I only state a case that might be. Suppose I were to find him cold, selfish, heartless, cruel, vicious, base, how should I love him then?"

"But Monsieur de Chazeul is none of these," rejoined the priest.

"I say not that he is," answered Rose d'Albret; "I only say he may be for aught I know. I knew him not in youth; and in manhood I have seen him twice or thrice a year in circles where all men wear a mask. I would fain see him with his face bare, good father."

"Few women ever so see their lovers," rejoined the priest; "love is the greatest of all hypocrites."

"Perhaps that is true," said Rose; "yet time, if a woman's eyes be unblinded by her own feelings, does generally, soon or late, draw back the covering of the heart, so far as to show her some of the features. I have seen little: I would see more; for what I have seen makes me doubt."

"Indeed!" exclaimed her companion, "what have you perceived to raise suspicions? Some casual word, some slight jest, I warrant you; such as he spoke just now about his cousin. Idle words, daughter! idle words, upon which you must put no harsh interpretation."

"How often idle words betray the spirit within!" said Rose. "They are the careless jailers which let the prisoner forth out of his secret dungeon. They have cost many a king his crown, if history be true; many a woman reputation, aye, and, perhaps, many a lover his lady's hand. But what I wish is to hear more than idle words, to see more than a masked face; and, I do beseech you, aid me to delay this marriage for a time. Why was I not told earlier? Why was all arranged without my knowledge? Louis de Montigni has been summoned back more than a month, and yet I have had but one week, one poor week, allowed me to prepare my thoughts, to nerve my heart, for the great change of woman's existence. Marriage, to man, is but a pageant, a ball, a festival. To us, it is one of the sole events. It is birth or death to woman. I do beseech you, father, if you have ever loved me, if you have watched over my youth, counselled me rightly, enlightened and instructed my mind, led me on

in honour, virtue, faith—I do beseech you, aid me but to delay this ceremony. I feel not rightly here," and she laid her hand upon her bosom.

"I cannot promise to do so, my sweet child," replied the priest. "The marriage is decided; your guardian's word is given; and I cannot but think it may be well for all, that the final seal be put to the engagement as soon as may be."

"Do you?" said Mademoiselle d'Albret; but there she stopped, for at that moment Chazeul appeared again at a little distance; and Walter de la Tremblade advanced towards him. The next moment, however, she murmured to herself, "They have gained him; and I am alone!"

A change came over her from that instant, and when, after speaking a word together, the other two rejoined her, she was cheerful if not gay.

"The Count declares it is some loose party stealing the deer," said Chazeul, as he approached; "and thought it needless to send out to see, as, in these days, when one can hardly secure the corn of one's fields, or the fruits of one's vineyard, it were a vain hope to keep the game of one's woods."

"Well, he knows best," replied Rose d'Albret; "and now, good cousin of Chazeul, do tell me, what is to be the fate of France? How often is your great friend the Duke to be defeated, before he succeeds in crushing heresy, excluding the King from the throne, and putting some one on that thorny seat instead?"

"He will be defeated, as you term it, no more, fair lady," answered the Marquis; "for if reports speaks true, he is even now marching against Henry of Bourbon with a force that shall crush him and his apostates, as men tread down an ant's nest."

"Indeed?" asked his fair companion; "then there will be a battle soon?"

"Within three days, men think," replied Chazeul.

"And of course you will be present?" said Rose d'Albret.

But the colour rose in her lover's cheek while he replied, "Nay, I cannot quit my bride and give up my bridal for any cause."

"True! men would say it was an ungallant gallantry," she replied; "and yet ladies love heroic acts I have heard. God help us! We women, I believe, but little know what we would have."

"That is very true," said the priest; "and, therefore, fair daughter, it is wisely arranged that others should decide for them."

"Perhaps so," answered the lady; "but one thing is certain, they would do so, whether it were better for us or not."

They then walked on once or twice along the whole range of the rampart without speaking, each seemingly busy with thoughts which they did not choose to utter; till at length the lady resumed the conversation on a new theme: "Methinks, cousin of Chazeul, the court in its days of splendour, must have been a gay place."

"It was indeed," replied the Marquis, glad of a subject which enabled him to speak more freely; "I know nought so brilliant on the face of the earth as was the court of Henry of Valois, some five years before his death; but I trust *ere long we* shall see a monarch who will hold as bright a one, without displaying his weaknesses; and then I trust Rose de Chazeul will shine amongst the very first in splendour, and in beauty."

"I am determined," she answered with a smile, "if ever I appear at the court, to have a coronet of diamonds fashioned into roses, to bear out my name."

"Oh trust to me," cried Chazeul, "trust to me, to find devices which shall make you outshine the Queen."

"Ha! there come a party over the hills," cried Mademoiselle d'Albret. "It is De Montigni, I am sure;" and running forward to the edge of the rampart, she looked forth; but, as she did so, she murmured, "Do they think to buy and sell me for a goldsmith's toy?"

Her two companions joined her in a moment; and, as the party approached, she waved her hand as we have before related, gaily beckoning her cousin. He did not raise his eyes, however; and with an air of some mortification, she said, "He will not look up!"

"He is bashful," said Chazeul; "too much study makes but a timid gentleman."

"So they say," replied Rose d'Albret; "but let us in and meet him at all events."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was an old hall in the Chateau de Marzay, very like many another old hall in many parts both of France and England, some forty feet in span, some seventy in length, arched over with a concave roof, nearly semi-circular in the curve, and not at all unlike, with its rounded ribs, the tilt of an enormous waggon. From the line where the vault sprang from the walls, ten or twelve large beams projected, ornamented at the ends with curiously carved and somewhat grotesque heads, supporting each an upright, upon which the arches of the roof rested, while diagonal beams gave additional strength to this sort of permanent scaffolding. The floor, as was usual in such chambers, was of polished tiles, alternately octangular and square; and seven large windows, with very small panes set in lead, gave light to the interior.

This hall was the favourite place, in all the castle, of its Lord, Anthony Lefevre, Count de Liancourt, a gentleman allied to some of the first families in France, who had served in former wars with tolerable reputation, showing a greater lack of judgment than of courage; the latter quality leading him into many dangers, from which he had been saved, more by the skill and resolution of his friends and followers, than his own discretion. Comparatively few of the vices of man do not spring from his weaknesses. It is still the contest between the stronger and the feebler parts of our nature which overthrows us; and whether the passion be vanity or pride or avarice or ambition, or any of all the host of minor fiends against which we pray, it is solely by weakness of the higher qualities, placed to guard the heart in opposition to them, that either or all gain the ascendancy. We do not have a care to fortify the garrison betimes, as we might do, and the enemy takes us by siege, or storm, or escalade.

The Count de Liancourt had been all his life a weak man, and the passion which triumphed the most frequently over him was vanity; but he had sufficient talent, which is very far from incompatible with weakness, to conceal from the eyes of those who did not know him to the very heart, the feebleness of his character. The suggestions of other people he passed for the result of his own deliberations, and he adhered to these adopted children with all the fondness of a parent. Though naturally wavering and undecided, he had the skill to give a colouring of moderation and prudence to that conduct which sprung from hesitation; and, by adopting the reasonings of wiser men, he justified that course which in him was the result of unreasonable doubts. But as he was wanting in discrimination of justice, right, and propriety, it not unfrequently happened that the very art with which he covered the fact that he followed rather than led, turned to his discredit; and acts by no means honourable to him were very generally ascribed to his own cunning, which were in truth only attributable to his own weakness. Without giving the whole history of his life, these facts could not have been made manifest by any other means than by description, and therefore I have thought fit to point out some peculiarities in a character which would not probably have room to develop itself.

He loved, I have said, that old hall, and would pass many an hour there, either walking to and fro—apparently in deep thought, but in reality more engaged in day-dreams than meditations—or in writing or reading at a table in one of the windows, while ever and anon he raised his eyes to the banners and ensigns which hung from the beams, and contemplated with pleasure the long ancestral line of which they were mementos.

In this hall he was found by his fair ward, Rose d'Albret, and her two companions, on their return from the battlements; but the Lady had to place her hand upon his arm before he roused himself from a book which he seemed studying deeply.

"De Montigni has just arrived, my dear uncle," said Rose, as he looked up; "we saw him from the walls."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the Count; "I knew no harm would happen to him. Ah, here he comes!"

As he spoke, the young nobleman entered the hall, followed by the good farmer Chasseron; and Monsieur de Liancourt advancing towards him, opened his arms and embraced him with every mark of kindness.

"Welcome! welcome, my dear boy!" he said, in a somewhat pompous tone; "welcome back to Marzay. You will find the old chateau just as it was, though your uncle cannot boast of bearing his years as well, Louis. Here are your gay cousin Chazeul and my fair ward Rose, all ready to receive you, and wish you joy of your return. Why, you look somewhat thin and pale!"

Chazeul embraced de Montigni also, and congratulated him upon his safe arrival in his native land, adding, "You have been no great traveller, I think, nevertheless, Louis. Padua has been your boundary, has it not? And there, doubtless, you have made yourself a very learned man, while we here have learned nothing but hard blows and rough campaigns. By my faith, you have, I think, chosen the better part, at least the happier one, though here is a fair reward for all one's labours. Sweet Rose, do you not welcome your cousin?"

The cheek of Rose d'Albret grew somewhat red, partly through indignation, partly through embarrassment. She saw clearly enough the latent design of the Marquis de Chazeul in speaking of her as if she were actually his; and she felt some anger at being called forward to welcome the companion of her youth, as if she were not prompt to do so, by a man who had shown such indifference to his safety. She came forward gracefully, however, and held out her hand to De Montigni with a warm and kindly smile, saying, "Indeed I am very glad to see you, Louis; but you would take no notice of me just now. I waved my hand to you from the walls, to be the first to wish you joy on your return, but you did not look up."

De Montigni coloured, and faltered for a moment, but then replied, earnestly, "I saw you from a distance, and knew you at once; but as I came near, a thousand memories of other days assailed me, Mademoiselle d'Albret. Days long gone rose up before me, hopes vanished, pleasures past away, regrets unavailing; and I could not but give myself up to thought."

Rose asked herself what were the hopes, what the regrets, he spoke of; and her heart beat, and her cheek grew somewhat pale. She looked round, however; Chazeul was talking in a whisper with her guardian; the priest was standing in the window; and she said, in a low voice, "Do not call me Mademoiselle d'Albret, Louis. That is a cold name. It used ever to be Rose, or Cousin, in former days."

"Cousin you are not, except by courtesy," replied De Montigni, in the same tone, "and I did not venture to call you Rose, now that you are another's."

The colour came warmly into her cheek, but she cast down her eyes, saying, in a tone scarcely audible, "I am not another's yet; and, if ever I am, I shall then be your Cousin really."

De Montigni knew little of the world, it is true; but yet when a woman speaks of such matters, in so low a tone, to one for whom she professes friendship, it shows at least a confidence in him, which is near akin to deeper regard. He was embarrassed, however; and how many opportunities does not embarrassment cause us to lose for ever! how often does it make us the very reverse of what we are! The kind appear harsh, the affectionate cold, the modest even impudent. He knew not what to reply; and suddenly breaking off their private conversation, though it might have lasted longer, for his uncle was still talking eagerly with Chazeul, he turned to his companion Chasseron, who, standing a step behind, had remained unnoticed, watching with his clear and penetrating eyes all that was passing before him, and drawing at once his own conclusions.

"My dear uncle," said the young nobleman, addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "here is a worthy gentleman to whom I have promised a welcome for the night in your name. I found him in the wood about half an hour ago, attacked by some six or seven marauders, two of whom he had disabled before I came up."

"Ay, sir," rejoined Chasseron, "and if you

had not come up and fought gallantly when you did come, the rest would have soon disabled me. To your courage and skill I owe my life, *pardie!*"

"Indeed!" cried Rose d'Albret, with her cheek glowing and her eyes turned somewhat reproachfully towards Chazeul, "I told you I was sure Louis was attacked, and that the guns we heard were those of some of these plunderers. I knew De Montigni was coming at that hour," she added as a sort of explanation, "and thought it very likely that he would meet with some lawless band in the wood."

"It was in my defence, fair Lady, that he he fought," said Chasseron, "and gallantly he did fight, too."

"And pray, sir, who are you!" demanded Chazeul, with an angry spot upon his cheek at hearing the praises of one whom he wished to believe weak and timid.

"A very poor gentleman, sir," replied Chasseron, "not many poorer in the realm of France; and yet a gentleman. My name is Michael de Chasseron; and in days of yore, I have seen many a well stricken field; so that I am some judge of such matters, though now I have laid aside that trade, and am, as you may see, but a cultivator of the ground."

"Michael de Chasseron! I have heard the name," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "at all events you are welcome, sir; and such entertainment as the Chateau of Marzay can afford you shall command."

Chasseron was expressing his thanks briefly, when a loud rough-toned but hearty voice was heard without, exclaiming, "Where is he? where is he? where is my dear boy?" and at the same moment an old man entered the room, who had apparently, though not really, numbered more years than Monsieur de Liancourt himself. He was dressed in a buff coat of buckskin, laced with gold, with a high-standing collar, according to a fashion passed away some fifteen or twenty years before, with no ruff round his neck, but merely a plain linen cape turned back from his grey beard and neck. Over his shoulders hung a riband, from which was suspended the cross of a Commander of the order of St. John, and in his hand he carried a stout staff, on which he leant as he advanced up the hall, somewhat limping in his gait from an old wound in the leg. A deep scar appeared on his brow, and a large hole on his right cheek, mementos of former fields; and his whole frame seemed greatly shattered by injuries and labours. His eye however was clear and bright, his cheek warm and healthy, and his countenance frank and smiling.

The instant he entered he paused, looked straight towards De Montigni, and then stretched out his arms. The young man sprang to meet his embrace, and the old commander held him for several moments to his heart, unable apparently to speak from emotion. A tear rose in the eye of Rose d'Albret as she witnessed the meeting, and for a moment she turned away towards the window.

"Welcome, welcome, Louis," cried the old Commander de Liancourt," welcome back at length, my boy; but what the devil made thee stay away so long? thou shouldst have been *here years ago*! 'Tis a bad business, Louis, 'tis a bad business; but no matter for that, it can't be helped. We are all fools at some time of our lives; one man when he is young, another man when he is old. Heaven help us, man, how tall thou art grown! and I'll warrant you, notwithstanding all they say of your studies, can wield a sword or couch a lance with any one. *Pardie*, I'll have thee run a tilt with Chazeul in the court-yard to-morrow!" and dropping his voice, he added with a laugh "break his head for him, Louis; he is a coxcomb and a knave, though he be my sister's son; but she's not much better, for that matter."

While he spoke, he held the young man by the hand, and eyed him all over with a look of fond affection, seeming to attend but little to what he said in reply, though De Montigni answered him in warm terms of regard, and declared he looked in better health than when last he saw him.

"Ay boy, ay," said the old commander, "rest and idleness have done something for me; though if I could have mounted my horse, I would have been in the field long ago; but this accursed wound still keeps me out of the saddle, and I am no better than an old woman,—food for worms—food for worms, Louis! This old carrion of mine is quite ready for the earth, when it be God's will. But you must see old Estoc; he bore your father's cornet at Jarnac; and the old villain does not know you are come, or he would have been here long ago. Halloo there! Estoc! Estoc!" and he made the hall ring with his shout.

"For heaven's sake, my good brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "do not shake the walls of the château down. Some one tell Estoc that Monsieur de Montigni is arrived."

"Monsieur de Montigni!" said the commander, imitating his brother's tone. "Warm that, Louis!—cordial! Monsieur de Montigni! *Ventre saint gris!* have you quite forgot he is your nephew, brother? Your eldest sister's son? Ah! poor Louise; if she could but see what I see!—Well, 'tis no matter, the grave is a sure shield against many a wound."

"Come, come, now brother," said Monsieur de Liancourt, somewhat sharply, "your humour gets intolerable. Did you not promise that I should have none of this?"

"Promise? No, not a bit of it," cried the old commander; "I always keep my promises, Anthony; I wish others did as well. However, there is no use of talking now. You must have it all your own way. You always did; and a pretty affair you often made of it. Ah! here comes Estoc.—Here he is, old comrade, here he is, with just the same face he went away only with a beard on it!"

These words were addressed to a tall, old weather-beaten man, as thin and as stiff as a lance, who advanced with great strides up the hall, and taking the Baron de Montigni in his arms, gave him a great hug; then suddenly letting him go, he said "I could not help it, sir, indeed. Bless my heart, it seems as if you were little Louis still; do you recollect how I used to teach you to ride, and to shoot, and to play with sword and buckler?"

"Ay, that I do, Estoc," replied the young nobleman; "those lessons have served me well, many a time since, and [illegible] ago.

than to day. But I must give my companion of this afternoon's adventure into your charge, Estoc. Where is Monsieur de Chasseron? he continued, looking around.

"He left the room this moment, probably to see after his horse," observed father Walter, advancing from the window for the first time.

"I will go and find him," answered Estoc; "I passed some one in the vestibule, but as it is growing grey, I scarcely saw him;" and he turned abruptly to depart.

"Hark ye, Estoc," said the old commander, detaining him for a moment, and speaking in a whisper, "come up to his room when he goes to change his clothes. I must have some talk with him; the boy must know how he stands here—do you understand?"

Estoc nodded his head, and took his departure without reply.

In the mean time the priest had held out his hand to the young Baron de Montigni, saying, "Though the last to wish you joy on your return, sir, I do so sincerely, and trust you have fared well during your absence."

"Ah! good father," exclaimed the young Baron, "in this dim light I do not know you; But I am right glad to see you again, and have to thank you for many a wise counsel and much good instruction, by which I hope I have not failed to profit. Have you been well since last we parted?"

"As well as I could wish to be," replied the priest; "not that I am sure that high health is as great a blessing as men think. Like wealth and many another of this world's gifts, it sometimes leads us to forget our dependence on the Giver."

"I trust not to a well regulated mind," said De Montigni; "and I am sure, to you it could be no source of evil."

The old man looked down and shut his teeth fast together; and Monsieur de Liancourt, wishing to bring a scene which was not altogether pleasing to him to a close as speedily as possible, told De Montigni that the evening meal would be ready in half an hour, so that he had but time to change his riding-dress.

The young nobleman lingered for a few moments, however, conversing with those around, and marking many things which the actors therein little knew that he observed. Chazeul had kept close to the side of Rose d'Albret since his conversation with the Count had come to an end, and thrice he had endeavoured to engage her attention to himself, but in vain. At this moment, however, he said with some degree of irritation in his tone, "You seem very much occupied, sweet Rose."

"So I am, Monsieur de Chazeul," she answered aloud, "and interested too.—Are you not so!"

"Oh, certainly," he replied, "these receptions are always interesting ceremonies."

"Not to those, with whom they are ceremonies" said Rose d'Albret; and while Chazeul bit his lip, and his brow contracted moodily, she turned to speak with father Walter de la Tremblade.

De Montigni was conversing, in the meantime with his two uncles; but he had heard all, and marked particularly the words "Monsieur de Chazeul;" and whatever other effect might be produced upon him, the immediate result was to throw him into a fit of thought, and make him answer some of Monsieur de Liancourt's questions at random.

"What are you thinking about, Louis!" cried the old commander; "my brother asks when you left Padua; and you say, five years."

"He is tired and exhausted," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "he had better go and take off these heavy boots, cool his head and hands in some fresh water, and come down to supper, where we will refresh him with a good cup of wine."

"I am tired," said the young nobleman, "for I have ridden more than twenty leagues to-day, so that I will take your advice, my good uncle, and find my way down to the supper-hall when I hear the trumpet."

Thus saying, he retired, passing through the vestibule, where in one of the deep windows he saw his old friend Estoc, still busily talking to the good farmer Chasseron. De Montigni did not stop, however, but merely said, as he passed by, "Take care of him, Estoc, and seek him out a comfortable room."

"That I will, sir," replied Estoc, and continued his conversation.

The first meeting between the two who now stood together in the window, had been somewhat curious. On quitting the hall, the old soldier had entered the vestibule with his usual wide and hasty strides; and, as that side of the château was turned from the sun, so that it was darker than most other parts of the house, he might not have seen the man he came in search of, who was seated on a bench near the window, had not his attention been called by a voice pronouncing the word, 'Estoc.'

Turning quickly round, he advanced towards him, and gazed in his face, saying, "You seem to know me, sir, and methinks I have seen you before."

"You have, my good friend," replied Chasseron; "we have met twice; do you not remember Michael Chasseron?"

"I remember Peter Chasseron, right well," replied the old soldier; "he took me prisoner at St. Jean, and treated me right kindly; but you are not the same," and while he spoke he continued to examine the countenance of his companion with great attention.

"And when he had taken you," replied the farmer, "he brought you to the person who was in command of the troop. That was his brother. I am the same. Do you recollect me now?"

Estoc gazed at him again, and then answered in a significant tone, "I think I do; but it is twelve years ago, and you were a young man then. Come into the window and let me look at you."

"I am the same, I tell you," replied Chasseron, moving into the window; "there, take as good a look as you like."

Estoc did not fail to do so; then cast down his eyes, and bit the side of his hand with his teeth. "Well," he said, at length, "you are a bold man to venture here, all things considered. Do you not know that we are all Catholics in this place, and Monsieur de Chazeul one of the foremost of the League, who would think no more of putting you to death, be the result what it would, than of sitting down to his supper?"

"Parbleu! I know it right well," replied Chasseron; "and that is the reason I waited for you here. I am sure that you are not one who would betray me, and as for your leader, the good commander, I would put my life in his hands without the slightest fear."

"That you might, that you might," said the old soldier; "and it will be better to tell him too. But do none of these people know you? Some of them must have seen you. Why, the very name of Chasseron, if they had recollected, was enough to make the Marquis cut your throat. He would no more hesitate to roast a Huguenot alive in that court-yard, than to kill a stag or a wolf;" and, as he spoke, he looked over his shoulder to see that no one was coming.

"He would need two or three to help him," replied Chasseron; "and I felt sure that, if I trusted to the young Baron's word, I should find those within who would take the part of honour. But none of these men have seen me for years; and when they did, 'twas but for a moment. You know in those days I came and went like the lightning. As for the name of Chasseron, it has long been forgotten too.—But hark ye, Estoc, you love this young lord it seems? Now it is for his sake that I have come hither; not for a night's lodging, which I could obtain where I chose. I have heard at Cœuvres that they are playing him false here; and that there are plans afoot for doing him wrong in several ways. Perhaps I may aid him, if I know the facts; and I would fain do so for his good father's memory. He was as high and honourable a gentlemen as any in France. Though adversaries, we were not enemies, and I owed him something too for courtesies shown when, God help me, there were few to show them."

"Ah I wish my poor lord could hear those words," cried Estoc. "But you are right, sir, you are right. They are playing poor Louis false. Wait a bit, and you shall hear more in the course of the evening; and if you can help him, though I doubt it, God will bless you, were you twenty times a heretic."

"Parbleu! you must be speedy with your tidings, Master Estoc," said Chasseron, "for I must be away before nine to-morrow. I have got my wheat to dispose of," he added; "a weighty matter in my new trade."

The old soldier laughed. "I should think, sir, you would make but a poor farmer," he replied; "but you shall have all my news this very night. Ha! here comes the young lord. As soon as he is gone by, I will tell the good old commander that you are in the house; and you shall see him yourself in his room."

Before Chasseron could reply, De Montigni passed through the vestibule, as I have before described; but the moment he was gone the old soldier added, "We are to talk with the poor lad while he is dressing, and if I can so manage it, you shall be called to take a part; if not, I will find the means ere night be over. Here come the rest—let them pass, and then wait for me. I will be back with you in a minute."

As he spoke, all those whom we have seen conversing in the hall passed through the vestibule, with the exception of Rose d'Albret, who *retired by* another door, leading direct to her *own apartment. The good* old commander, supporting himself on his stick, was the last that appeared, with his eyes bent down upon the ground, and his lips muttering disconnected sentences to himself. In the semi-darkness that now reigned, no one took any notice of Chasseron or his companion; but the moment that his old leader had reached the opposite door, Estoc followed, and taking his hand familiarly, put it through his own arm, as if to assist him on his way; but at the same time he bent his head and seemed to whisper. The old commander suddenly stopped gazing in his face, and then hurried on at a quicker pace than before, in evident agitation.

In less than two minutes, Estoc returned, saying in a low voice, "Come, sir, come! he is wild to see you;" and, with a quick step, Chasseron followed him from the room.

CHAPTER V.

Louis de Montigni was in hope of a brief period of repose and solitude; repose not so much of the body as of the mind; solitude in which he might, to use the fine expression of Holy Writ, "Commune with his own heart and be still." He had much need of it; for the last half hour had exhausted him more than all the fatigues of the day. It had been one of greater emotion than he knew, or would admit; and what is there more wearing than emotion! He imagined that he felt pained and grieved, only at finding, on his coming back to a place which had long been his home, that he was half a stranger, his place in its familiarity usurped by another, and he himself looked upon, not as the returned son of the house, but as one to be observed and marked by those now in possession. But in reality and truth, there were deeper sources of anxiety and sorrow below; though it must always be full of anguish to a young and inexperienced heart to find for the first time the emptiness of professions, the hollowness of half the friendships to which we trusted, the selfishness of the many, the baseness of some, the instability of others, the falsehood, even, of the near and dear—to discover that a few short years, a few short hours, perhaps, will shake us loose from hearts in which we fancied ourselves rooted so that tempests would not tear us out. Yet there are more painful things than even these every-day lessons of the world's constitution; things that, blighting at once hope and confidence, extinguishing the lamp of the future, and clouding the moonlight of memory, dispose us to lay down the weary head upon any pillow for repose—even if it be that of the grave.

He would not show all that he felt; he wished to show no part of it; and he was anxious, most anxious, to have a short space, in which, by his own power over his own mind, he might repress all external appearances of disappointment and regret, and so school his heart, that not the slightest token of what was passing therein might show itself in his outward demeanour.

With this purpose, and in this hope, he took his way up one of the narrow wooden staircases in the château, towards the apartments which

had been formerly apportioned to him, and which he had been informed were again prepared for his reception. He entered the well remembered ante-room, and looked round. Everything was just as he left it; the very chairs and tables were the same, and seemed in the same position. He wished that it had been otherwise; he would have been glad to see gilding and tinsel, and new decorations, rather than the well-remembered old oak panelling, the huge chimney, with the iron dogs to support the wood, and the tall-backed, uncomfortable chairs. It made him feel that man alone was changed. It was full of memories which he wished not to indulge. He went on quickly into the room beyond, taking up the lamp which stood upon the table in the ante-chamber; but there it was just the same. His servants, thinking he would stay longer in the hall, had spread out some of his apparel in haste, and had gone to greet their fellows in the offices; but even the sight of the various things he had brought with him from a foreign land were painful to him. They brought the thought of peaceful days, brightened by occasional dreams of happiness to come, of expectations which in truth he had been in no haste to realize till it was too late, of vague aspirations, which, like some shrubs that produce a long succession of ephemeral blossoms, had died as they bloomed, but flowered again every day.

Casting himself into a seat, he leaned his head upon his hand, and for a minute or two gave himself up to thought. "'Tis strange," he said to himself; "I knew not how deeply I should feel this, till I came near these gates. The apprehension was less than the reality. Scarcely an hour ago, I could have talked calmly of all; could have jested on it, as any indifferent thing. But to feel it is very, very different." He mused for a moment, then raised his eyes and gazed about the room. Some one had placed an ebony crucifix upon a small table at the side, with the figure of the dying Saviour in ivory standing boldly out from the black background of the cross. It was the only change that had taken place, and yet it struck him with melancholy, rather than consolatory feelings.

"I must conquer this," he thought. "What right have I to repine at another's happiness?" But ere he could give further way to his reflections, he heard a step in the ante-room; and rising, he cast off his cloak, and unlooped his collar, as if engaged in preparing for the evening meal.

The moment after his uncle, the Count de Liancourt, entered with an air of assumed cheerfulness, which Montigni saw at a glance, only covered some anxiety.

"Well, Louis," he said, "all, you see, is just as you left it."

"All in these rooms appears to be so, sir," he replied; and then feeling that there was more point in the words than he wished to give them, he added, "But a good many changes seem to have been made in the rest of the house."

"Few, very few," answered Monsieur de Liancourt, "and most of those I had long intended. The others are but preparations for the wedding."

His nephew was silent, and the Count paused for want of that assistance which a single word might have given. At that moment one of the young nobleman's servants appeared, and began to arrange his apparel; but the Count, resolved to pursue the purpose for which he had come, gave an impatient "Pshaw!" and then added, "Send him away, Louis; he can come again in a quarter of an hour."

The man withdrew at a sign; and De Montigni, turning to his uncle with a grave and self-possessed tone, which somewhat surprised and embarrassed one who had always been accustomed to think of him as a boy, inquired, "Have you any thing of importance to say, sir?" adding, "if you have, I could wish you would reserve it till to-morrow; when less fatigued, I shall be able to hear it with better attention and a clearer mind."

"Oh, no! nothing—nothing particular, Louis," said his uncle who had seated himself; "only we were speaking of Chazeul's marriage. I trust you think it is a good arrangement?"

"To anything that may promote Mademoiselle d'Albret's happiness, I cannot of course object," replied De Montigni gravely, and there he stopped.

Another embarrassing pause succeeded, and then the Count went on, saying, "It is a matter I have long determined on. The union of the houses of Chazeul and De Marennes must at once strike every one as an alliance much to be desired. The important family thus raised up must, in the present troubled state of the country, gain great influence, and may be of great service to the state; and as to private and family considerations, they all tend strongly to the same point; and therefore, after mature consideration, I resolved that it should take place."

De Montigni made no answer; and before his uncle, who was not at all well pleased with his silence, could find words to go on, a heavy step was heard in the ante-room, and the good old commander opened the door. The old man's eyes were somewhat red, as if they had had recent tears in them; but when he saw his brother, a look of surprise and disappointment came into his countenance, and he drew back a step, saying, "I did not know you were here, Anthony. I will not disturb you."

"Oh no, my dear uncle!" cried De Montigni; "Monsieur de Liancourt says he has nothing important to say. Pray come in. You must not take the trouble of coming up that long stair for nothing."

"No, no, Louis," replied the commander, "some other time—to-morrow, or the next day we will have our chat. Anthony's nothings are often the most important things he has to do;" and thus saying, he retired and closed the door.

"How peevish he grows!" said the Count. "However, Louis, I am glad to find you approve of your cousin's marriage, with my fair ward; and—"

"Nay, sir," interrupted De Montigni, "I neither approve nor disapprove of a matter in which I have no say, and have never been consulted. Whatever Mademoiselle d'Albret thinks best for her happiness, must have my best wishes for its result."

"Well, well, that is the same thing," cried

his uncle somewhat sharply; "of course she thinks it will be for her happiness; and I am sure of it, which is of more importance. Rose is a very good, amiable girl, and will always be able to find happiness in the line of duty; and I am not one to deceive myself as to what is best for those committed to my care. It has been my anxious contemplation for many a year, how to promote the interests and comfort of the three persons who seem especially placed under my guidance and direction, Rose, yourself, and Chazeul. He being of an eager, active, and worldly disposition, is best fitted for struggling with these hard and contentious times, and therefore in the distribution of the property of my family, which is large enough to satisfy all, I intend to assign him all the territorial possessions at my death. On you, who are of a studious, calm, and thoughtful character, I intend to bestow at once all the rich benefices which are held by the house of Liancourt. They are equal in revenues to the land, and with your own hereditary property, will form a princely income. Then the bishopric of Sens must necessarily soon fall in, for my uncle who holds it is in his eightieth year. To it, will be easily attached the hat of a cardinal, as has indeed been generally done; and thus one of the highest dignities in the world will be secured to you."

He spoke volubly and eagerly, to get over as fast as possible the announcement of the dispositions he thought fit to make, without interruption; and he then added with an air of dignified satisfaction, "Thus you see, my dear Louis, I have in every respect considered your happiness and your fortune, and nothing remains but to sign the papers which confirm this arrangement."

But though the Count thought himself both just and generous, and felt himself taking an elevated position towards his nephew, Louis de Montigni saw the matter in a somewhat different light. "Rose d'Albret," he thought, "the whole inheritance of Marennes, all the estates of Liancourt added to those of Chazeul! This is certainly the lion's portion, yet would I give up every part therein right willingly but one."

He remained silent, however, with his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the table, till his uncle exclaimed impatiently, "You make no answer, Louis. Is it possible that you are dissatisfied—ungrateful!"

"No, my dear uncle!" replied the young nobleman. "But this is a very important question; and I told you that I would fain have some repose before I discussed such things! I repeat it, that I could much wish to have some time for consideration and thought, before I make any answer, farther than that I thank you deeply for all the care and kindness which you have always bestowed upon me."

"Methinks," said his uncle, in a tone of displeasure, that one moment's reflection were enough to show you the propriety of that which is proposed, and to induce you to sign at once the papers necessary to confirm such a well-considered arrangement."

"Nay, sir," answered De Montigni, "it might be so, if only the disposition of your property were concerned."

"And pray what is there more?" asked the Count angrily; what have I pretended to dispose of, in which I have no right to dictate? I suppose you will not deny that I am authorized to bestow the hand of my ward where I think proper? What is there else that I dispose of, that is not my own?"

"Of me, my dear uncle," replied De Montigni. "If I understand you right, I must enter the church. Though some men hold bishoprics without such a process, according to the evil practices of these corrupt days, such cannot be the case long: nor were I one to follow such an iniquitous course. All these benefices by right ought to be held by an ecclesiastic; and I will never hold them but as one. Indeed, what you have said of my studious and thoughtful habits, shows that you know such must be the case. The church, therefore, is to be my destiny under this plan; but surely such a step requires somewhat more than a *moment's consideration*. It is a question I have never contemplated; it never entered my thoughts. I came hither prepared to throw off my somewhat long-indulged inactivity, to take a part in what is passing in my native land, after due deliberation and inquiry to draw the sword rather than to put on the gown. Nay, more, I should have done so long ago, had you yourself not urged me strongly, in every letter but your last, to remain at Padua and continue my studies, without entering into a strife where family is ranged against family, and brother takes arms against brother."

"And why did I do so?" asked Monsieur Liancourt. "Simply because I have long determined on what I have this night announced. Is the rich bishopric, so long in my family, to be lost—to be thrown away for a whim? No, no, Louis. It was that you might be qualified to hold it, and disposed by habit to receive it, that made me wish you to stay where you were."

"If you had announced your wishes, sir, before, I should have been better prepared to fulfil them," replied his nephew; "as it is I must have time. There may be men who look upon these things lightly, who could take upon them the solemn vows which bind them to the highest and holiest duties, without care or consideration. They may be right, or they may be wrong; they may be men, who from the course of their life, and the habits of their thought, are fully prepared for such a decision, though conscious of its great importance: or they may be those, who, never intending to fulfil the obligations of any station in which they are placed, look upon all indifferently. I am in neither of these conditions; I have never considered the subject; I have prepared my mind for other things; but if I do consent, it will be with the determination to act up to the calling I assume, and be an ecclesiastic in spirit and in heart, as well as in name."

"Oh, if it be only conscientious considerations that withhold you," said his uncle, "those will be soon satisfied by good father Walter. He will speak with you this very night. You know him, and esteem him."

"Much," replied Montigni, "and will gladly converse with him for an hour or two alone on this subject."

"Why not at once," asked his uncle; I can

call him in a minute, his chamber is but at the end of the passage."

As he spoke, however, the sound of a trumpet, as was then common in France, announced the hour of supper; and feeling that he could not press the subject further, Monsieur de Liancourt added, "Well, well, afterwards will do; and I doubt not that to-morrow I shall find you quite determined, and willing to sign the papers, and accept the benefices, which shall be made over to you immediately."

"What are these papers, sir," asked De Montigni, without giving any reply upon the subject of his willingness.

"Oh, nothing but common forms," replied his uncle, "I cannot explain them all to you just now, for supper is served. Come, De Montigni."

"I am not quite ready yet," answered the young baron, "pray do not wait for me; I will join you in a few minutes."

His uncle accordingly left him; but instead of proceeding to change his dress, De Montigni covered his eyes with his hands, and gave himself up for a few minutes to bitter and anxious thought. Oh how many wild and tumultuous feelings passed through his bosom during that short space of time! and all were sad and painful. The contemplation of the future, the memory of the past, the consideration of the present, regret, apprehension, indecision, were all present to his mind at once; and, for some time, thought seemed one strange chaos of indistinct and gloomy forms, from which at length rose up one image more painful than all the rest. His mind rested upon Rose d'Albret, and upon the idea of losing her forever. Remembrance brought her back as the companion of his boyhood; he recollected how she had shared his sports, how she had ridden by his side through the scenes around, how she had taken part in his pleasures and his fancies, how she had soothed him under any of the petty griefs of youth, how she had turned from him anger and reproof, when in the gay light-heartedness of early years he had offended the irritable gravity of age. She had always loved him he thought, and he had always loved her, with the tender and unselfish love of years when passion is unknown. He had ever thought her beautiful,—most beautiful; but it was the kindness, the affection, in her radiant eyes that gave them double light to him; and now he had seen her in the full loveliness of womanly perfection, he had had beheld the same looks bent upon him from a face which might well inspire more ardent feelings; and yet he was even now to see her given to another,—now, at the very moment when he had most learnt to long for her himself. Often he had fancied in his boyish dreams, that at some future period she would be his own; that their mutual lives, through maturity and age, would pass in the same happy confidence, in the same warm affection, which had brightened their childhood. He almost believed that some one had told him so, that she had been originally destined for him; and as his mind rested upon that thought, his disappointment became the more bitter.

What was to be his future life then? to be cut off from all the joys of domestic life; to embrace that cold and stern profession which, in his church, excluded those who adopted it from all the warm relations of husband and father; to pass his days in the dull routine of formal services, or in the petty intrigues and artful manœuvres which have too often disgraced the Roman hierarchy; to cast from him at once all the dreams and aspirations of young and energetic manhood; and, before his hair was grey, to clothe his mind with the chilly garmenture of age. He shrunk from the thought; but, when he recollected that Rose d'Albret was to be the wife of another, it seemed to him a matter of small moment how his after days were to be passed.

Such were some of his thoughts, and only some; for there were many, many more; and yet they occupied but a very few minutes. It was not one by one they came, but appeared before him like a hostile army, stretching out at once on every side wherever his eye was turned. Nevertheless he could have gone on for hours, and yet not have exhausted all the bitter subjects of contemplation presented to him.

Most likely, indeed, he would have gone on much longer, had not one of his servants presented himself to assist him in dressing; and starting up from his sorrowful reveries, he hastened to cast off his travel-stained garments, and in a few minutes descended to the hall, where the rest of the party were assembled to supper.

A place was reserved for him between the count and the old commander. On the right hand of the latter sat father Walter, and on the opposite side were Chazeul and Mademoiselle d'Albret. Two or three of the retainers of the house, who bore the rank of gentlemen, filled up the rest of the table, with Chasseron and Estoc at the bottom. It was on the countenance of Rose d'Albret, however, that the eyes of De Montigni rested, as with a slow step he entered the hall. She was looking thoughtfully down, with a pale cheek and a grave brow; and she did not look up till he had taken his seat, when she did so with a start, as if suddenly wakened from her reverie.

Monsieur de Liancourt made an effort to receive him with a cheerful and unembarrassed air, laughed and talked more than was necessary, but yet was evidently occupied with other thoughts, and not altogether well pleased. Chazeul tried hard to engage his fair companion in a low-toned conversation, but, failing there, turned to his cousin De Montigni, and by the sort of bantering persifflage which has been common in all ages to small wits, sought to show his own superiority as a man of the world, at the expense of his relation's inexperience. But the extent of De Montigni's information, his knowledge of other scenes and other lands, the higher tone of his mind, and, above all, that calmness, which is often generated by deep and powerful feelings, even when they are those of sadness and disappointment, set the haughty and supercilious jests of the Leaguer at nought; and he often rebuked him with a quick and cutting reply, which made the old commander laugh, and once called a smile even upon the grave lips of father Walter.

Rose seemed greatly busied with her own thoughts, and attended little to what was passing, though once indeed she raised her eyes to Montigni's face with a slight smile, while he

administered some wholesome chastisement to the jeering spirit of his cousin; and when he went on in a few brief sentences to point out that there were higher things in life, than those on which Chazeul seemed to set such store, her eyes brightened, her look became full of interest and pleasure; and then she suddenly withdrew her gaze from his face, and fell into deeper thought than before.

There were one or two persons present who marked all this, and knew that the two cousins were rivals in heart, though not openly; and they easily judged, that the contrast was unfavourable to him who seemed the successful lover. Amongst these, there were some who wished to prolong it; but the priest took the first opportunity of stopping any further comparison, by given thanks after meat, as soon as possible, and rising to depart.

In the little confusion which always takes place at the conclusion of a meal, the old commander drew De Montigni aside and whispered, "I will come up and see you directly, Louis, if you will go up to your own room."

"The Count is going to send Monsieur de la Tremblade to me," replied the young nobleman, in the same tone; "will he interrupt you?"

"Yes, yes, diabolically," replied the old soldier; "get rid of him as soon as you can, Louis. I will set a watch, to see when he leaves you, and come immediately after, for I must and will speak with you to-night, let who will try to prevent it. Mind, be upon your guard with him," he added, "promise nothing, engage yourself to nothing. Have I your word, that you will not, till you have spoken with me?"

"You have, my dear uncle," replied Montigni; and at the same moment the priest approached, and laying his hand upon the young Baron's arm, he said "Monsieur de Liancourt tells me, you desire to speak with me?"

"He wished me to have some conversation with you, my good Father," replied De Montigni, "and I shall be most happy when you are at leisure."

"This moment, if you please," rejoined the priest; and they left the hall together, the young nobleman perceiving as he did so, that the eyes of Rose d'Albret were fixed upon him, with an eager and somewhat anxious gaze.

CHAPTER VI.

Nothing was said, either by De Montigni or father Walter till they reached the chamber of the former, where, closing the door, the young nobleman placed a seat for his reverend companion, and asked him if Monsieur de Liancourt had held any communication with him upon the subject on which they were about to speak?

"A few words were all that passed," replied father Walter, in a mild, though grave tone; "but they were sufficient to show me that the matter on which you wish to consult me is one in regard to which your uncle and myself have often conferred before."

"Nay," replied De Montigni; "the Count *has not put the business* on its right footing: let us settle that first, my good father. I did not desire to consult you, but he declared that you would easily remove from my mind the strong objections which I entertain to pledging myself for any consideration to enter the church without much deliberation, and a considerable time for thought. I expressed myself most willing to hear all you could say upon the subject, though I much doubted, from a knowledge of my own character, that you would succeed in removing my scruples, and, from a knowledge of yours, that you would even make the attempt."

"You were perfectly right, my son," replied the priest, after a moment's pause; "my arguments could but tend to show that the profession which your uncle wishes you to embrace is the highest, as it is the holiest, to which man can dedicate himself; but I fear much, that very consideration would tend rather to induce you to pause long, and to think well before you took upon yourself such high duties and responsibilities, than to hurry you on, as is the case with so many, into a rash, I might almost call it an impious, intrusion into a sacred calling, which should be approached with reverence, and not without the full concurrence of the heart."

De Montigni smiled, well pleased. Various circumstances, all apparently small, but weighty in their sum, had induced him to imagine that father Walter de la Tremblade was one of those who had consulted together to frustrate his hopes, and disappoint his wishes; but the calm and reasonable answer which he now made removed the suspicion. Whether he deceived himself or not may be seen hereafter.

"I am happy to find, my dear father," he said, "that your good and disinterested opinion confirms my own, as it will give me strength and confidence in my determination."

"Of all the many wise maxims which have come down to us, confirmed by the experience of ages," replied the priest, "one of the surest is, 'Do nothing rashly;' and if applicable to the common affairs of life, it is still more so to points where the whole of our future existence, here and hereafter, is affected. You are right, my son, to pause and deliberate; but before I give any advice beyond the general opinion which I have expressed, let me hear all the circumstances, the doubts, and considerations that affect you; and you shall then have my best counsel which may, perhaps, be valuable, as that of a man long accustomed to consider and, with God's aid, to decide upon questions, in which the consciences of those very dear to him, as members of his flock, are concerned. Tell me what are your doubts—what are your difficulties; and if I can I will resolve them."

"My doubts, good father," replied Louis de Montigni, "are simply whether I am fitted, either by inclination or by character, for the profession my uncle would put upon me. No mention was ever made of such a plan till this very night; and now, fatigued in body and somewhat agitated in mind, I am asked to decide at once, upon a question of such vital importance to myself."

"That is wrong—that is all very wrong," answered the priest. "You must have time—it is absolutely necessary. Yet," he continued,

after a moment's pause, "I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake. I am sure Monsieur de Liancourt did not intend to urge such a speedy decision upon that point. Perhaps it was your acquiescence alone in the disposal of his property that he required. You are well aware that the benefices may be held by one who is not in the church; and his conferring them on you, while he is himself living will prevent any cavil which might be raised in the distracted state of the country, with regard to your obtaining them, if they were merely destined for you at his death. I do not mean," he added in a grave tone, "to pronounce any opinion upon the propriety of laymen holding such property. That is not a question for me to decide."

"But it is one for me to consider in accepting them," said De Montigni; "and I scruple not to acknowledge that I hold the corrupt practice in horror and reprobation."

"I must not deny that I think you are right," replied father Walter; "but yet your refusal to accept this portion of his property, would greatly embarrass and grieve your uncle. All the arrangements being concluded for Monsieur de Chazeul's marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albret, your rejection of the share assigned to you, would prove a serious inconvenience to all parties; and I am sure you would not wish to throw any impediment in the way of her happiness, or your cousin's either."

"And does her happiness so entirely depend upon this marriage?" asked the young nobleman bitterly.

"Undoubtedly!" replied the priest, with an air of surprise at the very question.

"Then my course will be easy!" exclaimed De Montigni. "I will never do ought to give her one uneasy moment."

"That is noble, and generous, and like yourself!" said Walter de la Tremblade, holding out his hand to him. "I was quite sure that you would never hesitate at any personal sacrifice for the happiness of those you love. What course, then, do you intend to pursue?"

De Montigni, however, remembered the promise he had made to his uncle, and he replied, "Of that I must think; all I can say at present is, that no wish of Rose d'Albret's shall ever be thwarted by me. First, in order to form a judgment of my future conduct, I would fain know all the circumstances of the case; and my good father, as you have thus far dealt frankly with me, I would fain ask you a few questions, hoping for clear information."

"I will give you the best that I possess, my son," replied the priest. "But you must recollect that I am not a man of the world, and meddle little with things that are not brought absolutely under my notice."

"Well, then, to begin with matters that you do understand," said De Montigni; "if I accept these benefices, and sign the papers my uncle wishes me to sign, do I in any degree bind myself either to enter the church, or to hold preferment which I think should be reserved for ecclesiastics?"

"Not in the least, my son," answered father Walter, "nothing can bind you to the church but vows made to the church; and as to the benefices you can give them all away next day; at no greater risk than being called by some, an enthusiastic fool."

"That is soon met," said the young nobleman; "but if this be so, what is the need of my signing any papers at all?"

The priest paused for a moment in thought; but then answered, looking suddenly up, "It is simply because, as your uncle's nearest relation, you have a claim to his property, either the entire estate or a moiety, I know not well which. The benefices he can bestow where he likes, and he gives them to you as an equivalent to the other, thinking that, if the bishopric can be obtained for you, as doubtless it might be if you so liked, the advantages would be at least equal."

"My uncle did not tell me this!" replied De Montigni, with an air of mortification. "My uncle did not tell me this!"

"Perhaps he thought you knew it already," rejoined father Walter; "or, perhaps, he did not remember how generous and self-denying you have always shown yourself."

"He should have dealt openly with me," said the young man in a mournful tone, "He should have dealt openly with me."

He then thought for a few minutes, while the priest watched the varying expressions that came over his countenance with an inquiring and interesting eye, reading them as they rose. Perhaps he did not altogether interpret them aright, though the true Roman Catholic priest, who, following the rule of his order, strictly excludes from his breast half the passions that affect other men, learns to trace their workings in others with a skill which those who suffer them cannot acquire. He stands as a spectator of the most critical part in the busy game of life, and sees the cards in either hand, and judges where they are played well or ill.

At length the young nobleman said aloud, "So then I have some real power in this matter; and they would have concealed it from me. A somewhat dangerous course!"

"Perhaps such was not the view, my son," answered father Walter, "the matter could not be concealed from you long, as, if you read the papers, you must have seen what they contained."

"I am not sure of that, good father," rejoined De Montigni; "they might calculate upon my not reading them at all, or that their contents veiling their meaning in the profuse words of the law, would afford me no clue to my own rights. However, all this must be inquired into. I will now know the truth, wholly and entirely."

"I trust," said the priest gravely, "that you will in no degree forfeit that character of frank and generous disinterestedness which you gained in youth. It is a jewel, my son, inestimable from its rarity. Come, Louis, let me tell your uncle that you will sign the papers."

The young man gazed in his face intently; but father Walter returned the look with calm and unflinching firmness, and then added, "I am no party to any deceit, if any have been committed."

"I believe you, father," replied De Montigni, "for it is you who have unveiled the deceit; but as for the rest, I will make no rash promise. I will know the whole clearly, before-

I act or promise to act; I will know what are my own rights, and their full extent; I will know the motives of others, their conduct, and its causes."

The priest smiled, and shook his head; "You lay out labour for many a long day, my son," he said, "if you propose to penetrate into the secrets of any human heart; and in the mean time you stop a union desired by all, to wait upon your caprice. Look into your own bosom, Louis, and inquire there, whether the motives of such a conduct may not have a source in passions you will not like to own; disappointment of some chimerical dreams, jealousy of another's happiness, or revengeful feelings for imaginary injury."

"No, no, no," replied De Montigni, "my conduct shall be influenced by none of these; and whatever my motives are, they shall be made clear in the eyes of all."

"Well before you act," continued the priest, "ask yourself, if what your uncle proposes is at all unfair. In the division of his property he assigns you more than the simple half, though perhaps not the moiety you might like the best. There is no great injustice in this; there is nothing to move anger or suspicion; and yet you are evidently somewhat heated, and nourish doubts of those that love you, which you have no just reason to entertain."

"Father, you are mistaken," answered De Montigni, "I am aught but angry; my heart feels too cold and chilled for anything so warm. Suspicion may be there—would it had never entered—but who can help it? When once a concealment or deceit has been practised in matters where all should be fair and open as the day, can confidence be ever restored? no more than you can restore the white bloom to the grape or to the plum which you have once pressed in your hand. I will think of this, good father, I will think of it all well. No man can reproach me for examining closely into that in which I have so great an interest; no man shall have to reproach me for the manner in which I act when I have examined. But let me put a picture before your eyes ere you go, in order that you may see what necessarily presents itself to my eyes. It is of an uncle and two nephews; the one the son of an elder sister, the other of a younger; the first possessed of moderate estates, but a claim, it seems, to his uncle's property; the other possessed of larger estates already, but, if I judge rightly, without that claim. The one is sent by his uncle and guardian to a foreign country to study: the other remains upon the spot. At the end of five years they meet again, and the uncle proposes a plan which he declares to be equitable. To the son of his eldest sister, who has been absent so long, he offers certain benefices, and proposes that he shall enter the church. To the son of the younger, who has remained upon the spot, he gives the whole of his estates, the hand of his fair ward, and the large property which she inherits. Do not suppose, father, I can shut my eyes to such things; do not suppose that I can do aught but feel them bitterly. Mark me, however, I say not that I will reject this arrangement, even if *I have power* to do so; I say not that I will *throw the least impediment in* the way of views and plans which were formed without my concurrence and without my knowledge; but I do say, that I will consider, and examine, and ponder, before I in any way sanction a proceeding, by which I am destined to be, in every sense, a loser."

"I thought," replied the priest, mildly, "that you had already determined not to do anything which could impede the union of Mademoiselle d'Albret with the man of her choice; that you would not frustrate her wishes, or delay her happiness?"

"Nor will I," answered De Montigni; "but I must be well assured in the first place of the conduct which she herself wishes to pursue."

Father Walter shook his head gravely, saying, "My son, my son, I fear you are deceiving yourself. I am not aware whether your knowledge of women be much or little; whether in studious seclusion you have passed your time without mingling with the general world, or whether you have frequented the gay society of Italy, and gained an insight into the female heart as it there appears. But do not deceive yourself into a belief, because Mademoiselle d'Albret sometimes speaks coldly to your cousin, affects an occasional indifference, ay, or even adds a harsh word towards him—do not believe, I say, that she does not love him. I have always seen that women, circumstanced as she is, from the very modesty of their nature, assume such disguises to conceal the warmer feelings of their heart; and the men with whom they are most free, familiar, ay, and perhaps affectionate, have the least cause to suppose that they entertain any serious attachment to them,—for where such exists, it always brings diffidence and some reserve along with it."

De Montigni mused. There was truth, he thought, in what the old man said—it might be, indeed, that he was right. True, in her youth, Rose d'Albret was frank, open, and unreserved; her loves and her dislikes were plainly shown. But yet she might be changed. Womanhood and passion might have brought with them reserve, concealment, art. Who could say what in the space of five years might have been effected, and what the girl of fourteen might have become?

"Probably you are right, good father," he replied; "I know but little of woman or woman's arts; but still I am not deceiving myself. All I propose is to pause and consider all things, this as well as any of the rest; in fact, to use your own maxim, and 'do nothing rashly.' As I conclude you will see my uncle to-night, and report to him the result of our conference, pray tell him my resolution, such as it is, and explain to him in terms that will give him no offence, but yet convey my full meaning, that in my determination to consider before I act, I am too firm to be shaken. I find that I have somewhat too long suffered my conduct to be dictated by others, and I do so no more, whatever be the result."

"Can you not enable me, Monsieur de Montigni," asked the priest, "to fix some term for your consideration? As your uncle will have to shape his conduct as he may judge expedient to meet yours, it might be as well to name a time for your decision."

"That I cannot do," replied Montigni; "at

least not to-night. At all events it shall not be long before I do decide. Small time will suffice me, if no means be taken to impede me in judging for myself; if there be, those who employ them must be answerable for the delay. I will now be satisfied on all points—I will see the whole case clearly before I judge. Whenever I do see it, my course will be determined in an hour. And now, good father," he continued, perceiving that the priest was about to reply, "I would fain discuss this subject with you no more, at least, to-night, though most happy to hear you upon any other, if you have aught else to say."

"Nothing, my son," replied father Walter, rising; "pray remember that the discussion has not been of my seeking. I never thrust myself upon the confidence of any one, happy to give advice or assistance where it is required, but never obtruding it, except at the sacred call of duty; and so, my son, good night and benedicite."

Thus saying, he slowly quitted the room, and walked deliberately down the stairs, across a low-roofed hall, where several servants sat, and then, mounting another staircase with a quicker step, found his way to the apartments of the Count de Liancourt. That gentleman, half undressed, was sitting in his dressing-gown conversing with Chazeul, and both eagerly turned to the priest as he entered, demanding, "Well, what does he say? how did you find him disposed?"

Walter de la Tremblade sat down in a vacant chair, and then, looking from the one to the other, he said, "I found him firmer, sterner than could be expected from his character or his years. I fear, my son," addressing Monsieur de Liancourt, "that your policy has somewhat run awry. If, instead of calling him you had written to him the plain and straightforward state of the case, telling him that the marriage of Mademoiselle d'Albret with Monsieur de Chazeul here depended upon the renunciation of his claim to your estates, and begging him to send you his procuration instantly for the purpose of making that renunciation, he would have done so at once."

"Pshaw," cried Chazeul, "you must think him a greater fool than even I do, to suppose that if he were told those facts he would give up his chance of beauty, grace, and the united estates of Liancourt and Marennes."

"He is no fool," replied the priest, "but one of those with whom it is better to tell the whole truth, and engage his generosity and his enthusiasm on your side, than suffer him to discover, not only the facts you would conceal, but that you have endeavoured to conceal them. Better to tell him the truth, Monsieur de Chazeul, than to let him find it out; and allow me to say, he has found out one half already, and will find out the rest ere long."

"*Ventre bleu!* what has he discovered?" demanded Monsieur de Liancourt. "This is an affair indeed."

"He is right well informed," answered the priest, "that the estates of Liancourt are his at your death, in right of his mother."

Chazeul struck his hand vehemently upon the table, exclaiming, "Then the game is up."

"Not exactly," replied the priest; "had he known it a month ago, it would have been much better. Then at a distance, and without the means of farther inquiry, he would, I am sure, have been easily induced to make the renunciation, in consideration of the benefices, without coming here at all."

"But he has been urging me for these two years," exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, "to give my consent to his return. I had no power to refuse him, and it was only by persuasions that I kept him there so long."

"Well, but the results, the results, Monsieur de la Tremblade," exclaimed Chazeul; "we will be guided by you. Tell us what conclusions you have come to, and what course it will be best to follow."

"From my conference with him this night," replied the priest, "I see exactly the state of his mind. In the first place, I tell you he knows much, and suspects more; he perceives that you have attempted to keep him in the dark; and he is no weak, studious boy, such as you believed. He is as firm as a rock, and determined upon his course. You cannot, and will not deceive him on any of the facts of the case; and at present his reply is, that he is determined to take full time to consider before he decides. There is one way, and only one way to act upon his mind. If you can induce Mademoiselle d'Albret, to ask him to make the renunciation for her sake, he will do it without the slightest hesitation. Get her but to say three words to that effect, and he will sign the act to-morrow."

"Oh, then the whole matter is easy!" cried Chazeul. "I will induce her to do that in a moment."

The priest looked at him with a somewhat cynical smile, and replied, "You may not find so much facility as you expect, Monsieur. Ladies have caprices; and perhaps you may not be able to make her say the exact words you wish."

"Oh, but I am sure I can!" replied Chazeul. "I know the pretty Rose right well, with all her coquettish ways for goading on a lover's passion, by airs of coldness and indifference; but she is not such a fool as to be blind to the advantages of the most brilliant fortune she can reach in France. With the united estates of Liancourt, Marennes, and Chazeul, we take our seat amongst the highest of the land. Did you not mark what she said to me to-day, about the splendours of a court? Such hopes and expectations, once entering a woman's head, never go out of it, good father."

The priest paused and mused with a slight smile curling his lip; but at length he replied, "Doubtless you are more learned in women's hearts than I am, Monsieur de Chazeul; you have had more to do with them, though in the confessional we sometimes hear strange secrets. However, if you will take my advice, you will not trust to your own unassisted efforts, but send for your mother at once. She is within a two hours' journey, and may easily be here, before noon to-morrow."

"Right, right, father," cried Monsieur de Liancourt, "we will not lose a moment's time. Jacqueline's head is worth all ours put together. It always was so; and poor Louise, when she was alive, was no match for her at all. Let us

not lose a moment, but send a messenger to her to-night, so that she may set out the first thing to-morrow. See to it, Chazeul, see to it; for I am tired, and going to bed. Choose some stout fellow who will do the errand well. Let him avoid the wood, and take the Chartres road; 'tis but half a league about."

"I will do it at once," said Chazeul, "for it is now near ten. But still I am sure that I can persuade fair Rose to make the request, before my mother comes; and so, good night, sir."

Thus saying, he left the room, and father Walter only remained, to shake his head with a doubtful air, and say, "He is too confident. God send that he mars not all;" and he, too, left Monsieur de Liancourt to seek repose.

CHAPTER VII.

In the chateau of Marsay, on that night, as every day in the wide world in which we live, care and anxiety, hope and expectation, the selfish intrigue, the means of frustrating it, the dark design, the events that are to bring it to light, were all going on side by side at once, separated from each other by thin partitions which served to conceal the proceedings of the various actors from each other, but not from the eye of that overruling Providence who apportions success and disappointment, joy and sorrow, reward and punishment, according to his wise but inscrutable will.

Less than a hundred yards from the chamber of Monsieur de Liancourt, Louis de Montigni sat after the priest left him, with his arms folded on his chest, his head bent down, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. He thought bitterly over much that had passed. The words which Walter de la Tremblade had spoken concerning the heart of woman, still rung in his ears; the probable causes of the peculiarities he had remarked in the conduct of Rose d'Albret, still agitated his mind; and he asked himself "Can she really love him? She who was clear-sighted, as well as frank, thoughtful as well as gay, generous, kind, liberal, can she love this man, who from youth till now has shown himself the same selfish, bold, confident, cunning, and presuming being? She used to see through him, and understand him when he came here as a youth, but a few years older than myself. It may be so, and perhaps the priest is right. If so, it were as well to renounce all without further hesitation, not to let her or any one perceive the hopes that are to be disappointed, the vain expectations that are to vanish at a breath, nor to call down that pity which is always more or less mingled with contempt, nor excite the scornful merriment of the winner in this perilous game. No, that I will not do; and yet this is a hard and a bitter act to require of me, which may well justify some doubt and some delay. Hark! there is my uncle's foot, I shall now hear more. The good old man has all his eyes open, where my interests and happiness are concerned. From him I shall hear the pure truth, undisguised and plain. I almost doubt that priest: yet he spoke fairly and candidly too; but these men of the gown, dependent on great families, *however* virtuous and right may be their inclinations, gain a bias towards the views of their patrons, which often blinds their eyes to the plain course of justice."

Such were the thoughts of the young Baron de Montigni, till at length the old soldier Estoc threw open the door, and the commander limped into the room.

"Now lock the door, Estoc!" cried the good knight, seating himself in the chair which his nephew placed carefully for him; "lock the door, we will have no more interruptions. I have a right to have my say too, Louis. *Ventre saint gris*, to use the language of the Philistines, we will have it out now, Louis."

"Most assuredly sir," replied the young nobleman; "I will suffer no one to interrupt us. My uncle, the count, as once my guardian and my eldest relative, might of course command my first attention; but now that is over, you, my dear uncle, have the next claim upon me, and I will not allow any one to deprive me of the pleasure or the benefit of hearing your conversation and advice."

"Well said, boy! Well said!" cried the old commander. "Do you hear that, Estoc? He's no chicken now, eh? By my faith, Anthony will find himself mistaken. I like that well. You are right, Louis, to say, you *will not suffer* any one to interrupt us. That's the true tone. I have grown into a sort of some dependence here, thanks to my infirmities. I let them have all their own way; but, parbleu, it will not do, for they turn tyrants when they are over indulged."

"I have come here, my dear uncle," replied his nephew, "with all reverence and respect for Monsieur de Liancourt. But my days of pupilage are over. While I stay in his house my chamber is my own, where I receive whom I like, when I like, and suffer not myself to be interfered with, (so long as I observe the courtesies of life,) when I am otherwise engaged. Whenever an attempt is made to restrain that communication with others that I may choose to hold, I leave the place, and take my lodging elsewhere."

"Right, right," cried the officer, "and if you go I will go with you, Louis. But sit down, Estoc. We have much to talk about, my boy. I trust you kept your word with me—I trust you promised nothing to the priest. He is a good man in the main; but shrewd, Louis, shrewd as a winter's night—pile up the fire, Estoc. You promised nothing, eh, Louis?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the young Baron. "I merely assured him, that no consideration on earth would induce me to do aught that would thwart the inclinations, or impede the happiness, of Mademoiselle d'Albret, but that, for the decision of my conduct, I must have time to consider, and that well."

"Ah no! I am sure you would not! Poor dear little Rose, God bless her!" cried the commander, "she deserves all tenderness. But if you did what they want, you would mar her happiness too, boy. Now let me hear what they sought of you. Then I will tell my tale."

De Montigni recapitulated, as well as he could, all that had passed between himself, his uncle, and the priest. He knew he could trust to those with whom he spoke; and he strove to give the words that had been uttered as nearly

as possible without change. He might indeed add a running commentary of his own conclusions, but he falsified nothing, he exaggerated nothing. As he proceeded, his good uncle leaned his chin upon his stick, and listened without replying a word, though once or twice he struck the point of the staff sharply on the floor.

Old Estoc, however, was not so patient or so taciturn; for more than once, he uttered a quick oath, and murmured from time to time "Pardie! —Morbieu!—Coquin!" in tones which showed that he was not at all edified with the reported discourse of Monsieur de la Tremblade.

But when the young nobleman had done all, the good commander's smothered fire broke forth in a blaze, "Curses upon them for ever!" he exclaimed; "now they wonder there are Huguenots, and yet to see a Catholic priest playing knave and hypocrite in this way is enough to make any honest man turn Turk! I am ashamed of my brother, Louis, I am ashamed of my family, but I am still more ashamed of my religion. It's not honest, my boy! It's not honest, if it suffers its clergy to go playing such a double game, telling what suits them, and keeping back what does not suit them to speak. Now you shall hear the plain truth. You are heir of Liancourt, pure and undoubted. It was settled so long since, and nothing but your own act can deprive you of the lands."

"I suspected that such was the case," replied the young nobleman, "as soon as I saw such anxiety to induce me to sign papers in haste, and without explanation."

"Suspected!" cried the old commander. Why, you should have known it long ago, if there had been honest men amongst us. I made my renunciation in poor Louise's favour —my sister—your mother, boy—when she married your good father—God rest his soul—and I took the Order of St. John. You are the heir, then, beyond all doubt; but Jacqueline, your aunt, my sister—she's a devil if ever one was —has never ceased working at my poor weak brother Anthony to deprive you of your right."

"She never loved me, I know," replied De Montigni. "I remember when I was a mere boy—"

"Loved you! that's not the point," exclaimed the commander. "She loves you just as well as anything else that stands in her way. It is that she loves herself, and loves herself in her son—the coxcomb! She has set her mind upon seeing him wealthy and powerful. She always looked upon money as the best of blessings. That is why she married old Chazeul, a man she hated and despised, only that she might be richer than her elder sister; and now this fellow has squandered half his father's estate, she thinks to patch up a greater fortune still by getting for him Marennes and Liancourt. The last she never can get if you are not a fool, Louis, and the first she cannot get without she gets the last."

"This seems to me a riddle, sir," said De Montigni, thoughtfully. "I understand that this marriage is fully settled, with the consent and approbation of all parties; and surely the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret, with her hereditary property, must be an object well worth striving for, even in the eyes of one who values wealth so much as my aunt de Chazeul."

"Ay, boy! ay!" cried the old commander, "so it would be, if she could get it. But the contract between the good Count de Marennes and your uncle is, that Rose is to marry his nephew, the subsisting heir of Liancourt. No name is mentioned, lest the heir should die in the meantime; but you were then, you are still, the subsisting heir of Liancourt, in virtue of your mother's rights as eldest daughter of my father, and my renunciation in her favour. If you put your hand to that paper, you are worse than Esau; for you not only sell your birthright, but your bride, for a mess of pottage."

De Montigni started up and paced the room for a moment, with his hand clasped upon his forehead, and twice he muttered, "This is shameful!" He was tempted, strongly tempted, let what would be the result, to assert his rights at once; to claim his own without one consideration of the feelings of others; to exact the utmost sum of his inheritance, like a miser; to demand his bride, willing or unwilling, under the engagement of her father.

But better thoughts first came to withhold him, and, as he reflected, difficulties appeared to impede him in such a course. The contract, doubtless, was in the hands of Monsieur de Liancourt. How could he prove it? how establish his claim? The estates, indeed, he might withhold; his opposition might delay the marriage. But then he asked himself could he inflict sorrow and disappointment on Rose d'Albret; could he dash from her lip the cup of hope and expectation? Most likely she looked forward to her approaching marriage as a thing decided beyond all chance of change. He had no substantial reason to suppose that she felt repugnance to it. Her mind was probably made up; her part taken; perhaps all the affections of her young heart engaged. Was he to be the person to blight all her prospects—to disappoint all her hopes? "No," he thought, "no!" and resuming his seat by his uncle, he said, "This deceit used towards me, my dear sir, is very bad. It disgusts one with the world and human nature. Yet one consideration will probably make me yield to all their wishes, and forbear from exercising my rights, even now that I know them."

"Phoo! Too!" cried the commander, interrupting him. "The boy is mad! Go, call our friend, Estoc. He must talk with him. There is a gentleman here, Louis—by the bye, he came with yourself—whom I met with once or twice in the old wars. He is as wise and good a man as ever lived—bating a bit of heresy in his notions, though scarce half a Huguenot either—a good soldier as any in France, and moreover a very prudent and clever person—a very wise good man. Indeed, none better. I have been talking with him a long time since supper all about this affair, and you must take his advice, or at least listen to it. Depend upon it, you will find it good."

At first sight De Montigni shrunk from the idea of exposing all his feelings, nay, detailing all the particulars of his situation, to a comparative stranger, like Chasseron, one too whom he looked upon as an inferior. But before he could reply, Estoc had left the room; and, as he thought further, he remembered so much of bold decision in the man's character, so many traits of shrewd

good sense in his conversation, that he began to think the opinion of such a person—totally independent of all passion and prejudice, knowing little of any of the parties, and who had seen so much of what had taken place upon his arrival—might be very useful as a corrective of any erroneous views which he himself might have adopted. He was free too, to accept his advice or to reject it; and he knew the good old commander too well, not to be sure that Chasseron must have borne a high character in former days, to have obtained his confidence and approbation, especially as a heretic—a sort of animal of which he was by no means fond. He waited then patiently for the return of the old soldier with his companion of the way, while his uncle, from time to time, addressed to him a brief adjuration, "Not to be a fool, and throw away fortune and happiness;" or, "Not to cast all the advantages which God had given him, into the lap of those who had played so foul a game, to wring them from him."

In a few minutes the door from the ante-room opened again, and Chasseron entered, followed by Estoc. The old commander, in whom age and infirmity could scarcely tame the eager, but generous, impetuosity of disposition which had characterized him through life, rose up from his chair to greet their new guest and begin the subject at once. But Estoc thrust him down again, with unceremonious affection, saying, "Sit down, sir, sit down. You have been too much on your legs to-day already. You will have your wound breaking out again, especially if you tease yourself so. Monsieur de Chasseron knows all about it. But there is more going on down below. Master Chazeul has just come down from a conference in the Count's chamber, and has sent off Etienne on horseback, to his mother, begging her to be here at an early hour to-morrow."

"Ay, Jacqueline must have a finger in the affair!" cried the commander; "and she will outwit us all, if we do not mind."

"I do not think so, sir," replied Chasseron, who by this time was seated between the old officer and his nephew. "It seems to me that the matter is very simple. Monsieur de Montigni, this worthy gentleman, having known and heard something of me in times of yore, has thought fit to tell me the situation in which you are placed, and to ask my advice. I knew something of the facts before; for, in the first place, I was well acquainted with the good Count de Marennes; nay, poor as I am, was somewhat related to him—in a very distant degree, it is true; but still he was not above acknowledging the connexion. In the next place, as you may perhaps have remarked, I live with my eyes and my ears open; and as I have been in this neighbourhood at least within fifteen leagues for some time, I have heard a good deal of what is going on. If, therefore, my counsel or assistance can do you any service, command it; for I owe you a good turn for that which you rendered me this morning. *Parbleu*, I should have been badly off if you had not come up."

"You are very welcome, my good sir," replied De Montigni; "and as my uncle has told you the circumstances, there is no use of entering upon them again. There are other things, however, to be taken into consideration, which you cannot yet know; I mean my own particular views and notions—"

"Ay!" cried the old commander, interrupting him, "the boy is fool enough, Monsieur de Chasseron, to talk of yielding to the wishes of these people, to think of abandoning all his rights, giving up to that coxcomb Chazeul both bride and estates! What think you of that? of letting them win the day by all their tricks and manœuvres? He has gone mad, I think! but *ventre bleu!* it shall not be so; for I will plead first myself. I renounced in favour of poor Louise, who had the next right after me, not of Madame Jacqueline, who has got too much already."

De Montigni coloured slightly at his uncle's words, but he replied calmly and affectionately; "I have my own reasons, my dear sir, if you will but hear them. All the gifts of fortune are but as we estimate them; I will not pretend that I am without ambition, still less that to obtain the heart of Mademoiselle d'Albret I would not make any sacrifice. But I do not court her hand without her heart; and no consideration shall tempt me to cause her unhappiness by opposing her marriage, if—and I have no reason to doubt it—she feels towards my cousin of Chazeul, as a woman should feel towards the man on whom she is about to bestow her hand."

"That, young gentleman, is the question," said Chasseron, quickly, while the old commander gave way to many a "Psha!" and other less decent interjection. "You have been ill used; and, evidently with a design of bringing about a marriage contrary to the previous contract between the lady's father and your uncle, you have been kept at a distance, in ignorance of all the facts, while opportunity has been given to Monsieur de Chazeul to seek the lady's affections."

"To be sure!" cried the commander, "it was all done on purpose!"

"Under these circumstances," continued Chasseron, without noticing the interruption, "you would be perfectly justified in opposing the marriage; and with the evidence of your uncle here, of the previous contract, I do not scruple to say, it could not proceed. I applaud your delicacy and generosity, however; but the utmost that could be expected from the most noble-minded man would be, that you should insist upon the delay of a year, with full opportunity of seeking to change the lady's views, reserving to yourself the power to enforce or renounce your rights, as you may find her affected."

"But sir—but sir!" cried the commander.

Chasseron, however, waved his hand, saying, "Hear me out, my good friend," and then continued, "This would be the kind and generous course, even if you found that Mademoiselle d'Albret was a willing party to this alliance. The first question is, however, whether she be really so or not? How can you tell that she does not consent with reluctance? How do you know that she has not also been deceived? May she not have been taught to think that her marriage with your cousin is in accordance with her father's designs? or even if no fraud has been played upon her, may she not have yielded from obedience to her guardian, knowing the power of those who hold, under the king, the

garde noble of a female orphan? may she not, even now, long for deliverance, and may she not bless you, if you step in, armed with power to save her? Nay, more," he added with a smile, "may she not love you already?"

The colour rose warmly into De Montigni's cheek, and his heart beat quick; "Oh, no, no," he cried, "I cannot hope such happiness. She was young, very young, when I went; not yet fifteen. We always loved each other, it is true; but as mere children."

"Love is a fruit that matures itself without the sunshine," replied Chasseron in a meaning tone, and then added frankly, "in a word, Monsieur de Montigni, I think it is so. I would not delude you with false hopes and expectations. That would be a bad return for the service you have rendered me; but I have known something of women, and I have in this case watched the lady accurately; not a glance of her eye has escaped me, not a varying shade of colour in her cheek. I think she loves you, I think she has now discovered it; and that, if you could see her at this moment, you would behold her weeping bitterly in her chamber over her hard fate. I think all this; but of one thing I am certain; if she have to-morrow to choose between you and Chazeul, she will not hesitate one moment, and her hand is yours."

The sensations of Louis de Montigni at that moment would be impossible to describe and difficult to conceive. Hope, joy, expectation, rose up to struggle in his breast, with sorrow, doubt, and apprehension. He dared not trust himself to the full tide of satisfaction and love. He felt it impossible to believe that such happiness might be in store for him; and, contrasted with the dark and bitter feelings which had lately possessed him, the dream of happiness which now presented itself, though one which he had more than once indulged before, seemed too much for the lot of any mortal creature. A few moments' reflection, however, showed him that even if all that Chasseron said was true,—if the brightest hope of his heart were realized and the love of Rose d'Albret were truly his, there were still difficulties and dangers enough in the way, to mingle a full portion of bitter with the cup of human joy. Obstacles innumerable presented themselves to his imagination; and it seemed to his inexperienced mind almost impossible to triumph over the impediments which might arise to bar the path to happiness.

His uncle and Chasseron sat gazing at him for a few moments, while he remained in silence, meditating over the present and the future. The old commander could not comprehend his feelings; but Chasseron, with clearer eyes, read, as if in a book, all the varied emotions of his heart, as they were written on his changing countenance. He suffered him, then, to reflect without interruption, till at length the young nobleman replied, "God send that it may be as you suppose! If it be so, sir, the decision of my conduct will be easy, for nothing but the belief that I should be wounding the feelings or opposing the happiness of Mademoiselle d'Albret, could prevent me from putting in my claim to her hand. But if I thought that she had one doubt or hesitation in regard to this marriage, that her whole heart did not go with it, that she only consented at the command of her guardian, and not from her own inclination, I would preserve every right I have, for her sake as well as for my own."

"Why, I tell you, boy, they have driven her," cried his uncle. "they have coaxed, and laboured, and striven, for these last two years. They have made her believe that my brother Anthony has the full and entire disposal of her,—that she is but as his horse, or his ox, or any other of his goods and chattels, which he can give, or sell, or exchange, at his will and pleasure."

"That error may soon be proved," exclaimed De Montigni.

"Nay," said Chasseron, before he proceeded, "perhaps not so easily as you imagine. Depend upon it, these artful people, with power in their hands, will take good care that you have no opportunity of speaking with her alone, if they can help it. You have the means, however, of driving them to it, if you use them skilfully. Let them think that your decision entirely depends upon her—"

"I have told them so already," replied De Montigni.

"So far so good," continued Chasseron; "but keep to your text: refuse to discuss the subject with them at all, till you have ascertained her views. Demand an hour's private interview with her; and adhere firmly to that condition. Let it take place also, in some spot where you cannot be overheard—"

"The rampart is the only place," said Estoc; "on the west side there are no windows, and I will plant myself at the door, so as to ensure there be no interruption."

"There be it, then," said Chasseron; "and this once gained, the decision of your fate is in your own hands. You may gain the day, too, if you like; only remember, listen to no arguments, enter into no conversation upon any part of the subject; but merely say that, when Mademoiselle d'Albret, unconstrained and free, assures you fully, with her own lips, in a private conference, that her happiness depends upon your making this renunciation of your rights, you are ready to do so, but not till then. Doubtless, they will tutor her,—doubtless, they will endeavour to work upon her mind by every argument and inducement—and many may be devised which we cannot foresee—but you, on your part, must use your opportunity to the best advantage: press her home with all the words of love and passion,—call to her mind the days gone by, the scenes, the affections of childhood; show her how shamefully you have been deceived; let her know the frauds which have been put upon herself. Make her comprehend, that it was for you she was destined by her father; and, if you will, let her know your generous intentions; tell her that for her happiness you are ready to sacrifice not only your rights and your inheritance, but even herself. Then, Parbleu! if you do not win her, you are better without her."

The old commander rubbed his hands, exclaiming, "He will win her, he will win her! Don't be afraid; she is quite ready to be won. She loves him already, man—she always has loved him; only the poor little soul did not understand what it was."

"But suppose," said De Montigni in a mus-

ing tone, "suppose all this takes place as we would have it: suppose I am blessed to the utmost of my hopes and beyond my deserts, that I find her willing to be mine, unwilling to be his, what is the next step to be taken?"

"Ay, that is the question," replied Chasseron, "and one not very easy to resolve. I will give you my opinion, fairly, though it may be wrong. However, you may follow it or not as you like. Bold measures are fitted for dangerous circumstances; and deceit, such as has been used towards you, will justify you in employing means which, were it otherwise I would not advise, and you ought not to follow. If you find her disposed to give her hand to you, and you make open and decided opposition to the scheme which they themselves have devised, a thousand to one you will be driven out of the chateau, and all the influence of her guardian, even to compulsion itself, may perhaps be used to force her into a marriage with your rival. In the present condition of the country, it will be difficult to enforce your rights, so long as she remains here; by no means difficult for them, in the course of a year or two, to drive her, by persecution, into the arms of a man she hates. I would advise you, then, all these things considered, not to let them fully know, all that takes place between you. Give no decided answer the moment your interview is over; but say they shall know your resolution on the following day. Take advantage of the time; and having gained her consent, and arranged your plan, fly with her at once to the camp of the King. Beyond all doubt Henry, as soon as he is informed of her father's intentions regarding you, will bestow her hand upon you. He is a good-humoured man enough; frank and free; and has a weakness for all love affairs. He will be glad enough, too, to secure the support of the houses of De Montigni and Marennes to his own cause; for at present he is a king without a kingdom; a soldier without money; and, by my faith, too, a husband without a wife. However, you need not fear his taking yours, for they do say he is over head and ears in love just now with another person; otherwise I would not answer for him."

De Montigni smiled: "You are no courtier, Monsieur Chasseron," he said, "and your plan suits me well; but there may be difficulties in the execution."

"Pooh, boy!—None, none," cried his uncle; "the business will be quite easy. Here are old Estoc and I as full of stratagems as the Duchess of Montpensier. We have had all our cunning bottled up for these ten years, since I got that cursed wound; and we'll arrange between us a plan for getting you all out of the chateau, so that no one shall know anything about it, for eight hours at least. The King is besieging Dreux they say; and you can soon reach his camp."

"But can I persuade Rose to consent?" asked De Montigni.

"To be sure, to be sure," answered the old commander; "when she sees that there is nothing else for it, she won't hesitate. Besides, your taking her off to the King's camp, is not as if you were running away with her to marry her without any authority."

"*Certainly not,*" said Chasseron; "remember to impress that upon her mind: first, that it is according to her father's own disposition, that she gives you her hand; secondly, that the King's right to the guardianship of a noble ward, is paramount to that of your uncle, and quite supercedes it."

"And you think," asked De Montigni, "that I may be perfectly sure of Henry's conduct?"

"Perfectly," replied Chasseron.

"I will be answerable for that," said the commander in a grave and emphatic tone. "I will pledge my honour, which was never yet forfeit, that His Majesty shall bestow upon you the hand of Rose d'Albret, as soon as you reach his camp and all the circumstances are explained to him."

"Well, then," said De Montigni, "my course is clear, and my conduct decided. If the hopes that you have raised prove just, and that sweet girl consents, we will fly as has been proposed. If not, and I am disappointed, I will make the renunciation which is demanded of me, raise my own retainers, join the King, and, fighting for my lawful sovereign, will wed myself to honour as my only bride."

"I trust, sir," said the good farmer, "you may ere long be able to serve the Bearnois, as they call him, not only with your own retainers, but with those of Marennes and Liancourt too."

"God send it—God send it!" cried the commander; "and I will get into the saddle, too, if the devil were in my hip instead of a pistol ball. Come along, Estoc; you and I will go and lay out a plan for carrying off the lady, and I will let Louis know the result to-morrow by daybreak:—But mind you do your part well, my boy. No shyness—no diffidence—go right to the point at once. Tell her all about it, and let her judge for herself. Now, Monsieur de Chasseron, Estoc and I will see you to your room," and thus saying, they took leave of De Montigni, and retreated for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

We must now give a short space, a very short space indeed, to Rose d'Albret, who, after speaking a few moments with her uncle, the priest, and Chazeul, had retired to her own chamber in search of solitary meditation. There, however, she found her maid waiting for her, it having been her custom for some weeks, since Chazeul had taken up his residence at the chateau, to quit the rest of the party as soon after supper as possible.

"There, take off this stiff gown, Blanchette; give me a dressing gown, undo and comb my hair; and then you may go and gossip with Monsieur de Montigni's servants. They have just come from Italy, and will tell you, I don't doubt, how much prettier the girls of France are than those on the other side of the Alps. I will undress myself, when I feel sleepy."

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I don't want to gossip with them," said Blanchette; "if I talk with anybody, it shall be with Alphonso, Monsieur de Chazeul's head valet. He is a fine man, and a gay one, like his master. Ay, indeed, Monsieur de Chazeul is something like a man."

Rose d'Albret turned suddenly towards her, and fixed her eyes upon her face, asking, "How much has he given you, Blanchette?"

"Lord, Mademoiselle!" cried the girl, turning crimson.

"Yes, Blanchette, I wish to know," said Rose; "tell me exactly how much he has given you. These fine gentlemen think that a lady's heart can never be won rightly without bribing her maid; and therefore, just in proportion to the number of crowns you have received, I shall judge that Monsieur de Chazeul values my love. I am quite serious, so mind you reckon up exactly."

The girl evidently did not clearly see whether her mistress spoke ironically or not, but the tone of Rose d'Albret was so serious, that she inclined to the latter opinion, and answered hesitatingly, "Why of course, Mademoiselle, he has given me some little presents at different times, as all gentlemen do when they are in love."

"Little presents!" cried Rose in the same tone, "why then he values me little. But count up, count up, Blanchette, how much altogether."

"Why, may be, perhaps a hundred crowns in the whole, Mademoiselle," answered the maid.

"A hundred crowns!" cried Rose d'Albret, "I am worth more than that; and I'll tell you what, Blanchette, you are a great fool if ever you say a word in his favour again, unless he gives you treble as much. So you look to it, undo my hair, and make haste."

The girl obeyed the orders she received, and then, by her mistress's direction, left her. The moment she was gone, however, Rose shook her head sadly, and burst into tears, exclaiming, "Alas, that they should thus fill me with suspicion! I am bought and sold like the goods of a market. No one comes near me that is not bribed or corrupted by some means. I have nowhere to turn for advice, or sympathy, or consolation. What is the meaning of all this? Am I to believe that it is poor Rose d'Albret, he seeks? No, no, he would take other means to win love, if love were all he wanted. But I will know, I will see into the bottom of his heart before I give him my hand. Give him my hand! Oh God! to think that the day is coming so soon! But I will have some better insight; and if they use such art with me, surely I may be excused for practising some with them."

Rose d'Albret leaned her head upon her hand, and thought long and bitterly; but her mind was now pursuing another course; the image of De Montigni had risen up before her. Nor would it be banished, though she was afraid to look upon it steadily. "He is very little changed," she said to herself; "I can trace all the features of the boy in the man. He has lost his gay, light-hearted laugh, however—his cheerful look that spread light around him. He has grown grave and stern. Can he have suffered! Disappointed love, perhaps, has done its sad work upon his heart. Oh, that I could comfort him!"

She thought again, and other images seemed to present themselves; for after a moment's silent musing, she started up, crying "God forbid! God forbid! Ah! what would come of it, if it were so? Ruin, destruction, desolation to all perhaps! Would I had resisted firmly from the first! Yet I have promised nothing. I have been but passive in the hands of others. I have heard my fate announced, and made no answer. 'Tis a vain fancy after all. He hardly spoke to me, looked cold and askance—perhaps he is offended—no, not offended; grieved, mortified, disappointed, perhaps. Heaven! where are my fancies leading me? And yet I often thought when my eyes met his, that there was a look of tenderness, almost of pity, in his face, mournful yet affectionate. Would that I knew what is passing in his heart! Yet what would it avail?—I know not.—It might perhaps avail to save us both from misery—or plunge us into greater. 'Tis useless to think of such things; I will leave fate to take its course, and shape my own as opportunity occurs. But I may at least strive to gain some knowledge of this man's character and objects; and, if I do assume a spirit different from my own to fathom the depth of his, surely it may be forgiven when the cause is so powerful. I fear—I much fear that I am wedding cold deceit, and treachery, and wretchedness. I will sooner die first—sooner resign all I have, hide me in a convent, if needs must be, and spend my life in prayer. But I will read his heart first. Perhaps I do him wrong. His motives may be generous and noble for aught I know; and yet I cannot but doubt it. If they were so, why such shrewd steps to surround me by those who do nought but praise him! There is a want of truth and nature in it, that bring suspicion whether I will or not. De Montigni's very coldness has more of love in it —Poor De Montigni, what can have changed him so? I'll find some means of speaking to him, and, if I can, will give him consolation. He used to love me much when we were both young; and, if he have any deep grief at his heart, it will soothe and comfort him to hear words of sympathy from the lips of Rose d'Albret. I loved him, too, always; and I could love him still—if it were right."

But there she paused, and would not think how much she might love him. She was like a child who comes to the precipice's edge, peers over, and runs away in haste, lest he should see the full danger, and, with giddy brain, fall over.

"Hark," she continued, "there is Chazeul singing in the rooms below. I will put out the light, and hie to bed. He is like the night-raven that fancied himself a nightingale. But I can stop my ears; and, undressing hastily, she retired to bed: but sleep was far from her; and, for many an hour, she lay revolving plans of what she would say and do on the morrow. Still, thoughts she was afraid of, would intrude; still, before she was aware of it, her fancy was busy with De Montigni; still her repugnance to the union with Chazeul grew more and more strong, and it was not till half the night was spent, that at length she closed her eyes in sleep. She heard Blanchette come late into the anteroom where the maid's bed was placed; she heard her breathe hard soon after, in the dull sleep of selfish content; she heard sound after sound in the chateau, indicating that all were seeking repose; and at length, when every other noise was still, the deep bell of the clock

first striking one, then two. But the third hour did not find her senses waking.

It was daylight the next morning, though it was her habit to rise early, when her maid called her; and Rose at once perceived that there was a tale behind the meaning look on the girl's face. "Well, Blanchette," she said, "what is it? You have got something to tell. Speak it quickly, girl, I do not love to wait."

"Ah seigneur! mademoiselle," replied the maid, "I have heard such high words just now in the hall between the Count, and Monsieur de Chazeul, and Monsieur de Montigni."

The colour fled from the cheek of Rose d'Albret; but she strove hard to ask in a calm and indifferent tone, what the dispute was about.

"That I cannot tell, mademoiselle," replied the girl, who, like so many people in her station, only gathered sufficient information to alarm, but not enlighten; "All I know is, Monsieur de Liancourt looked very angry, and spoke very high, and the Marquis too; and Monsieur de Montigni replied coldly to my Lord, saying, 'I must hear that from her own lips, sir, with no one present to restrain her.' But when Monsieur de Chazeul said something I did not hear, the Baron turned upon him like a lion, and answered 'Silence, sir! or I shall forget you are my cousin. You have heard my answer. Be it as you like. I seek not the conference you seem so afraid to grant, but without it, I sign away no right that I possess;' and then the Marquis replied, with a scornful air, 'you are mistaken, sir; I fear no conference between a lady who loves me and a boy like you. There is no great rivalry to dread. So, to keep peace in the house, you shall have this interview, and that right soon;' and then he turned round and came towards the door, behind which I stood, and so I came away."

"Hark!" cried Rose d'Albret, "there is some one knocking at the ante-chamber door, see who is there! Say I am not dressed, but will be so soon."

"It is Monsieur de Chazeul, mademoiselle," exclaimed the girl, after going out and returning; "he bade me tell you that the weather has grown warmer, the frost gone, and the morning is fair and sun-shiny, if when you are dressed, you will join him on the ramparts, for he wishes to speak with you."

Rose laid her hand upon her brow, thought for a moment, and then exclaimed, "I will go. Quick, dress me, Blanchette. I will go."

Her toilet was concluded much sooner than usual; and in a short time, avoiding the great hall, she was gliding along with a palpitating heart and unsteady step, by a passage which led direct to the walls. Before she opened the door between the house and the rampart, however, Rose d'Albret paused and meditated for a moment, pressed her hand upon her side as if to stop the beating within, and then saying, "So—so shall it be," she went out.

Chazeul was walking away from her, towards the end; but he turned the next moment, and as soon as he saw her, hastened his pace to meet her. Rose advanced deliberately, but was not a little surprised, when, on coming near, Chazeul threw his arms round her and attempted to press his lips upon hers. She repelled him in a moment, with a look of indignant scorn, but the next instant she calmed the expression of her countenance, and said, "Nay, nay, Monsieur de Chazeul, you forget you are not my husband yet, and never may be. So take no liberties, I beg, or I go in this moment."

"And never may be!" cried Chazeul. Oh, that is settled beyond all power of recall, sweet Rose. I have your guardian's promise, signed and sealed, dear lady, so that either Rose d'Albret is my wife or a cloistered nun for life."

"Well, that is one alternative, at all events, Monsieur," she answered; "not a very pleasant one indeed, nor one that I am likely to adopt; but still, do not consider me as your wife, till I am so; and take no liberties, if you would have me stay with you."

"Nay, this is but what all lovers take and grant," replied Chazeul: "however, be it as you will for the present, sweet Rose."

"Lovers!" repeated Mademoiselle d'Albret, "pray put the matter on its right footing, Chazeul. It is better that we should understand each other clearly. This proposed alliance is what is called a *mariage de convenance*. I look upon it as such; and so do you at your heart. I am not one to love easily. Doubtless I shall love my husband, when he is so; but in the mean time, all that either of us looks to is, a certain change in our position for the better. I view the matter quite reasonably; and so do you, though you think it right to affect a little passion. Not that I am insensible to the advantage of having a handsome husband, of reputation and distinction; nor you to that of having a pretty and well dressed wife; but, as the principal question, there are higher points involved than mere inclination. Deal with me therefore candidly, Chazeul, and do not make the unnecessary attempt to deceive me with a show of passion that has nothing to do with the affair."

Had Rose d'Albret assumed a warmer tone, Chazeul might at once have suspected her; but her calm and reasoning manner was so consistent with his own notions, that he aided to deceive himself; and judging her cold, and incapable of any strong passion, felt more secure than ever of the success of his schemes. "Well, Rose," he said, "I do love you, whatever you may think; and so do you love me, I believe. But to speak of these higher matters that you talk of: our marriage is certainly, under every consideration, the best devised alliance of the times. You know that the estates of Chazeul are very large, but still not large enough to give me that power and influence which I might obtain. The estates of Marennes are nearly equal; and therefore by my marriage with you, according to your father's and your guardian's wishes, I well nigh double my station and importance. But there is something more, dear Rose, in favour of this marriage; my generous uncle settles on me the whole estates of Liancourt, which add vast weight to all the rest, so that no member of the Holy Union—ay, hardly Mayenne himself—will be able to compete with me in wealth and influence. Splendour and power are before us, Rose, such as princes might envy; and there is but one difficulty."

"Ha! What is that?" cried his fair companion, in an eager tone.

"Why, it is this," replied the Marquis, with some slight hesitation, "this boy, De Montigni, you know, has been sent for to sign the contract and the necessary papers. My uncle generously offers him, as his share of the inheritance, all the rich benefices at the disposal of the house of Liancourt. He may hold them, all but the bishopric, without entering the church; but if he chooses to take that profession—and he is fit for nothing else—the bishopric can be easily secured to him also, and then his portion will be even larger in revenue than mine. It is necessary, however, in order to avoid after-litigation, that he should sign a renunciation in regard to the estates; but this he refuses to do till—"

"Offer him something more," cried Rose d'Albret, willing to try him thoroughly; "give him the farm of Marcilly. You will scarcely miss it; and it will serve to make matters easy."

"It is a rich farm," answered Chazeul, shaking his head; "but that is not the question, Rose. He will not sign till he hears from your own lips, that it is your wish he should."

"I will speak to him," said the young lady. "I will speak to him directly."

"Nay, hear me first, sweet Rose," replied Chazeul. "Make your words short with him. Merely say, that this marriage having been decided and your hand promised to me, you are placed in a situation of great embarrassment by his conduct."

"I can say that with truth," answered Rose d'Albret; "but then," she added, "if I find he remains firm, may I not offer him Marcilly?"

"It is unnecessary," said Chazeul, with an impatient look; "for he has given his word, and will not break it, to sign the papers, if you but express a wish that he should."

"Oh, I cannot ask him," replied Rose d'Albret, "I cannot distinctly ask him, Monsieur de Chazeul."

"And pray why not?" demanded Chazeul, in some surprise.

"Oh, for many reasons, which I should think you would see at once," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret. "In the first place, it would be laying myself under an obligation which I may find it difficult to acquit. All I can do is to tell him truly what I feel, to tell him the embarrassment into which these events may cast me, and then to let him deliver me from them if he will."

"Ah! here comes father Walter," said Chazeul; but the announcement gave no pleasure to Rose d'Albret; for she felt that there would be more difficulty in concealing from his eyes what were the real feelings of her heart than from those of Chazeul, already blinded by his own self-confidence.

Happily for her, however, father Walter had fixed upon his own course; and trusting to the power which he had always possessed over her mind, he thought to bind her not by promises, but by principles, forgetting that when he himself favoured art and deceit, the slightest accident might discover the whole and free her from the bonds which he strove to impose upon her. As he approached, he beckoned Chazeul apart, saying, "I have a message for you, Monsieur de Chazeul. Good morning, my daughter, I would speak a word or two with you in a moment—now, Chazeul," he continued, when Rose had advanced a step or two, "what has been done?"

"She does not exactly promise," said Chazeul, "but she owns that his conduct places her in circumstances of great embarrassment, and says she will tell him so—but I am sure she will do what we wish. However, perhaps it might be better to wait till my mother comes, before we grant him this interview."

"I do not know," replied the priest thoughtfully; "if we do, it will be impossible to prevent De Montigni from having in the meantime some private conference with the good old commander, which he has not obtained as yet, for the old man is not yet up, and the young one is walking in the hall. But if they once meet to discuss this affair, the fact will come out, that Mademoiselle d'Albret was really destined by her father for your cousin. No one can tell what effect that may have upon her, and therefore it may be better to let their conference take place before he knows it. Once get his signature, and the matter is irrevocable. At present he is only vaguely aware that he has a claim to the estates. He makes some merit, indeed, with her, of his willingness, for her happiness to resign his right, but that will not at all counterbalance the impression we have produced on her mind that, in marrying you, she is fulfilling the wishes of her parents, and the engagements that they had made. We had every right, indeed, to produce such an impression; for the moment that De Montigni renounces the estates in your favour, you become the person pointed out in the contract."

"Pshaw! never mind whether it is right or wrong," replied Chazeul; "so that the end be gained. But I see what you mean; you are right, we must get the interview over, before he gains further information. Then, his word once given, he will not shrink from it. I am sure she will do it, though she says that she cannot distinctly ask him to consent, or lay herself under an obligation to him."

"That is all the better," replied the priest; had she promised too much, I might have doubted, from what I saw last night; but now go you to your uncle and make sure that there is no speech between De Montigni and the commander; and I will confirm her in her intentions, as I well know how. I will join you in ten minutes and then you can send De Montigni up here."

Thus saying they parted; and, with his usual slow and deliberate step, the priest advanced to the spot where Mademoiselle d'Albret was walking thoughtfully along the battlements.

"There is a question I wish to ask you, good father," said Rose, beginning the conversation herself, in order to guide it in the direction she thought best; "and I beg you would answer me frankly. My maid tells me that she overheard high words this morning between De Montigni and my guardian. What were they about?"

"Truly, daughter," replied the priest, well-pleased that she had brought forward the subject at once, "I cannot tell you exactly what took place, for I was not present. But I know that the conduct of Monsieur de Montigni is

giving the Count great pain, alienating his affection from him, and unless something is done to convince him how wrong he is, I fear we shall have scenes of quarrelling and confusion, the curse of long and tedious lawsuits, ay, and perhaps, even bloodshed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Rose, with unaffected horror. "Ah! that is very terrible. How can we stop it, good father?—What is the cause of all this?"

The priest was well satisfied to see the immediate effect his words produced. "No one can stop it my dear child," he replied, "unless it be yourself. I believe your entreaties would have more effect upon the mind of Monsieur de Montigni than those of any one; and if you fail, matters must take their course. But, at all events, if you exert yourself to restore peace, you will have the blessed satisfaction of having done your duty. The case is this, my child," he continued, before Rose could reply: "You are bound to give your hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, by all those obligations which must be most imperative upon a woman of good feeling and good principles. Your uncle is bound, also, by the tenor of his contract with your father, to secure to this your future husband the estates of Liancourt; for that purpose, and to avoid contentions and lawsuits, it is necessary that Monsieur de Montigni should make a renunciation of any claims, real or imaginary, to those estates. To take from him all cause for complaint, your guardian has most generously consented to give him revenues, to an equal amount, from other sources, and that immediately. But Monsieur de Montigni resists, talks high and loud, and the only thing that seems to have any effect upon him is the thought of distressing you, who were brought up with him as a sister."

Rose paused thoughtfully for a few moments, really moved and affected; and the priest, who watched each change of her countenance with keen and practised eyes, fully believed that he had gained the day. That supposition was confirmed, when she said in a low and agitated voice, "Send him to me, good father, send him to me!"

"I will, my dear daughter," answered the priest; "for I feel almost sure that you will be able to persuade him to a nobler and more generous line of conduct. I need use no exhortations to you, daughter, to exert your greatest influence to restore peace in this family; but let me say, that for such an object you may be well justified in overstepping, in some degree, the bounds which a timid and delicate woman generally prescribes to herself. For this high purpose you may well urge him more warmly and vehemently than you might otherwise think reasonable and proper, and may hold out to him the inducement of contributing to your happiness and peace, with a view to restore again tranquillity and comfort in a house where you have ever been treated as a daughter."

"Send him to me, good father," repeated Rose d'Albret "I know not what I shall say or do to effect the purpose desired; but in former days De Montigni was always generous *and self-denying*; and if I can restore peace *without any act of injustice*, no personal sacrifice on my part will seem too much for me to make."

She spoke sincerely, with all her previous thoughts and feelings thrown into confusion; and, with a pale cheek and trembling frame, she seated herself upon the parapet, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"I will send him this moment, my child," replied the priest, convinced even by her visible agitation, that he had produced the effect he had desired.

"Stay, stay a moment," said the fair girl in a faltering tone; "I am troubled, father, let me recover myself for a moment."

"As long as you will," replied the priest; "but the sooner such a painful scene is over, the better."

"Now," said Rose d'Albret, after a short pause, "now, good father; and let him be quick, for I fear my courage will fail."

"God's blessing go with your good work!" cried father Walter, and with a low inclination of the head he retired.

At a rapid pace he sought the great hall, where he found Monsieur de Liancourt seated at a table, and pretending to write a letter, though the agitated shaking of his hand prevented him from tracing more than one or two words in a minute. De Montigni was walking up and down on the other side, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon the ground; and Chazeul was standing, playing with the hilt of his sword, near the door which led to the ramparts.

"All is right and safe," said the priest in a low voice to the Marquis as he entered. "He has not seen the commander?"

"No, no," whispered Chazeul; "but the old man must be down soon. He is later than usual."

"The change of weather always affects his wounds," replied the priest; "but the sooner this is over the better.—Monsieur de Montigni," he continued, crossing the hall, "Mademoiselle d'Albret wishes to speak with you on the ramparts."

"Very well," replied de Montigni, advancing towards the door. But pausing in the midst of the hall, and drawing up his head proudly, he added, gazing first at Monsieur de Liancourt, then at Chazeul, "Remember, gentlemen, I am to have one hour unwatched, unlistened to, unrestrained—ay, and uninterrupted; and if, in that time, Mademoiselle d'Albret distinctly asks me to sign these papers, I will do it before noon to-morrow. That is our compact."

"So be it," answered the Count; and Chazeul bent his head with a sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER IX.

The heart of poor Rose d'Albret beat so fast as she sat upon the battlements, leaning her head and arm upon the stone work of one of the embrasures, that she feared she would faint before de Montigni appeared. She longed eagerly to think over all that had taken place that morning, over her own sensations, over her past, over her future conduct. But her ideas were all in wild confusion; and she

could not command her mind sufficiently to give them anything like order and precision. In a few minutes, however, she heard a step; and looking round towards the door which led across the drawbridge into the chateau, she saw de Montigni advancing towards her with a quick pace. She trembled to meet him, but yet as she gazed there was nothing stern or harsh or cold in his countenance. It was somewhat grave, perhaps; but still there was a light in his eyes, a look of hopefulness and satisfaction. It was more like that of the youth who had left her five years before, than it had appeared since his return; and, as he came near, he held out his hand towards her, saying, "Rose! —dear Rose!"

She could not resist the tone and the manner; yet starting up at once, she placed both her hands in his, while the warm blood of emotion mounted up into her cheeks and forehead, and made her whole face one glow. The next moment her eyes were drowned in tears; but De Montigni, without noticing them, drew her arm through his, and led her towards the further part of the rampart, while good old Estoc, with a heavy sword by his side, appeared upon the flying bridge, and leaned over the chains, looking into the space below.

"Dry your tears, dearest Rose," said De Montigni; "dry your tears, and calm your heart, and listen with your whole mind to one who has always loved you, as a boy, as a youth, as a man—one who is ready at your slightest word to make any or every sacrifice, but to procure you one moment's happiness."

"Oh, De Montigni!" exclaimed Rose d'Albret, "do not speak to me so tenderly, do not speak to me so kindly, or any little calmness, any little power over my mind that I may hope to possess, will be lost altogether."

"Nay, that must not be, Rose," replied De Montigni; "I have need of your full attention, dearest Rose, and I have not come here to agitate or afflict you. I have sought this interview that we may understand each other clearly and fully, or rather, that I may know and be quite sure that, in anything I do, I am really consulting your wishes and your happiness, and that you are not deceived, as I have been, in regard to the circumstances of your position."

"Alas, De Montigni!" answered his fair companion, "I fear no explanation can deliver me from the terrible embarrassment in which I am placed. Indeed, indeed, I know not which way to turn or what to do. I would give worlds, I would do anything, to restore peace to this family, but I have no right to ask you to make sacrifices, I have no right to injure or to distress you."

"Talk not of sacrifices, Rose," replied De Montigni in a mournful tone; "talk not of sacrifices to me. I am ready to make any, *all* for your dear sake. You have nothing to do but to command, and I will obey; but it is upon the sole condition that I know it to be for your happiness; and first, Rose, let me beseech you to tell me, how you conceive you stand regarding this marriage."

"I do not understand you," replied Mademoiselle d'Albret; "how do you mean, De Montigni?"

"We have but an hour, Rose, for all that we have to say," answered De Montigni, "therefore forgive me if I ask you plain and straightforward questions upon subjects into which I have, perhaps, no right to inquire; and answer me candidly and frankly—I know you will. First, dearest Rose, is it love, or what you consider duty, that binds you to Nicholas de Chazeul?"

"Duty, duty," replied Rose d'Albret eagerly; then placing her hand upon her brow, she thought for an instant, and added with a melancholy shake of the head, "Love? Ah, no! Alas, love has little to do with it, on either side!"

"Then almost all my questions are answered, Rose," replied De Montigni, taking her hand, and pressing it in his own.

"Nay, do not, do not, Louis," said his fair companion; "you agitate, you alarm me. I must do my duty, De Montigni; I have promised to endeavour to restore peace to this household. Remember, I must obey—I must fulfil the engagement entered into by my father."

"Then, Rose d'Albret," replied the young nobleman, "you are the bride of Louis de Montigni, and not of Nicholas de Chazeul: the bride of one who has loved you from infancy, not of a cold and heartless villain, who loves nothing but himself."

Rose d'Albret turned, withdrew her arm, and gazed upon him for a moment in pale and speechless astonishment. The next moment her lips too turned white, and she would have fallen had not her lover caught her in his arms.

Poor De Montigni knew little of woman's heart, and could ill distinguish between the effects of mere emotion and distress. He carried rather than led her to the side of the wall, and seating her in one of the embrasures, hastened to reassure her, as he thought. "Listen to me, Rose, listen to me, dearest girl," he said; "De Montigni is not about to take advantage of any circumstances of his situation. It is for you, as I said just now, to command, and for me to obey. I am ready at a word to renounce my inheritance, my rights, my hopes —yes, Rose, even yourself—if it be necessary for your happiness—I forgive you for having deceived me but now. If you now answer that you love this man, I am willing, ready to renounce all, even my newly awakened joy, that you may be at peace. I shall soon find repose on some field of battle."

"I have promised nothing," murmured Rose d'Albret to herself; "Thank God, I have promised nothing! I have acquiesced in what they told me was a duty—nothing more—Oh, no, no, thank God, I have done no more;" and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

After a moment, however, she dried them suddenly and looked up. "What was it you said, De Montigni!" she cried; "tell it me again! It seems like a dream. Tell it me again. Surely you said I was not doomed to wed Chazeul!"

Louis de Montigni gazed upon her with a look in which surprise, and joy, and thankfulness gradually rose up like the increasing flame upon an altar. "Oh, Rose," he said, "your words give me life. I did say you were not doomed to wed Chazeul. Your fate depends

upon your own decision, and upon my actions, which your decision will rule. Listen to me, dear one, and I will in a few short words explain all. We shall have much to speak of afterwards, so mark well every point. My uncle, the commander, will confirm all I say, if you doubt me."

"Doubt you, De Montigni! Doubt *you*?" asked Rose d'Albret, extending her hand to him. "I'd sooner doubt myself. But speak, Louis, speak. What have you to tell?"

"A brief tale, but a sad one," answered De Montigni. "In years long gone, your guardian, the Count, being then married to your aunt, and childless, the good old commander made a renunciation, on my father's marriage, of all his claims to the estates of Liancourt in my mother's favour. I became, therefore, the presumptive heir; and your good father entered into a contract with my uncle, the Count, by which, in case of his death, you were to become the ward of Monsieur de Liancourt, and to wed the nephew to whom his estates naturally descended. Since then, I find, the Count has been persuaded by some persons—my aunt Jacqueline de Chazeul, I believe, and I fear the priest also—to favour a scheme for substituting Chazeul in place of myself. The particulars of the contract have been kept secret from you and me. I have been sent afar till the whole plot was mature; you have been taught to consider yourself as the promised bride of another. My renunciation, however, was necessary, in order that, by rendering Chazeul the heir of the estates of Liancourt, it might give validity to your marriage with him, in the face of which stands my uncle's contract with your father so long as the estates are entailed upon me. For this purpose was I sent for from Italy, still kept in ignorance. But I had never forgotten Rose d'Albret. I shrunk from signing away my birthright without inquiry. Forgive me, Rose, forgive me, if I say I would have done anything to obstruct—ay, even to delay for a day or hour your marriage with another. Then came the priest to talk with me; and from him,—by a slip of the tongue, I believe—I learned my claim to the estates. In a private interview with my uncle, the commander, I learned my whole rights, and the contract signed by your father. The whole villanous scheme was in short exposed; and from others rather than my own presumption, I learned to hope—what shall I say?—that Rose d'Albret might as willingly unite her fate with the companion of her girlhood, as with a man whom she must, when his fraud is all discovered, in some degree condemn. Yet still, Rose, still, if your heart leads you towards him, speak but the word! De Montigni is yours: without you I am nothing—fortune, rank, hope, life itself, is an empty bubble. All shall be resigned at your first bidding; and to know I have made you happy by my own wretchedness, shall be the consolation of my remaining days, the one sole light of a dark existence, the friendly hand that closes my willing eyes in death. But if not—if you have been but constrained by a cold sense of duty—if you can find happiness with one who has always loved you—if you can give your heart *in return* for passion such as you deserve—oh, *Rose, oh, my beloved!*"

He held out his arms to her as he spoke; the wall shaded them from observation: he drew nearer, more near; and Rose d'Albret, with a cheek of crimson, and overflowing eyes, bent forward her head and sobbed upon his bosom.

"Thou art mine! thou art mine! Thou dearest and best beloved," cried De Montigni, clasping her to his heart. "But hark!" he exclaimed, "there is the clock striking ten. We have but half an hour, Rose, to settle all our plans. Thou art mine, however; and it shall be a strong hand that tears thee from me."

"But, oh, De Montigni," exclaimed Rose d'Albret, withdrawing herself from his arms and looking up with apprehension in her face, "How will all this end? There will be strife—there may be bloodshed!"

"Fear not, dear one," answered her lover "It is that which I would fain avoid; and if Rose d'Albret will deign for the sake of De Montigni, to overstep some cold proprieties, to trust herself entirely to one in whom she has acknowledged she can confide, to fly to the court of the King with her promised, her contracted husband, all difficulties, all dangers will be at an end; and in our sovereign's presence, with all the nobility of France to witness, we will pledge our vows at the altar, let who will gainsay it."

"To fly!—Oh, Louis," cried Rose d'Albret; but the next moment she bent down her eyes, placed her hand in his, and added in a low tone, "But I am yours. Do with me what you will. I know you would not wrong me."

"Not for the joy of heaven," answered De Montigni. "But it is the only way, dear Rose, to avoid evils innumerable, strife, contention, and a thousand black and terrible things hidden from us by the dark curtain of the future. You must fly with me, dear Rose. You must fly with me this very night."

"To-night!" said the young lady; "to-night, Louis!" but, after a moment's thought, she continued, "Yet it must be so, I believe. To-morrow might be too late; and perhaps, they may not let me speak with you again, Louis."

"If they discover the nature of our conversation most certainly they will not," replied De Montigni; "but that we must conceal from them. I am not one to teach you deceit, dear Rose. God forbid that you should lose that bright candour, which, to the mind, is what the hue of warm health is to the face. But these people have dealt wrongfully with you and me; to deliver you from their hands without long contention, there is but one way open; and we are not bound to reveal our plans and purposes, our views and feelings, to those who would misuse their knowledge."

"But if they ask me!" said Rose d'Albret; what can I do!—what can I say!"

"Say as little as possible, my beloved," answered De Montigni. "Enter into no particulars; merely tell them that you found me very resolute; but add, that my decision must rest with myself, after what you have said, and that you believe, upon due consideration of all the circumstances, I will do what is right. Be sure too, dear Rose, that you may safely say so; for I will do what is right to the utmost. Then if they try to investigate more closely, boldly refuse to answer. Say, that to tell them all the

words which passed between us would be to betray my confidence, and you will not do it. Let them not lead you on from one thing to another, but keep your reply to as simple a statement as possible."

"I will! I will!" replied Rose d'Albret; "I know the danger of suffering them to entangle me in explanations or discussion."

"And particularly beware of the priest," added her lover. "He is not honest, Rose, and has made himself their tool."

"I fear it is so," answered the young lady. "Even now he tried to deceive me, and partly succeeded."

"Let him not do so again, dear one," said De Montigni; "but there is another person of whom you must likewise have a care. I mean Madame de Chazeul. She will be here soon, and though, perhaps, I judged harshly of her while I was a boy, I find my good uncle, the commander, her own brother, is but little more merciful to her character."

"If she be coming, I will hide myself," answered Rose. "Oh, she is a horrible woman! I always avoid her; I always abhor her company. I remember well things she has said that froze my blood. She scoffs at the very thought of goodness and honour; and with her serpent-tongue would have one believe, that no one is virtuous but in appearance; and yet I have heard her as bitter against others for light faults, as if she had none herself."

"She is treacherous too, as well malevolent, I find," replied De Montigni; "therefore avoid her to-day as much as possible, dearest."

"I have a bad head-ache, Louis, with all this agitation," said Rose; "but I am glad of it; for it will give me a fair excuse for lying down again. Burdened with the secret now in my bosom, I would not spend a day with that woman for the world. She would try all means, to make me tell her everything that has passed, or force me to lie to conceal it."

"Perhaps your plan may be the best," rejoined De Montigni; "but remember, dear Rose, you will have to wake and rise an hour after midnight, to fly with him who loves you."

"But how, Louis! how!" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret. "Remember, in these times the gates are guarded."

"All that is settled and laid out," replied her lover. "Only be ready, dear one, to come with me at the hour I name. Bring little with you; leave jewels, and clothes, and all behind. All I seek, all I desire, is Rose herself; and though, perhaps, amidst these contentions, your guardian may keep us long from our rights in your inheritance, yet De Montigni has enough for himself and her he loves; and I do not think that Rose will murmur at the want of splendour and high estate, if her heart be satisfied with its choice."

Rose d'Albret gazed at him with a bright smile, for she could not but contrast with pleasure, his thoughts with those of Chazeul. "I will be ready, Louis," she said, "and I will own, a crust of bread, with one who feels as you do, will be better to me than splendour and feasting with another. But there is one difficulty, Louis," she added, suddenly, while the smile passed away, and a look of apprehension took its place. "What can I do with my maid Blanchette? I thought the girl was honest and true, but these people have corrupted her. Every one who approaches me seems to have been gained by some means; and, with those who have not been so gained, they have long suffered me to have no private conversation. Even with the good old commander himself, since he returned hither from Paris, about two months ago, they have not allowed me to speak for a moment without some one being present. But Blanchette, what is to be done about Blanchette? She owned this morning that she had received bribes from Chazeul to a considerable extent."

De Montigni mused. "We must find some remedy, dear Rose," he replied at length: "a person who has received one bribe will generally not refuse another, and I must try to outbid Chazeul. But why should she have any part in the affair? Why should she know it at all?"

"She sleeps in my ante-room," answered Rose d'Albret. "I cannot pass out without her hearing me."

"There is the window, dearest Rose," said her lover; "It is but a few feet above the wall; and we must try that, if other resources fail. At all events be at the window at one. I will come to speak to you there, and tell you what is arranged. You must be quite ready, however, dearest Rose; for our safety may depend upon a moment."

"My heart sinks when I think of it," replied Rose d'Albret. "But yet, Louis—but yet, Louis," she answered, "I will not hesitate; for it is the only way to escape from a fate, of which I now feel, for the first time, all the wretchedness:—but how shall I know when you are beneath the window?"

"I will reach up and knock with the point of my sword," answered De Montigni, "and then we must speak low, lest any one should hear. —Hark! there are voices; the time, I suppose, is at an end. Adieu! dearest Rose, adieu! Be ready—pray be ready; for I feel sure that happiness will attend us. Nevertheless, let us now have grave and serious countenances; for we must not let them see, that there are any warmer feelings in our hearts."

"I shall not find it difficult to look grave, Louis," replied the lady; "for it is a hard necessity that drives me to do that which I do. —But, hark! they are surely quarrelling there!"

"'Tis Estoc will not suffer Chazeul to pass, I dare say," answered De Montigni.

"Go, Louis, go," cried Mademoiselle d'Albret; "for heaven's sake, do not let them dispute.—Adieu! adieu!"

They were at this moment on a part of the walls which, running round from the drawbridge we have mentioned, passed under a defence which was called *the cavalier*, and was concealed by it from the windows of the building, as well as from the bridge and the rest of the rampart. De Montigni felt strongly inclined to press his fair companion to his heart before he left her; but he wisely refrained, and looking up to the top of *the cavalier*, he had cause to be satisfied with his own self command; for just above the parapet, he caught sight of part of a man's head, evidently watching them.

Taking Rose's hand, then, he bent his head over it, whispering, "We are watched, Rose;"

adding aloud, "Farewell, then, Mademoiselle d'Albret, I will consider all you have said," he took a step back, bowed low, and retired along the wall.

When he came within sight of the bridge, he found that, as he had supposed, the good old soldier had thrust himself right in the way of Chazeul, and holding his sheathed sword in his left hand, seemed ready to draw it if the other attempted to pass him. Chazeul was in the act of turning to speak to some person behind; and De Montigni heard him exclaim aloud, "Call Monsieur de Liancourt!"

The moment, however, that Estoc caught sight of the young Baron advancing rapidly along the wall, he dropped the sword back into its place, and suffered Chazeul to come forward. The cheek and brow of the latter were fiery red, and his eye flashing with anger, as he exclaimed,

"This is very modest and proper indeed, Monsieur de Montigni! Do you forget that you are in your uncle's chateau, that you thus set a guard upon his walls to prevent his family from passing?"

"To ensure, sir, that they keep their word with me," said De Montigni. "I am quite well aware that I have but little more right than yourself to command in this place; however, do not let us quarrel, Chazeul," he added with a serious air; "we have things of more serious consequence to think of—at least I have."

"I dare say you have," replied Chazeul with a triumphant smile, judging from his cousin's countenance that all things had gone according to his own wishes. "Well, what is the result of your conference?"

"Of that hereafter," answered De Montigni, passing on. "Nay, no words at present, good Estoc," he continued, seeing the old soldier eyeing Chazeul with an angry glance, "let the past be forgotten, if you would not grieve me."

"But one warning first to this young gentleman," said Estoc; "Do not use such words again to a French gentleman, Monsieur de Chazeul; for I give you fair notice, that, if I be the one on whom you spend them, I will send my sword through your body, as I have done to many a better man than yourself before now."

"You might not find me quite tranquil under such an honour," Master Estoc, replied Chazeul; "but I will take care that you shall be chastised for your insolence, by those whom it may better become to meddle with you:" and thus saying, he followed De Montigni over the bridge and through the passage into the hall.

To say the truth, the heart of Louis de Montigni was not quite at ease; for, how long he had been watched from *the cavalier*, and how much of what he had said had been overheard, he could not tell. The small part of the man's head which he had observed, did not enable him to judge who it was that had been playing the eaves-dropper; and he more feared the priest than any one else. But when he entered the hall he found father Walter there, and his uncle absent; and, the moment after, Monsieur de Liancourt himself appeared with an air of so much satisfaction, that De Montigni's apprehensions of discovery were at an end.

"Well, Louis," said the count, "I trust you *are satisfied*, and that you have made up your mind to yield all this idle resistance, and sign the papers at last with a good grace."

"I have promised my reply before noon to-morrow," replied De Montigni with a frown upon his brow; for he was not well pleased with the pitiful art which had been used towards him. "Before I sign anything, however, I must read the papers, and consider them well; it is but fair to know, what I am asked to do."

"You are mightily long and deliberate, Monsieur de Montigni," said Chazeul; "I understood that you were to make up your mind by what Mademoiselle d'Albret thought fit to say. Now I will take it upon myself to affirm, that she did ask you to sign them."

"You are wrong, Monsieur de Chazeul," replied his cousin, turning upon him sternly, "she did not."

"You are too frank and noble, my son, I am sure," observed father Walter, "to have recourse to an evasion; and we have every reason to suppose that, if the young lady did not actually ask you to put your hand to these documents, she did what was tantamount, and expressed some wish that it should be so."

"I have every reason to think so too," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "nay, indeed, I am sure of it. Come, Louis, be frank, and tell us what she did say upon the subject."

De Montigni mused for a moment, and then replied, "Our conversation was long, sir, and I have neither will nor power to repeat it all; but the only words which she used that could at all bear the interpretation you would give to them were, as far as I can remember them, these: That she would give worlds, she would do anything to restore peace to the family, but that she had no right to ask me to make sacrifices, or to injure or to distress me."

"I think nothing could be more plain," said father Walter; "surely, my son, you cannot pretend to misunderstand her meaning?"

"I do not pretend to misunderstand her at all, good father," answered the young nobleman; "and I am in no degree disposed to cavil or to evade. I will not be hurried, however, in any of my proceedings. By what Mademoiselle d'Albret judges best for her own happiness I will be guided; and, as I said before, ere noon to-morrow I shall be prepared to act decidedly. In the meantime I require to see these papers; and as, perhaps, it may be needful that I should have some one with me to explain to me, while reading them, anything I do not understand, I should wish uncle Michael, or father Walter here, or both, to be present with me while I look over them."

"Oh, father Walter by all means!" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "you know my brother Michael, though as good a soldier as ever lived, is nothing but a soldier. He does not understand these things at all."

"And I but little," rejoined the priest. "However, if Monsieur de Montigni is content that I should be his fellow-student, I am most willing to give him any explanation in my power."

"Madame de Chazeul is just coming into the court-yard, my lord," said a servant, hurrying up the hall, and addressing Monsieur de Liancourt.

"I must go down to receive her," exclaimed

the Count. "Then it is understood, De Montigni, that you will read the papers with father Walter! Fix the hour yourself, and you shall have them."

Thus saying he hastened away; and, after a few minutes' more conversation with the priest, De Montigni went in search of his uncle, the commander, whom he found walking up and down the corridor. Father Walter remained for an instant talking to Chazeul, but the old commander had scarcely time to say to his nephew, "Well, boy, well, is all settled!" and De Montigni to answer, "To my heart's content, my dear uncle," when the step of Chazeul was heard approaching.

"Devil fly away with the fellow," said the old soldier: "when I found that you were with our dear little Rose, I got out of his way, for fear I should betray myself; and now here he comes again. Keep it close, Louis, keep it close! No stratagem ever succeeded but with a shut mouth.—Ah, Chazeul! are not you going to see your mother! She is in the court they tell me."

"She will be here directly, sir," replied Chazeul, "then I shall see her;" and, attaching himself to their party, he remained for the evident purpose of preventing any private communication between them.

CHAPTER X.

Those who have visited France in the present day, who have travelled over that rich and fertile land from end to end, who have journeyed through its least frequented districts, and examined into the nooks and corners which are but little exposed to the eye of the ordinary traveller, have yet, in general, but a very faint idea of the scene it presented at the period of which we write. Yet were they to bring history to aid their researches, from time to time, they would discover such fragments of a former day as might enable them to call up before their eyes a true picture of France during the wars of the League, as a Buckland or a Sedgwick, from the teeth and bones of long extinct animals, and from the leaves of trees that have decayed for thousands of years, are enabled to raise up from the waves of time an image of a by-gone world, and people it with monstrous things, such as the eye of man probably never beheld in actual existence.

The whole country towards the end of the sixteenth century, torn with factions, desolated by rapine, stained with bloodshed, knew nought of commerce, manufactures, or arts, and even agriculture itself, on which the daily support of the people depended, was accompanied with terror and danger. Thus hamlets and villages, through wide districts of the most fertile parts of France, were swept away or left vacant; the houses of the farmer and the labourer had grown few, and were sometimes defended with trenches and palisades against any of the smaller bands that roved the country; the greater part of the population was gathered into fortified cities; and the rest of the kingdom was dotted with chateaux and maisons fortes, generally at a considerable distance from each other, often in the hands of opposite factions, and always prepared for stern resistance against the attack of an enemy.

In the part of the country of which we have been writing, these castles of the old feudal nobility were somewhat numerous; and we must now beg leave to remove the reader for a time from the Chateau de Marzay to that of Chazeul, which lay, as he has been already informed, at no great distance. We must also go back to an early hour in the morning of that day of which we have just been speaking, in order that those who peruse these pages may be made acquainted with some events which weave themselves into the web of the history as we proceed with our task.

It was at an early hour, then—perhaps a little before six o'clock; and, though there was a certain degree of grey mingling with the blackness over head, yet the light of a wintry morning had not sufficiently dawned to enable any one to see within the various rooms of the chateau. It was at this period that, in a small chamber, plainly furnished, and somewhat high up in one of the many towers of which the building consisted, there sat a very lovely girl, reading, by the light of a small lamp, a number of old letters, which seemed to cause deep and painful emotions in her heart; for the tears streamed rapidly down her cheeks, and almost drowned her sight, as she continued that which seemed a sad and sorrowful task.

The eyes from which those drops poured so rapidly were large and black as jet, but soft and yet lustrous, even when swimming in the dew of grief. Her hair, too, and her fine eyebrows, were of the same inky hue, but her skin was beautifully fair and clear, with a faint tinge of the rose in the soft cheek. In years she might be somewhere between eighteen and twenty, delicate in form, yet with limbs so well proportioned, and lines so exquisitely drawn by the pencil of the Great Artist, that every movement displayed some new grace, whether when leaning her head on her hand, she bent down over the page, or raised her look suddenly to heaven, as if appealing on high for comfort or for justice.

Her back, as she sat, was turned towards the door, and her whole soul was evidently busy with the task before her—too busy as it proved; for she heard no step upon the stairs; she heard no hand upon the lock; she heard no movement in the room. She fancied that all in the house but her own sad self, were sleeping soundly till the break of day. But it was not so; for as she bent over the pages, the door behind her opened quietly, and an elderly woman, dressed in the extreme fashion of the day, though in a travelling costume, looked in, and then paused suddenly on seeing the light and the figure I have described. Her features were aquiline and strongly marked, her eyes keen and sunk, her figure tall and upright, but upon the faded cheek, even at that early hour, might be seen a glow of red, which it needed no very practised eye to discover was laid on by another hand than that of nature; and her eyebrows also betrayed a debt to art.

She paused as I have said for a moment at the door, then advanced with noiseless step, the perfect silence of which was produced by the slipoers of fur which she wore to defend her feet.

in travelling from the cold; and approaching the fair reader from behind, she stretched forth her long, and somewhat meagre neck, and peered over her shoulder at the papers on the table.

The next instant, she laid her large thin hand upon them with a firm and heavy pressure; and the poor girl starting up; with a short scream, stood before her, with face and lips as white as those of death, eyes gazing with astonishment and fear, and limbs as motionless as if she had been turned into stone.

"What is this, Helen de la Tremblade!" said the Marchioness de Chazeul, in a sharp and ringing tone; "What is this, girl? Answer me this moment."

"Oh, madam, pardon me! pardon me!" cried the poor girl, falling at her feet.

"Pardon you?" said the lady, with a bitter look; "I will first see what I have to pardon;" and she began to gather up the letters.

"Oh no! no! no!" exclaimed the other, starting on her feet again, and endeavouring to snatch them away. "You must—no you must not! Do with me what you will; but do not read those. They are mine, madam—they are mine alone!"

But the Marchioness thrust her rudely back, till she reeled to the other side of the room, at the same time crying, "How now, jade! Yours? I will read every word. Sit down upon that stool, and move a step if you dare,—But I will secure you!" and first gathering up the letters, she turned to the door, locked it, and walking back to the table laid the key upon it, while she drew a seat facing the poor culprit, and repeated, "Sit down, this instant!"

The unhappy girl obeyed, and covered her face, now crimson, with her trembling hands; and Madame de Chazeul drawing the lamp nearer to her, began to read the letter which lay at the top, commenting, as she proceeded in a low hoarse voice, like the croak of a raven towards the approach of day. "Ha!" she said, as she went on, "Chazeul's hand! Good! I might have divined this. 'Eternal love and passion!' —Fool! There's nothing eternal but folly."

Farther on, however, she seemed to find matter which occupied her more deeply; for her muttered words ceased, her brow put on a still heavier frown, and her small black eyes flashed with double fierceness. "How! how?" she cried, after nearly finishing the letter; "and is it so! What need I more? This is enough in conscience—Oh, base girl! But I will see more—I will see more!" and she turned to another page.

When she had read some way farther, she laid the letter down again upon the table, and gazed at it sternly for several moments, with thoughts evidently busy afar; and then turning to the poor girl, who sat with her face still covered with her hands, she said, "Come hither!"

The girl obeyed with slow, trembling, and uncertain steps, not daring to raise her eyes. When she was near, however, she once more sank upon her knees before the harsh and heartless woman in whose power she was, and lifted her hands as if in the act of supplication; but for several moments her lips refused their office, and no sound of voice was heard. At length when she did speak it was only to say, "*Forgive me, oh forgive me!*"

"Perhaps I will," replied the Marchioness, in a somewhat softer tone, though at the same time there was a lurking sneer at the corner of her mouth that showed no very merciful sensations, "perhaps I will, if you instantly make a full confession. Tell me how all this happened, without disguise; and perhaps your shame may be yet concealed. Speak, girl, speak."

"Oh, what can I say?" cried the unhappy girl, "you know all now; you see the words he used, the promises he made; you know that I was left entirely to his guidance. Often when you were away, he has been here for weeks together; when you were here, he was always suffered to be with me. Long I resisted—for two years; ever since my uncle placed me with you, has he tempted, and urged, and vowed, and I refused. But I was like a besieged city without assistance or support, and was driven to yield at length, when perhaps deliverance was at hand."

"Without assistance and support, base girl!" cried Madame de Chazeul, "why did you not tell me? and you should have soon had aid."

"Oh, lady!" replied Helen de la Tremblade, "I did tell you at first, when his words were not so clear; and you scoffed and jeered at me till I dared not say more; and, after that, I learned to love him. Then, for his sake, I dared not speak."

"So it was my fault, was it?" said the Marchioness with a look of haughty contempt. "Thus is it ever; when a fool commits a folly, it is ever because somebody else did not counsel or help him. Was I the guardian of your virtue, girl?"

"You should have been," replied Helen de la Tremblade, a momentary spark of indignation rising in her breast as the worm was trampled on, "you should have been, against your own son."

"Ha!" cried the Marchioness with a flashing eye; but then, restraining herself, she demanded, "Who brought these letters? Who was the panderer to your guilt?"

"Nay, do not ask me that," said her unhappy companion; "be angry with me, if you will; ask what you please about myself; but do not, do not vent your wrath on others."

"Will you say?" cried the Marchioness, in a furious tone. "This moment, will you say?"

"No, no!" answered Helen in a deprecatory tone, "I cannot, I will not. He knew not what he brought."

"You will not!" repeated the Marchioness sternly, "you will not! Girl, you shall! Are you not in my power?"

"You have no power to make me injure another," replied Helen mournfully; "I have injured myself enough; your son has corrupted, destroyed, betrayed me. With all these vows and promises written with his own hand, he is now about to wed another, whom he has no right to wed. Surely this is enough of misery; and I will not make my heart so sad as it would be, were I to add the ruin of another to my own."

"Vows! promises! no right to wed her, base girl! I will soon show you what are such promises!" and, snatching up the whole packet of letters, she held them open to the flame of the lamp.

Contrary, perhaps, to the expectation of Madame de Chazeul, Helen de la Tremblade made not the slightest effort to stop her in the act. Whether it was that she felt her strength was not equal to contend with the tall and masculine woman, who was thus taking from her the only proof of those promises by which she had been betrayed, or whether it was the apathy of utter despair that restrained her, I cannot tell; but there she stood, motionless though not unmoved, with her eyes now tearless though full of sorrow, with her lip quivering but without a sound. Oh, who can tell the dark and terrible feelings of the poor girl's heart at that moment when, to all the bitterness of sin, and shame, and sorrow, and betrayed love, and disappointed hope and blighted affection, she saw destroyed before her face every evidence of the arts that had been used to deceive her, all that could palliate, if not justify, her conduct?

The flame caught the letters in an instant; and with a resolute hand the Marchioness held the papers till the fire nearly scorched her, then cast the fragments on the tiled floor, and, as they were consumed, turned with a bitter and a mocking laugh to the poor outcast, exclaiming, "Now talk of vows and promises!"

"They are written in heaven, if not on earth," replied Helen de la Tremblade, gazing at her with a degree of firmness that but enraged her the more.

"Heaven!" she exclaimed in a contemptuous tone, "heaven! do you dare to talk of heaven? Fool, if that is your resource, I will make you rue your conduct, at least on earth!" Then advancing to the door, she unlocked it, returned, and, grasping the poor girl by the arm, dragged her after her, down the stairs and through the long corridors of the chateau, to the outer hall.

Now came the bitterest moment of the whole for the unhappy victim. The hall was filled with attendants prepared for a journey. There were servants and armed men, the two maids of Madame de Chazeul, and a gay page jesting with one of them. All eyes were fixed upon her as, dragged on by the Marchioness, she was brought into the midst of them; and oh, how thankful she would have been if the earth would but have opened and swallowed her alive!

"Undo the door!" cried Madame de Chazeul. "There, throw it wide! Now, strumpet, get thee forth, and carry your shame to any place where it may be marketable!"

"Oh God!" cried Helen de la Tremblade, clasping her hands in agony, "can it be possible? Have you—have you no pity? At least let me take that which belongs to me."

"Forth, wretch, forth!" cried the Marchioness, stamping her foot. "Drive her out, drive her out, I say!"

No one stirred to obey the cruel order; but Helen turned and waved her hand, roused into some firmness by the cruel treatment she met with. "That shall not be needed, Madam," she said. "I go; and when you stand at the awful judgment-seat of God, with all your sins upon your head; when all that you have done through life comes up before you as a picture, may you find a more merciful judge than you have proved to me."

"Away with you, away with you!" cried the Marchioness, adding the coarsest term of reprobation that in the French language can be applied to woman. "It is ever thus with such wretches as you: when detected in sin, they begin to cant. Away with you, I say; let us hear no more of it!"

Helen turned, and walked slowly towards the door; but the page ran after her, exclaiming, "Here is your veil, Mademoiselle; you left it below last night."

Helen took it; but before she could thank him, the Marchioness strode forward, and dealt him a box on the ear that cast him upon the ground, exclaiming, "Who taught thee to meddle, malapert?"

"Ah, poor boy!" cried Helen; and, with the tears in her eyes, she quitted the inhospitable doors, within which virtue and happiness had been sacrificed for ever.

For some way she walked along utterly unconscious where she went. We must not say she thought either of her situation at the time, of the past, or of the future; for there was nothing like thought in her mind. It was all despair; she asked not herself where she should go, what should be her conduct, what place of refuge she should find, how she should obtain even necessary food. The predominant sensation, if any were predominant, was a wish to die; and any road which led her from that hateful mansion was to her the same.

This troubled state continued for some minutes, till a small wood concealed her from the castle; but still she walked on, or rather ran; for her steps, under the impetuous course of her own feelings, grew quicker each moment as she went. At length she heard the sound of horses' feet and the grating roll of carriage-wheels, and a vague remembrance of having seen the heavy coach of Madame de Chazeul standing prepared before the gates, made her believe that she was pursued by that terrible woman, and, a sudden feeling of terror taking possession of her, she darted in amongst the trees, and crouched behind some brushwood.

There she could hear the whole train pass by; and as they wound on down the hill, she saw the well-known colours and figures sweep slowly on till, as they were beginning to rise on the opposite slope, they came to a sudden halt, and a consultation seemed to take place. In a few minutes two horsemen detached themselves from the rest, and passed the wood in a gallop towards the chateau; but poor Helen remained in her place of concealment; and, as she did so, the tumultuous agitation of her heart and brain grew somewhat calmer, and a long and bitter flood of tears brought thought along with it. But, oh how terrible was reflection! how did she bemoan her own fatal folly! how desolate seemed her heart! how hopeless—how utterly hopeless—seemed her situation!

Where could she hide her head? she asked herself—where cover her shame?—where conceal herself from the eyes of all men?—who would help?—who would assist her?—who would speak one word of comfort, of consolation, of sympathy? None, none. From the sympathy of the virtuous and the good she had cut herself off for ever! Was she to associate with the abandoned and profligate?—was evil to become her good?—was moral death to bring her mere mortal life? Ah, no! she would soon-

er die, she thought, a thousand-fold sooner die; and she abhorred herself for her weakness past, more than many who think themselves virtuous, would abhor themselves for actual crime.

"Why should I stay here?" she asked herself at length. "I am an outcast—a beggar; my father and mother in the grave; my uncle's face I dare not see; I have no one to seek—I have no road to choose; the wide world is before me; I must trust myself to fate;" and rising up, with the feeling of desolate despair taking possession of her once more, she followed the path before her, then turned into another, then wandered along a third, and thus went on for nearly an hour and a half, with several of the country people who passed, turning round to gaze in surprise at so fair and delicate a creature straying abroad, with a vacant air and tear-stained countenance, at so early an hour of the morning.

At length she felt weary; and, with listless indifference to all that might befal her, she seated herself on a stone, at the foot of a wooden cross, which had been erected by some pious hand beneath a high tree-covered bank, down which the snow, now melting under the first warmth of spring, was slipping from time to time in large masses, or sending forth a thousand small streams, which rendered the road almost like the bed of a river.

Poor Helen heeded it not, however; she took no notice of the cold and the wet. The bodily discomforts that she suffered had but little effect upon her; and, if she perceived them at all, they came but as things which recalled to her mind more forcibly the hopeless desolation of her situation. Thus, after a few minutes' rest and thought, she once more bent down her beautiful head upon her two fair hands, and wept long and bitterly.

While she was thus sadly occupied, the sound of a horse's feet striking the plashy ground at a quick pace came down the lane. She gave it no attention, and the horseman dashed past her, apparently without noticing her. It was not so, however; and about a hundred yards farther on he pulled in his rein, and turned back again. In another minute he was by her side; and she heard a kind and good-humoured voice exclaim, "What is the matter, young lady? has any one injured you?"

Helen de la Tremblade looked up, and beheld in the person who addressed her a man of a frank and open countenance. He was dressed in a brown suit of a plain rough cloth, and seemed to be a substantial countryman of about forty years of age, though his beard and mustache was somewhat gray. There was a look of pleasant and intelligent interest on his face, which might have brought back some hope to her cold heart, for it spoke of sympathy; but she replied in a sad and bitter tone, "Alas, I have injured myself," bursting into a fresh gush of tears as the words of self-reproach passed her lips.

The man gazed at her for a moment in silence, seemingly puzzled by the contrast between her dress and her apparent situation. At length he exclaimed, "Parbleu! you cannot stay here, my poor girl. You seem a young thing, and well nurtured; what can have brought you into this *state?*"

"My own fault, as well as the cruelty of others," answered Helen de la Tremblade.

"Well, we all have faults," replied the man, "God forgive us for them! and as for the cruelty of others, we are none of us good enough to afford to be severe, especially when errors are freely acknowledged. But tell me, can I do anything to help you? I have little time, to be sure, but I cannot find in my heart to see a fair young thing like you left to perish by the roadside."

"Oh!" cried Helen starting up; "if you would but give me shelter for a single night, till I can think, till I can give my mind some order, you might save me from destruction. Doubtless," she added, seeing him pause as if in hesitation, "doubtless you have a home not far off; doubtless you have wife and children,—daughters perhaps; and should you hear my prayer, be sure God will bless and protect them, if ever they fall into misery like me. I am not intentionally wicked, indeed; weak I may be: nay, weak I am, but not vicious; no, not vicious, whatever you may think."

"Pardie, few of the fine dames of France can say that!" exclaimed the horseman. "But the truth is, my poor young lady, my home is not very near. But I would fain help you if I could. Where are your father and mother? Better go home to them, and if you have offended them, try to soften them with tears. They must have hard hearts if they resist."

"They are in the grave," answered the unhappy girl.

"And what is your name, poor thing?" inquired her companion.

She paused and hesitated; but the next moment she said, "Why should I conceal the truth? my name is Helen de la Tremblade."

"What!" exclaimed the farmer, "the niece of the good priest at the Château de Marzay?"

"The same," answered Helen with a mournful shake of the head.

"Then you have been residing with the old Marchioness de Chazeul," rejoined the other, adding, "at least the servants told me so."

"Till this morning," replied Helen with a sigh; "but I am now a houseless outcast."

The horseman dismounted from his beast, and took her kindly by the hand; "Alas, poor child," he said, "you have been, I fear, under a hard ruler. I know something of this woman; if not personally, at least by hearsay; and I can easily believe that she has been harsh and unkind."

"But I was first in fault," answered Helen, interrupting him frankly, "I deserved reproach, perhaps punishment, but oh, not so terrible as this."

"Why, what was the cause?" asked the farmer. "Nay, then," he proceeded, "as your cheek glows, I will ask no further questions. I seek not to distress you, young lady, but to serve you; and if I can, I will place you in security. You cannot—you must not remain here. Heaven only knows what might happen to you. But how I am to get you hence I cannot tell. I have not time to go back with you to Marzay, and—"

"Not for existence," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "no, not for all that earth can give, would I set my foot within those walls."

"Ay, I forgot," rejoined the farmer, "she must be there by this time."

"Oh not for that—not for that alone," exclaimed the poor girl with a shudder, "you do not know—you cannot tell all."

"Well," replied her companion, "perhaps you may think differently by and by. But in the mean time, how am I to get you hence? I am going to the village of St. André, some eight leagues distance, and have no conveyance but the horse I ride. "Stay," he continued, "I will go on a short way, and see if I can find a cottage or farm-house where we can hire horse or cart."

"Oh do not leave me," cried Helen, "you are the first who has spoken kindly to me; and perhaps—perhaps if you go you may not return."

"I will, upon my honour," replied the farmer; and setting spurs to his horse, he was away over the opposite hill in a few moments.

The time went heavily by with Helen de la Tremblade. She asked herself, "Will not he too deceive me!" and when nearly twenty minutes passed without her companion's return, her heart sank, and her eyes once more filled with tears. It had seemed, while he was near her, that she was not totally abandoned, that she had still some human being to hold communion with, that she was not, as she had at first believed, shut out from all sympathies. She knew not who he was, it is true; she had no information of his name, his station, or his character; but he had spoken kindly to her, he had shown feeling, humanity, compassion; and perhaps it was that which had made her fancy she had seen in his countenance all the higher and nobler qualities of the mind and the heart. She longed for his return then; and in counting the weary minutes and listening for every sound, she in some degree forgot the oppressive weight of the past and future. At length, tired with expectation, she rose and walked along the road to see if he were coming; and, as so often happens, no sooner had she given way to her impatience, than she saw his figure rising over the hill.

"I have got a man and horse with a pillion," he said, riding up to her, "I cannot promise you, Mademoiselle de la Tremblade, any long or sure protection, but I will engage to put you in a place of safety for a night or two. During that time you will have the opportunity of thinking over your future conduct. I am not a rich man, but, on the contrary, a very poor one; yet you shall share what little I have in my purse, as I must leave you to your own guidance towards nightfall; and if you like to confide in me fully, when we stop three hours hence, you will find that you have not misplaced your trust. Think of it as we go; for I cannot speak with you of such things, while your good squire is with you. Mayhap you might find worse people in whom to place your confidence than Michael Chasseron."

Helen did not reply; for while he was yet speaking, an old peasant with the horse which had been promised came in sight; but she mounted gladly, and rode on beside the companion, whom she had known barely an hour, with a heart relieved, though not at rest. As they went, too, he spoke to her of many things, in plain and homely terms, but with wide and various information, and with a winning kindness and consideration for her sorrows, which made her feel that all the world were not harsh and bitter as those she had just left. She herself said little, but she found herself constrained in gratitude to answer such questions as he thought fit to ask; and, although he inquired nothing directly regarding her situation, and she believed she told him nothing, yet in fact, long before they reached their halting place he had learned nearly all that he desired to know, not by her words, but by his own conclusions.

CHAPTER XI.

The moment Helen de la Tremblade had quitted the château, Madame de Chazeul entered the carriage which stood prepared for her in the court, and accompanied by what she considered a sufficient guard, set out upon her way towards the dwelling of her brother. Her thoughts, however, were not of the pleasantest kind. At first, they were all in confusion; but, through the turbid mass of her angry sensations, there came an impression, a consciousness, that she had too much given way to the violence of a disposition, originally irritable and passionate, which all her cunning and art had not been able to bring effectually under controul. This perception grew stronger and more distinct as she became cooler; but, for a time, she attempted to justify to herself what she had done, on the score of policy. "If Rose d'Albret were to hear of this," she said, "we should have new difficulties, and all my well-laid schemes would be frustrated; so that it was necessary to get the girl out of the château as quickly as possible. She will never venture to go to her uncle's, surely! Oh no, she was ever timid and frightened; she will hide away in some corner till she finds a new lover."

This reasoning did not satisfy her, however. She saw there was danger in the course she had pursued. She asked herself, what was she to say to Walter de la Tremblade when he inquired after his niece, whom she had taken some two years before, as what was then called, Demoiselle de compagnie? Was she to tell him what had occurred? Was she to relate her own conduct? Was she even to acknowledge that her son had seduced the unhappy girl under her own roof, with opportunities afforded by her own negligence, and not the best example, by her own conduct? If such things came to his ears, what course would he pursue? Might he not blast all her projects; destroy, even by a word, all the glorious fabric which she had been building up for her son's ambition! He was not one who could be cajoled and cheated; he was not one who could be overruled or thwarted. Art to art, and cunning to cunning, he was her match; and she felt it. No, the matter must be concealed from him entirely, at least till her schemes were all successful, and Rose d'Albret was the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul. Then, she thought, he might do his worst; the prize would be gained, the struggle accomplished, and his power at an end.

Next came the question how this concealment was to be secured. If Helen did not go to him at once—which the Marchioness little

believed she would—might she not write the tale which she would be afraid to speak. Nay, destitute as she had been driven forth, it seemed certain that want would compel her to do so immediately; and then the whole must be discovered.

As these thoughts presented themselves to her mind, she formed her plan with her usual decision; and, bidding one of her women order the coachman to stop, she called to the door of the vehicle two of the mounted men, who accompanied the carriage, and in whom she thought she could rely, and directed them to return immediately to the chateau.

"Seek for the girl, Helen," she said, "you will soon find her; 'tis not a quarter of an hour since she went. You can take some people on foot with you, to hunt about in the neighbourhood. Carry her back home immediately; and tell Mathurine to lock her up in her own room and keep her upon bread and water till I return. I have been somewhat too severe with her, though she must undergo some punishment. Away, as hard as you can gallop, and mind you find her, or you shall repent it. Here, Theodore, speak with all the people, and tell them, on their lives, not to utter one word at the Chateau de Marzay of what has taken place this morning. I and Mademoiselle de la Tremblade will soon make it up again."

The man to whom she last spoke promised to obey, though, understanding his mistress well, he clearly saw that she had some other end in view than merely reconciling herself to her own conscience for her over severity, and the carriage rolled on once more upon its way.

About four hours after, it reached the Chateau de Marzay, having met with no farther impediments by the way than such as were presented by roads naturally rough and uneven, which had become one mass of mud and dirt from the united effects of a sudden thaw and long neglect. In the court-yard of the mansion she was received by her brother, the Count de Liancourt, who informed her, according to his version, of all that had taken place in the chateau since the arrival of De Montigni. He told her the truth, in fact, as he believed it; but nevertheless, he gave her a completely false view of the whole affair; for it is ever to be remarked and remembered that, of all the treacherous liars against whom we have to guard in our course through life, our own heart, with its whole host of subtilties and fallacies, its prejudices, its vanities, and its self-delusions, is the most dangerous. Men would rarely, if ever, be deceived, if they did not aid most strenuously to deceive themselves, and what is more curious still, it often happens that when we are most busy in attempting to put a fraud upon others, we are most actively cheating ourselves. There is always a traitor in the council whenever we quit the straightforward course of truth and rectitude.

Monsieur de Liancourt assured his sister, as she alighted from her carriage, and walked up the staircase to the hall above, that the only difficulty was with De Montigni, and that Rose d'Albret had used her influence upon him to induce him to consent.

"Has she?" said the Marchioness, thoughtfully; "not very vigorously, I should fancy."

"Oh yes, indeed," replied Monsieur de Liancourt; "for I watched their parting from *the cavalier*, which was built at the time of the siege, where I could see them, but they could not see me. It was as formal as a court ceremony. He kissed her hand, and made her a low bow, and said something which I did not exactly hear, but the last words were, 'I will consider all you have said.'"

"So, then," said Madame de Chazeul, "Mademoiselle Rose hears reason at last! But what is it that has done this? she always seemed as cold as ice before, and barely willing."

"Oh! the fact is," replied the Count, "Rose was never without ambition. I do not pretend to say she is in love with Chazeul; but he took care to inform her of the high and splendid fate that would be hers as his wife, and that was quite enough."

"It may be so," answered the Marchioness; "ambition is at the bottom of every woman's heart; but yet, if De Montigni were as handsome as when he went away, I should have fancied that love and folly might have had a hard struggle against ambition and good sense. I would not have suffered them to have any private conversation if I had been here."

"It was the only way to get De Montigni to consent," rejoined Monsieur de Liancourt: "besides, Chazeul has no cause to fear the comparison. He is a man with knowledge of the world and of courts. The other is still a boy, with no knowledge of anything but books and philosophy."

"Not the man to win a woman, indeed;" said Madam de Chazeul, with a curl of the lip; "but we shall see."

As the last words were on her tongue, they entered the corridor where De Montigni and Chazeul were walking up and down with the old commander; and an amusing scene took place between the Marchioness and the rest of the party. She had made up her mind as to the part which she was to act towards her nephew; and the moment she saw him, she exclaimed, with a joyous air, and holding out her open arms towards him, "Ah, my dear Louis, welcome back to your native land! What a truant you have been! How like he is to poor Louise!" and she embraced him, apparently with all the tenderness of a mother.

The old commander growled a savage oath or two, and, when she turned to him, looked her full in the face, saying, "He is like Louise; and that is why I love him."

"Ah, Michael," said the Marchioness, "you always were a bear, and always will be one. It is lucky you do not bite as well as growl."

"I may bite some day, if I am provoked," answered the commander.

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Madame de Chazeul, laughing as heartily as if her mind were free from all the weight of cunning schemes and violent passions. "You see, Louis, he is just the same as ever. We have not been able to tame him since you were gone. It is a sad, ferocious beast—a bear. And so you have come to grace the wedding?"

"I hope so, Madam," replied De Montigni, gravely; but his thoughts were busy with the question, of what should be his demeanour towards the artful woman who was now before

him; and, while she said a few words to Chazeul, expressive of no particular affection towards him, the young Baron made up his mind, to seem won by her manner, and to attach himself as much possible to her during the day, in order to keep her from attacking Rose d'Albret, who, he feared, might not be so well able to play her part against the Marchioness as himself.

Madame de Chazeul, however, was pertinacious too, and one of her first inquiries was for Mademoiselle d'Albret.

"I will send and call her," answered Monsieur de Liancourt; "let us go into the hall; perhaps she may be there."

They did not find her, however; and the servant he sent to summon her, soon returned with the tidings, that the young lady had gone to bed again with a bad headache.

"I will go and see her," said Madame de Chazeul. "Poor dear Rose, all the agitation of these preparations is too much for her;" and she moved towards the door leading to Mademoiselle d'Albret's apartments, though the old commander exclaimed, in a surly tone, "You had better let her alone! Your tongue, Jacqueline, never cured a headache, I am sure."

The Marchioness, however, was stopped by the entrance of another person with whom she had also to play her part; for just as she was quitting the hall father Walter appeared, and advanced towards her. Her face immediately assumed an air of friendly regard, and giving him her hand, she said, "Good morning, father, how fares it with you? Our dear Helen would have come with me, but she was somewhat indisposed. Nothing of consequence, however; and perhaps she will join us to-morrow, or at all events, on the day of the marriage." Then suddenly breaking off, in order to avoid any further inquiries on that subject, she lowered her voice, and inquired, "How go things here, father? De Montigni is restive, I find. Are you sure of Rose?—quite sure, father? My brother, Anthony, continually blinds his own eyes: but you see more clearly."

"I think there can be no doubt," replied the priest, "not that I pretend to say that the lady loves your son; she regards the alliance but as a family arrangement conducive to her interests, and the only means of giving peace and quietness to the house. For these reasons she has urged De Montigni to sign the renunciation and the contract, and I think he will do it—nay, I feel certain he will. They would hurry on the affair before your arrival, though I thought it would have been better to wait. But from the course things have taken, no harm has been done; and, perhaps it may be as well now, when you see the lady, not to derange the impression which has been produced."

The Marchioness mused. "How comes it, good father," she asked, "that Chazeul has not made himself loved? I fear he has been playing the fool with other women; for he is not reputed to want success upon a lady's heart, when he is inclined to try. I must give him some lessons; do you think that any of his love affairs have come to this girl's ears? That should be prevented till the marriage takes place."

"By all means," said the priest "but I know of none from which there is any danger."

"And I of but one," rejoined the Marchioness, "but I will take care to keep that from her. One may be justified in using a little violence for such an object."

"Assuredly," answered father Walter, "anything in short, but the spilling of blood."

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" cried the Marchioness, "I bear the woman no ill will for loving Chazeul; but if I were to have her carried off and shut closely up for a few days, there could be no harm in that."

"It were the best means," replied father Walter, "unless her family be sufficiently powerful to make dangerous resistance."

"There is no fear of that," answered Madame de Chazeul, with a quiet smile; "but I will go and see Mademoiselle d'Albret."

Thus saying she quitted the hall, while father Walter advanced towards the group of gentlemen at the other end, who had been conversing together calmly enough during his interview with the Marchioness. That lady, however, returned after a very brief absence, saying that Rose d'Albret was trying to sleep; and, put upon a wrong track as she was, both by her brother and the priest, she attached herself during the rest of the morning to De Montigni, endeavouring by every artful means, to possess herself of his whole views and intentions, and at the same time to convince him, that he was giving pain to Rose d'Albret by his hesitation in regard to the signature of the papers.

One of the reasons why the game of life is not unfrequently won by the simple and the honest against all the arts of the politic and the wily, is perhaps that, in this game, as in no other, the most skilful and calculating can never tell what cards may be in the hands of the adverse party. I say one of the reasons; for there are many, and amongst them is the belief, from which cunning people can never free themselves, that others are dealing with them in the same way that they would deal, if their relative situations were reversed.

Madame de Chazeul, however, had studied de Montigni's character from youth, and knew that he was generous and kindhearted. She therefore, like father Walter, endeavoured to work upon him, in the first instance, through his affection for Rose d'Albret. She spoke of her gently and tenderly, called her "poor Rose," and represented the slight indisposition under which she was suffering, as entirely proceeding from some agitation and vexation she had undergone in the morning, affecting at the same time to be ignorant of the nature of that agitation, but leaving him to draw his own conclusions.

De Montigni, as the reader knows, had the secret in his own keeping, and internally mocked at all the policy which the Marchioness displayed; for there is nothing so contemptible as discovered cunning. He resolved, however, to turn back Madame de Chazeul's art upon herself, and found even a pleasure in foiling her with her own weapons.

"Well, my dear Madame," he answered, "I trust that, by this time to-morrow, Rose will have no farther cause for anxiety on my account."

"Indeed, how so?" asked the Marchioness.

"Because by that time," replied De Montigni, "all will be positively settled."

"And of course as Rose could wish," added the Marchioness.

"As far as I understand her wishes, it shall be so," said De Montigni; "but I do not desire, madam, what I say to you to be repeated; and now will you tell me frankly, for I know you are well aware, what is the value of these benefices which my uncle offers me?"

"At least equal to the value of the estates," replied Madame de Chazeul: "more, indeed, if you take in the Abbey of Chizay in Poitou; but that I believe was promised to good Monsieur de la Tremblade—not exactly promised, perhaps; but I know he was led to expect it."

"No one shall break a promise for me," replied De Montigni with some emphasis on the words. "They can be all held, I believe, without taking the vows."

"Your uncle holds them," answered Madame de Chazeul, "and he has taken no vows that I know of—unless it be, never to drink thin piquette when he can get strong Burgundy, or to eat pork when he can find venison."

De Montigni smiled, and was going on to stop the question of the Marchioness by inquiries of his own, when the summons to dinner was heard, and the whole party descended to the hall below.

When the meal was over, father Walter put the young Baron in mind, that they had to read over together the papers, in regard to which there had been so much discussion. Although De Montigni much wished to occupy Madame de Chazeul as far as possible during the day, he could not well put off the engagement; and whispering to the old commander, to watch her closely, he retired with the priest to his own chamber. There several long documents were spread out before him; and he proceeded, with pen and ink at hand, to peruse the whole, clause by clause, demanding minute and lengthened explanations as he went on, and taking notes of every point of importance. Father Walter was somewhat surprised at the calm and steady good sense he displayed; and, though De Montigni expressed neither consent to nor dissent from any of the items, was more and more convinced every moment, that the young Baron had made up his mind to accept the benefices and renounce the estates.

In the meanwhile the Marchioness de Chazeul had drawn her son away from the rest of the party below, and walking with him on the rampart, was giving him those lessons of which she had spoken to the priest. Not a word did she say of Helen de la Tremblade; nor a word of reproach or reproof did she utter; but her conversation turned entirely upon his demeanour toward Rose d'Albret.

"Ah Chazeul!" she said, after taking a turn backward and forward, in the tone of one jesting with a friend, "thou art a silly lad, I fear, and little knowest how to push thy fortune with woman-kind."

"Nay, my good mother, it is not thought so," replied Chazeul, drawing up his head and smoothing his ruff; "I am no seeker after the fame of such conquests, but I have some reason *to believe they are* not so difficult as they are *supposed to be.*"

"True," answered his mother, "doubtless with the light Parisian dame, the gay lady who has known a thousand lovers, thou art a potent assailant; but she is like a city which has been besieged and taken a thousand times, till all the outworks and ramparts have been battered down, and the place is right willing to surrender at the first sight of artillery. With a maiden fortress, however, such as this fair Rose d'Albret, thou art but a poor general, otherwise you would have gained the citadel long ago."

"Meaning her heart; but how would you have me conduct the siege, dear mother!" asked her son, pursuing the simile she had used.

"By assault, Nicholas!" replied the Marchioness; "prayers, tears, vows, daring, anything. Here neither wall, nor bastion, nor redoubt, is to be gained but by vigorous attack. Women, who by experience have not gained a knowledge of their own weakness, are always more resolute in resistance than those who have learned that they cannot long hold out when closely pressed. Storm and escalade are the only ways with such castles, Chazeul; and if you were to pursue till doomsday your cold and formal rules of siege, you would make no way, but find defences grow up in proportion to the feebleness of the attack."

"Why, you would not surely have me treat Rose d'Albret as any common woman of but light fame?" said Chazeul. "You are much mistaken, mother, if you think that is the way to win her."

"Nay, I would have you treat her very differently, foolish boy," replied the Marchioness. "With a woman of light fame, as you call her, you may well trust to her to make at least half the advances. With a young ignorant girl you must make them all yourself; for, be sure, she will not. One or the other must be bold and daring; and the only question is, on whose part it shall be. The practised dame will take her share on herself, the inexperienced girl expects it all from you. We all know in our hearts, Chazeul, that we do not dislike an impetuous lover. Though we may chide, we easily forgive even very grave offences, so that love be the excuse. The story of the Romans and the Sabines was a good allegory of women's hearts; men must take them by force if they would have them."

"Oh, her heart is mine sufficiently for all the purposes of wedded life," replied her son. "I know her better than you, my good mother, and am well aware that more things enter into the calculations of that little brain than you imagine I would not spoil her," he continued, "with too much devotion. You women grow exacting as you imagine you have power; and I would have her think the tie she has upon me is not too strong, lest she should one day think fit to use it strongly. It is enough for me to know, that she sees clearly her own interest in a marriage with myself. She will not expect, in a wedding of convenience, all that court and exclusive attention which some brides demand; and every little loverlike act will come with tenfold force."

"All very wise and very prudent, good youth," replied his mother, "if you had no rival, no competitor in the game that you are playing; if there were no obstacles, no difficulties in the way. But here our great object is time

and secure possession; and had you, by bold and ardent eagerness, advanced your suit so that she had no escape from marriage with you, we should have found both herself and De Montigni more tractable, depend upon it."

"She is tractable enough," replied Chazeul, "it is De Montigni alone that holds out; and she has done her best to persuade him, I am sure. A rival, do you call him! but a pitiful rival to me! and as to obstacles and difficulties, whatever have existed are swept away already. She has done her best to persuade De Montigni to sign; and I am sure he will do so."

"Well," said the Marchioness, "we shall see. I think he will, but do not feel so sure. He was somewhat too smooth and courteous just now; and I thought I saw a somewhat double meaning in his words, as if he hoped still that Rose might raise up some impediment. We must suffer him to have no farther speech with her alone. It is a dangerous plan."

"There is no fear of Rose," replied Nicholas de Chazeul, peevishly. "If it be anything like love on his part for her that you dread, it is a vain fancy. Had you seen him meet her last night, you would have been cured of such dreams. He was as cold as if we had imported a statue from Italy, fresh cut in the stone; and not all Rose could do would warm him."

"Ay, before others," said the Marchioness, "but perhaps when alone it might be different."

"No, no," said Chazeul, "my uncle watched them; and it was just the same: all formal bows and stiff courtesies. But who is this, comes riding here?" he continued, gazing from the battlements. "A trumpet at full speed, with a green scarf! News from Mayenne, upon my life! I must go down and see."

Thus ended a conversation which has been repeated here with reluctance; but it is as needful, in painting nature, to show the mind and character of the bad as of the good, to display the thoughts and reasonings of the wicked as of the virtuous. Neither does the portrait of Madame de Chazeul serve little to exemplify the times in which she lived. France was then full of such. Intrigue of every kind, amorous and political, was then at its height, and most of the infamous and daring deeds that were done, either for the gratification of private passion, or for the attainment of great public objects, were suggested by woman.

The man who had been seen riding so sharply towards the chateau, proved to be a trumpeter sent by the Duke of Nemours with letters to Chazeul, notifying the march of the army of the League to relieve the town of Dreux, closely besieged by the King, and calling upon him to join it, with all his retainers, as a battle seemed inevitable. The despatches spoke in glowing terms of the force under Mayenne. It was nearly double in number, they said, to that which Henry of Bourbon could bring to oppose it, and a glorious victory would soon be achieved, in which all honourable men would long to take part. Chazeul, however, sent an ambiguous answer: for he was not one to sacrifice his private interests even to the triumph of his faction, and he was resolved to possess the hand of Rose d'Albret, and to see the estates of Liancourt and Marennes secured to himself, before he quitted the Chateau of Marzay.

More than one hour elapsed before Louis de Montigni had terminated his examination of the papers with the priest; and even then, with all father Walter's skill, he could not extract from him any promise, either direct or indirect, to sign them. To the eager questions of Madame de Chazeul the priest could but reply, "I cannot tell what he will do. I believe his mind is made up, to act as we could wish; but his demeanour is certainly somewhat strange. He has taken notes of everything, and remains pondering over them. Our only plan is to watch the commander, and to cut them off from any private communication with each other. Noon to-morrow will show us what we are to expect; and in the mean time we must guide things as we can. Have you seen Mademoiselle d'Albret?"

The Marchioness replied in the negative, and it was not till one hour before sunset that Rose came forth from her chamber to breathe, for a few minutes, the fresh air. She was pale, and evidently suffering; and whenever Madame de Chazeul attempted to question her, she pleaded indisposition as an excuse for talking little. She gazed forth from the ramparts over the wide country which the chateau commanded, with a feeling of dread, mingling strangely with hope and joy. The bright sunshine of the first day of spring was glittering over the whole; but on the verge of the southern sky was hanging a dark and heavy mass of clouds, rising up in all sorts of fantastic forms; and Rose could not help associating her own fate with the aspect of the day, and thinking that the bright gleam of summer, which had come to her heart after a long and chilling winter, might, perhaps, be soon blackened by storms, the clouds of which were already within sight.

Soon after the party was joined by De Montigni; and the two lovers strove hard to conceal their feelings under the appearance of cold indifference; but Rose found the task so difficult that she remained only a few moments after the young Baron's appearance, and then once more retired to bed.

Madame de Chazeul remarked the whole; and suspicion rose up in her mind. But the field of probability is wide and dim, so that her doubts found no fixed point to rest upon; and she contented herself with whispering to De Montigni, "Were I a man, I would not long give a lady cause to fly me thus."

The young nobleman made no answer, but turned away, as if somewhat offended; and this slight indication of temper was used by Madame de Chazeul to deceive herself. "Were he not acting contrary to the girl's wishes," she said to herself, "he would not take offence at my supposing it."

The rest of the day passed without any occurrence of importance; and the only points which Madame de Chazeul thought worthy of notice at supper, were the absence of Estoc from the table, and that Louis de Montigni confined his conversation almost altogether to father Walter, with whom he talked a good deal in a low tone. She herself was tired with early rising and a journey. The commander soon retired to rest; and she followed without delay, as soon as she was certified by private information, from one whom she had set to watch, that

the good old soldier was actually in his bed. Satisfied that all communication between Montigni and himself was at an end for the night, she laid herself down to seek that repose which is unfortunately, but not unnaturally, as often the portion of the hardened in vice, as of the virtuous and the good.

CHAPTER XII.

I HAVE said something of the same kind before; but I must repeat that, unless it be in a mud cottage containing one room, and at the most two individuals, it scarcely ever happens that there are not several, very various scenes proceeding in the same house, at the same time; and when the house is large, and the inhabitants many, these scenes are multiplied and diversified even to infinity. Tragedy and comedy, broad farce and startling romance, have each their separate chambers, and their several actors; and while, in the halls of the Chateau of Marzay, all the cunning drama of intrigue which we have described, found a stage, the acts of many another play were being performed in the chambers allotted to the servants.

Loud and uproarious merriment had its part; and, as is too frequently the case, the vices and follies of their superiors were imitated by the inferiors, presenting pictures tho gross and unpleasant to be given in this place. We must, however, turn away from the principal personages of our tale, to notice some events which took place, during the hour of supper, in a part of the chateau somewhat distant from that in which Monsieur de Liancourt's family was assembled.

In a room not far from that of Mademoiselle d'Albret, with the door ajar, a lamp upon the table, and a piece of embroidery in her hands, sat Blanchette, the maid of our fair friend Rose. She paid but little attention to her work indeed, though she affected to be very busily employed, but her ear was turned frequently towards the passage, apparently listening for every sound. At length it was gratified by hearing a step; and the moment after, the valet of Monsieur de Chazeul pushed open the door, and entering the room, closed it behind him. He was a tall swaggering, debauched-looking personage, and into the particulars of the first greetings between himself and Blanchette, I shall beg leave not to enter. Suffice it to say, that they betokened a degree of intimacy which Rose d'Albret had certainly not the slightest idea existed between her maid and any other person.

After a while, however, the valet inquired, "Well now, tell me, my pretty Blanchette, all that your mistress has been saying to you to-day."

"Indeed, I shall not," replied the maid, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't intend to tell you, or Monsieur de Chazeul, anything more."

"Come, come, don't be silly," cried the man, "for I must soon get back; now the caprices of you ladies," he continued, with an affected air, "are very pretty and interesting in affairs *of love*, but very troublesome in matters of business."

"Well, I shan't say anything more" said Blanchette, with a determined air, "so there is no use of talking about it."

"Ah, ha, then," rejoined the valet, "I see how it is; your mistress has told you not to tell."

"Indeed, she has not," answered Blanchette; "but she has taught me to value myself more highly than your master does."

"How so?" demanded her companion; "I am sure my master values you as highly as I should like to see him. What did she say to you about it?"

"Ah, I don't mind telling you that," said the maid. "She asked me last night, when I was saying something in favour of Monsieur de Chazeul, what he had given me; and, when I told her, she said she was worth more than that, and that I was a great fool if ever I opened my mouth about him again, unless I got three times as much."

"Upon my word the lady has some notion of life," cried the valet; "one would think she had spent her whole days in Paris; and she is right too, Blanchette, we servants should never put too low a value on ourselves, for we have more in our power than people imagine. However, I can promise you that when Monsieur de Chazeul is married to your lady, you shall have three times as much; and in the meantime—"

"Ay, ay," replied Blanchette; "a fish in the plate is worth three in the stream, Alphonso. Promises are made of wind, and it is very difficult to convert them into anything else."

"Well, but listen to me," said the man. "I was just going to say, in the meantime Monsieur le Marquis has sent you five-and-twenty crowns Here they are," and he placed a little leathern bag in her hand; "now, there's a dear, beautiful girl, tell me all your mistress has said to you to-day, especially after her long talk with Monsieur de Montigni, this morning."

"That is soon told," answered Blanchette, putting the money in one of the pockets of her apron; "she said nothing at all, except that she had got a headache, and would go to bed again."

"*Peste!*" cried the valet; "is that all the news that you can give? Surely you have made out something more. What humour did she seem in?"

"Bad enough," replied Blanchette; "I think Monsieur de Montigni must have done or said something to offend her, for I could see she had been crying, and she was silent and dull, just as she is when she is angry with me."

"I dare say he did," rejoined the valet; "for he is an obstinate colt, and takes as long to drive where people want him, as an ass loaded with sand—But hark, there is some one walking in the passage."

They listened, and a heavy step sounded along the corridor, advancing in measured time from one end to the other, and then back again, like that of a sentry keeping guard. It passed and repassed twice, not a little to the annoyance of the two worthies shut up in the room together. But at length the valet, who did not wish his absence to be remarked and commented upon amongst the servants, declared, "Whoever it is, I must go but do you shut the door af-

ter me quickly, Blanchette, then no one need know that you are here."

"I am afraid Mademoiselle will call every moment," answered the girl; "but people must have time to take their supper, you know."

"I must go, upon my life," said the man, who took a great deal more interest in his own position than in hers. "Now, Blanchette, I will pop out as soon as he is passed; you close the door quick behind me, and he will not see whence I come."

He accordingly waited till the steps sounded close to the door, and then as soon as they had gone by, opened it, and went out as noiselessly as possible. But his footfall did not escape the quick ears of the old soldier, Estoc, who turning instantly, not only perceived who it was, but also marked the room from which he came. He said nothing, however; but, as soon as the valet had left the passage, advanced at once to the door which had just been closed, and, opening it without ceremony, went in. As may be supposed, this sudden apparition troubled the maid a good deal; and, though an impudent and unprincipled girl, she was not yet sufficiently veteran in vice to keep her cheek from growing red, or her hands from shaking.

"Well, Mademoiselle Blanchette," said Estoc, "I thought I should find you here."

"Indeed, sir!" said Blanchette. "I generally sit here."

"Not always, Blanchette," replied Estoc; "but I saw your lover leave you, and so I came in, just to give you a word of advice." Blanchette coloured and bit her lip, but made no reply; and Estoc went on, "you are in the wrong line, if you wish to make your fortune, Mademoiselle. Now, if you will follow my counsel, you may do something for yourself. Go up to Monsieur de Montigni's apartments about eleven o'clock to-night, for he wants to speak with you."

"Lord! Monsieur Estoc," cried the girl; "I would not go up to any gentleman's room at night for the world. I wonder how you could propose such a thing!"

"Oh! I make no difficulty in proposing it," answered Estoc, "when you make none in receiving a gentleman's valet at night.—But Monsieur de Montigni only wants to speak with you on business, to ask you one or two questions, and, perhaps, to make you a present of a couple of hundred crowns."

"I am very much obliged to him, sir," replied the girl, affecting a cold and modest air; "but I would rather speak to him in the day, if he has no objection."

"That can't well be, Blanchette," answered Estoc; "for Monsieur de Montigni intends to go away to-morrow; and he will not have time previous to his departure. Now, my good girl, remember you are in my power, for don't you suppose that, if this business comes to the ears of Mademoiselle d'Albret, you will stay in her service a minute after."

"Well, I have done nothing that's wrong," replied the girl, boldly; "and I don't care what any spy says of me, not I."

"Well, we understand each other," rejoined Estoc. "Give me an answer in one word, will you come, or will you not? Your reply will decide your own fate."

"Well, sir, well," said Blanchette, who saw that the plan of outfacing the old soldier would not succeed; "I will come if you will be there too."

"Oh, that I certainly shall," replied Estoc; "for I have got some papers to look over with Monsieur de Montigni—so I may tell him you will come?"

"Yes, sir," replied Blanchette, "I will;" and, with a significant nod of the head, Estoc left the room.

Without going near the supper hall, he retired at once to the apartments of De Montigni, where he waited for about half an hour, till he was joined by the young nobleman, to whom he related all that had taken place. "The girl is not to be depended upon," he added in the end, "and I think it would be better when we have got her, to lock her up here for the night."

"Nay," answered De Montigni, "that were a violent proceeding. I have told my servant Joseph to watch her well, and we shall hear his report. If I find that she has been holding any communication with these people, since you saw her, we must devise some means to blind her eyes. But, now Estoc, is all the rest prepared?"

"Everything," replied the old soldier. "I have the guard to-night; and I have picked my men from those who will not fail us. Your servants have their orders; and, were it needful, we could make all the rest prisoners in the castle here; but that you would not like to do."

"Certainly not," replied De Montigni. "I think at present they have no suspicion; and I trust that we shall be able to execute our scheme without either difficulty or strife. Be with me when this girl comes, Estoc, and now go and take some refreshment; but above all things caution my good uncle Michael to make no effort to see me to-night, and to seek repose at his usual hour. Depend upon it there are watchful eyes upon us; and, of all things, we must avoid suspicion."

While he was speaking, a sunburnt man who had accompanied him from Italy, made his appearance, and bowing low with a smile, he said, "I have watched and listened to some purpose, Monsieur le Baron. As soon as supper was over, Mademoiselle Blanchette drew aside Alphonso, the Marquis's valet, and whispered with him long in the corner of the hall; I saw they were very eager, but could hear nothing; and as I was resolved to know more, I crossed suddenly behind her back, just as the man was saying 'I will wait for you at the bottom of the stairs.' I could hear no more, for they both stopped."

"That is enough, that is enough," replied de Montigni, "we must remedy this, Estoc; but I will have the whole plan ready, when you come again."

"At half past ten, Estoc was in the young nobleman's room; and at eleven, Blanchette might be seen creeping stealthily up the stairs with a lamp in her hand, while in the dark corridor below, concealed in one of the recesses of the windows, stood Chazeul's valet, waiting for her return. Almost all the rest of the household had retired to bed; and the chateau remained perfectly silent for a quarter of an

hour, while the man continued his watch in darkness. At the end of that time, however, Blanchette and her lamp were once more seen upon the stairs; and, whispering to him as she passed, "Quick, quick, old Estoc is coming down directly, he is now speaking to the Baron at the door," she hastened on, through that passage, across the lower hall, and up a short flight of steps towards the apartments of Chazeul. The valet followed quickly, and introduced her into the dressing room of his lord, who was waiting with some impatience for the intelligence she was to bring.

"Well, well," he cried, as soon as she appeared, "what is it he wishes, Blanchette? Let us hear all that took place."

"When first I came in," said Blanchette, after a pause to take breath, and a little coquettish panting and holding her hand upon her heart, "Monsieur de Montigni spoke me very fair, and promised a great deal. He said he knew that I was in your interest, sir, and he did not wish me to betray my trust, but that he was very anxious indeed to have an hour's private conversation with Mademoiselle before noon to-morrow. He asked me if she was yet asleep; and when I told him she was, and had been so for these two hours, he turned to Estoc and said, 'that is unfortunate;' he then looked again to me, and, calling me close to him, he spoke almost in a whisper, saying, 'that if I would engage to get him the interview early to-morrow, before the rest of the people are stirring, he would give me two hundred crowns, and, as an earnest, put these into my hand. He told me particularly to be very secret, and not to say a word to any one, which, of course, I promised as much as he could wish."

"You did quite right, you did quite right," replied Chazeul; "but did he let you know what was his object in seeking this interview? He must have said something more, for you were long with him."

"Oh, I asked him, noble sir," replied the girl, "what I was to tell my mistress he wished to see her for, but he replied somewhat sharply that it was no business of mine, and then I said I was sure Mademoiselle d'Albret would ask, but that if he did not like to say, it was not my fault if he did not get the meeting he wanted; and then he replied that if my mistress did inquire, I was to tell her he wanted to hear more explicitly from her own lips what he had not time fully to understand in the morning."

Chazeul laughed: "The poor youth writhes like an eel upon a spear," he said; "he would fain make one more effort, but we will not let him. Now mark me, Blanchette, not one word of this to your mistress. She has been too much agitated to-day; and we must not have the same scenes every morning. She made herself clearly enough understood for any man of common sense; and by that Monsieur de Montigni must abide. I will not forget you, Blanchette, if you are faithful and discreet; and it is no bad post, premiere demoiselle to the Marchioness of Chazeul. So now go to bed and sleep, and contrive to forget Monsieur de Montigni's commission before to-morrow morning."

"*That I will,* Monsieur," replied Blanchette; *and with a courtesy she quitted* the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

The moments which the maid Blanchette passed with De Montigni, and afterwards with Chazeul, were full of anxiety to Rose d'Albret. She lay in darkness, wakeful and expectant, listening for every sound to give her some indication of the girl's return to the ante-chamber, from which she had heard her distinctly go forth, without knowing the cause. Imagination was busy with every painful possibility. She feared that their whole scheme of flight might be discovered; she thought that the maid might have conceived a suspicion from some little preparations which she had made during the evening; she asked herself what would be her fate if the execution of their design were prevented. Would they, could they, compel her to unite herself with Chazeul? and she now shrunk from the very idea with tenfold horror. She would not do it, she thought; she would sooner die. She would seek the protection of the cloister—anything, she would do anything, rather than give her hand to one whom she equally disliked and despised. Suddenly, in the midst of these feelings, a sensation of wonder at their vehemence came over her; and she asked herself how it was that her ideas upon the subject had been so suddenly and completely changed.

She had till lately looked upon her marriage with Chazeul as a thing arranged, and to which she would submit, not without some repugnance, perhaps, but without that degree of horror and dislike which she now experienced. At first she had been coldly indifferent, and afterwards she had wished to put off the day of the sacrifice as long as possible; but she now felt that a life of penury and daily labour would be comparative happiness to wedding Nicholas de Chazeul.

How had a single day made this strange difference? she inquired, and then she thought of De Montigni; and, though no eye could see her, the colour rose in her cheek to feel how different were all her sensations towards him, how willingly to him she would yield heart and hand! But the secret of the change was discovered,—she loved, and loved truly, and a new light had shone into her heart.

Quickly, however, her thoughts wandered back again to the present, and once more she listened for Blanchette's return. Where could she have gone? she asked herself; what could be her motive, if something were not discovered? Her own heart was too pure to attribute to the girl that conduct which, perhaps, if she had known all, would have been first suspected; but as she raised herself on her arm, to give ear to some distant noise, she heard the outer door of the ante-room open again, and the step of the maid moving about in the neighbouring chamber. With a beating heart, and in breathless silence, Rose marked every sound, till at length a thin line of light, which crossed the floor from the key-hole, was suddenly extinguished; and she heard the girl take her place in bed. A few minutes after, the clock of the chateau struck twelve, but Rose still lay quiet for some minutes in order that the spy upon her actions might be asleep before she moved.

Blanchette, however, was one of the "dull

weeds" that easily fasten themselves on "Lethe's shore." Herself was all she thought of, all she cared for; and, having provided to the best of her ability for the success and prosperity of that well-loved person, she was soon in the arms of slumber, undisturbed by any of the reproaches of conscience, or the lighter tones of imagination. The heavy breathing of profound and dreamless sleep was heard ere long, and rising from her bed, Rose d'Albret dressed herself as well as she could in the darkness, and drew down the tapestry over the door between her room and that of the maid, to prevent Blanchette from hearing any sound within.

She feared that she should not be ready in time, and she hastened all her preparations eagerly, as much to withdraw her own thoughts from fears and apprehensions, as to guard against being too late; but, as so often happens, all was complete long before the hour, and for nearly twenty minutes she sat at a little distance from the window, trembling with agitation and alarm.

She had now full time to give way to all the busy thoughts that naturally sprang from her situation. She felt she loved—she trusted she was beloved in return; but still to fly with De Montigni from all other protection—to put herself entirely in his power—to cast herself thus into his arms—it was rash, she thought, it was foolish. Would he continue to love her? Might not his quickly-roused passion die away as soon? Might he not be the first to think her rash confidence in him bold, almost immodest?

"No, no!" she answered, "he would not do so; he was too kind—too generous. He always had been. Why should she think him changed in mind and heart, in thought and feeling, since the bright days of his boyhood, when she had loved him so well? Did he not tell her that he had always loved her?—did he not promise to love her always?—and when had he ever broken his word? No, no! it was but agitation and weak terror made her doubt."

Even if there were a risk, she thought again, even if the dream of happiness with Louis de Montigni, which had come with so sweet a relief to her heart, were not to be fully realised, yet, when the only alternative was to wed a man she now hated and contemned, could she hesitate to give herself to one she loved? and again she answered, "No! If death were the only other course, she would seek it, rather than give her hand to Nicholas de Chazeul."

Her mind then turned to the dangers of the way; to the chance of being stopped ere they could quit the castle; to the likelihood of being discovered and frustrated; to the shame and confusion that must follow. She pictured herself brought before Monsieur de Liancourt; she called up the scornful looks of Chazeul, and the sneering taunts of his mother; and for a moment her heart sank as fancy painted the scene with the vividness of reality. But then her spirit rose; "I would not bear it," she said to herself. "I would own my love to one, and my hatred to the other. I would call for a sight of the contract that my father signed. I would refuse to wed this man—aye, even if they dragged me to the altar. I would demand the protection of the good old commander, and put myself under the guardianship of the law."

Poor girl, she little knew how powerless was the law in France at that moment. "It is strange," she continued, turning to another line of thought, "I have not heard the clock strike one; and yet it is long since twelve. Can anything have gone wrong? It must have struck without my hearing it.—How dark it is without! Not a star in the sky, and the moon down!—Those must be drops of rain I hear."

A moment after the heavy bell of the clock sounded upon her ear; and she found how long tedious expectation can make one short hour. Rose smiled at her own impatience, and said in her heart, "I must not let Louis know how eagerly I have watched for him; and yet why not? If he be generous, as I think, to be so loved will but increase his own; and if he be not, no arts will keep a wayward heart. Hark, there is a sound!" And the next instant, something like the steel point of a sword's scabbard, struck lightly against the window.

Rose opened it without noise, and asked in a low and trembling voice, "Who is there?"

"'Tis I, 'tis I, my beloved," answered De Montigni, who was standing on a ladder, which had been placed against the window. "All is ready, if you are. But before you come, secure your maid in her own room. We have turned the key without. She is not to be trusted; and it were well to prevent her from giving the alarm to-morrow, till the last moment."

"There is but a bolt," said Rose d'Albret, "and I fear I shall wake her with the noise, for it is a very heavy one."

"Stay, dearest," replied her lover; "I will do it," and he sprang lightly into the room.

"Oh, Louis," whispered Rose, as he held her for a moment to his heart, "do not waste time."

"I will not," he answered. "Where is this bolt," and following Rose, who led him on with a trembling hand, he drew back the tapestry and felt for the bolt of the door. Slowly and gently he pushed it forward; but this was not accomplished without some noise, and the heart of Rose d'Albret beat as if it would have burst through her side. She could not even listen for the throbbing; but De Montigni bent down his ear; and after a moment he whispered, "it is all safe, she sleeps, my beloved. Now, Rose, now," and taking her hand in his, he led her back towards the window.

He felt by the trembling of her hand, that she was greatly agitated; and although when he had first entered the room, he had given way, as we have seen, for a single instant to the warm emotions of his heart, he would not now add by one rash caress to that which Rose already underwent. When he reached the window, however, he drew the other side of the casement farther back, to get out first and assist her in descending. But the lady detained him a moment by the hand, asking in a low voice, "And will you love me ever, Louis?"

"As from my earliest youth, so to my last hour, dear Rose," replied De Montigni, in the same low tone.

"And will you never judge me rash, imprudent, bold, De Montigni?" again inquired the lady; "will you never reproach me, even in your own secret heart for listening to your persuasions? will you never think it was immo-

dest or unfeminine to quit the shelter of my guardian's house, and give myself to you with this implicit confidence!"

"Never, dear Rose!" replied De Montigni; "banish such idle apprehensions. I shall ever feel the deepest gratitude. I shall ever feel respect for that decision which saves me the pain, the peril, and the grief of bringing to account my nearest relations for a most shameful attempt to violate the contract with your father, and to defraud me of my own—for you are my own, Rose. You are plighted to me from your infancy, and indeed, dear one, I have a right to demand, as the only one entitled to your hand, that you should take the only means by which it can be secured to me; and for your thus yielding willingly and readily, my thanks, and love and gratitude are yours forever."

"Well, then, there is my hand, De Montigni," said Mademoiselle d'Albret, "and I am yours. I do not doubt you, Louis,—I do not doubt you; but in these things woman may well be timid; for her all is at stake; and God knows those we play against are often cheats."

"Such am not I, dear Rose," replied her lover. "Come, my Rose, come!" and stepping out of the window, he held his hands towards her, to guide her in the descent.

Rose d'Albret closed her eyes, murmured a short prayer to God for protection and assistance in the course before her; and after pausing one moment more, in lingering hesitation, she put her foot upon the ladder, and descended gently, with De Montigni steadying her steps. The height was not great, and the next minute her feet were upon the ground between the old chateau and the walls that defended it. There was no one below, for De Montigni had determined to come alone, in order to avoid all bustle and confusion.

"Now, dear girl, now," he said, "the first step to freedom is taken. Estoc is waiting for us on the walls; my horses are prepared without; and in five minutes we shall be at liberty."

"But how shall we pass the gates!" asked Rose; "they are always strictly guarded."

"We have placed men that can be depended upon," replied De Montigni, "and the sally port at the south is in the hands of Estoc." This way, dearest, this way, to the bridge."

Their escape, however, was not destined to be effected so easily as they supposed; for when they reached the spot where the flying bridge which we have so often mentioned hung between the chateau and the outer walls, De Montigni, on looking up, perceived through the dim air of night that it was raised. There was a flight of stone steps, built against the body of the chateau, from the sort of paved court in which they were, to the door that communicated with the bridge; and up these De Montigni sprang in a moment, leaving Rose d'Albret below. He found, however, that the chain which suspended the bridge in the air, was padlocked; and, descending again with a noiseless step, he asked his fair companion in a whisper, "Who sleeps in the room on the right!"

"I do not know," replied Rose, "some of Monsieur de Chazeul's servants, I believe."

"There are people talking within," replied De Montigni; "the bridge is up, the chains padlocked; and even if they were not, the noise of letting it down would call attention. We must go round, dear Rose, to the staircase in the wall."

Rose d'Albret trembled very much; for her agitation was already so great, that any impediment made her heart sink with apprehension but leaning on De Montigni's arm, she hurried along with him, and soon reached the staircase of which he had spoken, which in another minute led them to the top of the wall.

"Sit here for a moment, dearest," said De Montigni, "while I find Estoc, and do not raise your head above the parapet. He and I may pass for the guards; but the veil and ruff do not well imitate the steel cap and cuirass."

Rose silently did as he bade her, and gazed out, while he was gone, through the neighbouring embrasure. The country through which she was to pass lay before her; but it was all dark and indistinct like the wide land of the future in the journey of life. There was no star to betoken hope in the sky above; thick clouds, like frowning fate, covered the whole heaven; and though the few heavy drops of rain which had fallen, had ceased for the time, there were low sobbing gusts of wind, which seemed to say that they would soon commence again.

Sad and apprehensive, Rose d'Albret gazed over the scene, and with curious eye strove to trace out the road along which she was to travel, as one does so often and so vainly in the mortal night which surrounds us here below. Fortunately, however, she had not much time for gloomy meditations. In less than two minutes De Montigni was by her side again, accompanied by Estoc, who bent down and kissed her hand, saying, "Come, Mademoiselle, come, don't be frightened about the bridge being up, that is done against those on the outside of the wall, not those on the in. We will soon reach the sally port, but we must cross the court first."

"But who are those that Monsieur de Montigni heard talking in the room to the right of the bridge door?" asked Rose d'Albret in a whisper.

"On my body and life I do not know," replied Estoc; "some of Chazeul's people, about no good, I'll warrant; but they'd better not come near us, or I'll split their skulls and his too, if he meddles. This way, Mademoiselle."

"Hush!" cried Rose, drawing back, "there is a man coming along the wall. Oh, Heaven! who can it be?"

"Nobody but Paul the sentinel," replied Estoc. "I placed him here on guard, lady, and he knows his business. Come!" and leading her on, he passed close by the warder, who for his part, when they approached, turned his back to them, and gazed out over the country.

To witness such a thorough understanding between her companions and the guards, restored some degree of confidence and hope to Rose d'Albret; and, hurrying forward, they descended the stairs by which she had mounted, chose the second archway in the body of the building, and crossed the vacant court, where all was still and silent, except a large eagle which was chained to a perch in the midst, and which, disturbed in its reveries by their passing near flapped its large wings, and

uttered a shrill cry. Taking through another archway on the opposite side of the court, they threaded one or two of the passages of the building, and soon reached a paved passage, or coulisse, similar to that which ran between the chateau and the wall on the northern side. As they walked along, Rose remarked that De Montigni drew round to the side of Estoc, and whispered something in his ear.

"I do not know," replied the old soldier; "I placed him there not ten minutes ago. Perhaps he is standing under the arch."

"I do not think it," said De Montigni; "there is no depth to hide him, and I can see no one."

"My eyes are not so good as they were," answered Estoc; "but he may have opened the door, for aught we know, to have all ready."

"What is the matter!" asked Mademoiselle d'Albret, clinging to De Montigni's arm; "what has gone amiss!"

"Nothing, dearest, nothing," replied De Montigni. "'Tis only that we do not see the guard who was placed with the keys of the sally-port. He may, perhaps, have opened the door and gone in, or he may have walked on to the end."

When they reached the low-browed door in the wall, however, which was to give them exit from the chateau of Marzay, they found no one there, and the heavy iron-covered gate tightly locked. Swearing an oath or two in an under tone, Estoc looked up and down the passage to see if he could perceive the careless warder; but nothing was to be discovered; and no sound or footfall gave notice that he was near.

"Stay," said the old soldier; "stay a moment here, I will go and see for him. I cannot understand this at all. Yet there can be no danger, lady, so do not be afraid; for if anything were discovered, we should find people enough here."

"But if any one should come while you are gone!" asked Rose d'Albret, in a faltering tone.

"Why, then, you must hide yourselves amongst those passages opposite," replied the old soldier. "You know them well, both of you, for many a hunt have I had after you amongst them, when you were children."

Notwithstanding all her apprehensions, Rose d'Albret could but smile, as the old man's words brought up before her mind the picture of the happy hours of childhood; and she laid her hand fondly on De Montigni's arm, feeling that she did love him truly, and had loved him longer than she once thought she had.

"Let us go at once, Louis," she said, "into what we used to call the labyrinth; they would not find us easily there, and we can watch till he comes back."

"Ay, ay," said Estoc; "go there, pretty lady. I will not be a minute, for the man cannot be far off."

Thus saying, he left them; and crossing the passage, they entered an arch, a little way farther down, which communicated with some of the interior parts of the building but little used by the household, and was traversed by narrow stone corridors, with innumerable staircases to rooms above. Placing themselves under the shelter of the vault, they waited, listening to the old soldier's receding step; but the momentary light which had come up in Rose d'Albret's mind, at his allusion to former days, passed rapidly away as she stood there with her lover, uncertain of what the next hour might bring forth.

The moment after, they heard the neigh of a horse beyond the walls, and De Montigni, turning to her, whispered, "There is but a little space between us and safety, Rose."

"Alas! it may be enough," replied Rose d'Albret, "to bar us from all our hopes."

"Nay, nay," answered her lover, "take not such a gloomy view of it, dear one; there are always small obstacles to every scheme; but these will soon be removed, and all will go well."

"God grant it," said Rose d'Albret; but even as she spoke, she drew back farther within the arch, saying, "Hush! there are figures upon the wall."

"Stand, give the word," cried a sentinel above.

"I forget it," cried the voice of Chazeul; "but you know me, my man! You know Monsieur de Chazeul!"

"I know no one without the word," replied the soldier. "Stand off, or you are a dead man!"

"Dare you be so insolent!" exclaimed Chazeul. "Who commands the guard to-night!"

"I do my duty, sir," replied the soldier; "so stand back, I say! It is Monsieur de l'Estoc's guard."

"I thought so," replied Chazeul; "like master like man. Go, and call him, sir."

"Not I," answered the soldier; "I do not quit my post for any one. You can call him yourself, if you want him."

"I will," replied Chazeul sternly, "and have you punished for your insolence;" and, turning back along the wall, he proceeded to search for Estoc.

CHAPTER XIII.

The small evils of life, against which, in the narrowness of our views and the idleness of our heart, we so often pray, as if they were as hideous as unmasked sin, how often do they work for us the greatest benefits in ways we never dreamed of! how often do they even forward us in the very course they seemed likely to obstruct! There is not a hair of our head that is not numbered; there is not a sparrow falls to the ground unmarked; so we were told by Him who is Truth; and surely there is not an act or incident of our life that has not its end and object in the great scheme of our being, and in the greater scheme of universal nature. Pleasant is it, and sweet to contemplate, for the eye of faith, that all is ruled and directed to its fixed purpose by Almighty wisdom and infinite goodness.

"He is gone!" whispered De Montigni to Rose d'Albret, as Chazeul strode away. You see it is fortunate, dear girl, that we did not find the sallyport open, or we should have been passing just at the moment he was upon the walls above. He could not have stayed us, it is true, for we have a large party in the castle; but it might have occasioned strife, and that I would fain avoid."

"Oh yes, yes!" said Rose. "God grant that we may escape that—but hark! it is raining, Louis."

"That is unlucky," replied de Montigni. Yet, in truth, it was far from unfortunate for the success of their scheme. The large drops which began to descend in a heavy shower, soon changed the purpose of Nicholas de Chazeul, who was lightly clothed, and somewhat careful of his own person; and instead of seeking Estoc, as he had intended, he hurried back to his own chamber, cast off his wet clothes, and retired to bed, keeping his indignation for the following morning.

In the mean while Louis de Montigni and Rose d'Albret remained for some minutes longer under the archway; and, although apprehension and anxiety had a large share in the fair lady's feelings, it must not be denied that there were sweet and happy sensations too. With her arm twined through that of her lover, with her hand clasped in his, she felt all the joy, the thrilling and inexpressible joy of loving, trusting, confiding; and she felt it, too, for the first time. All the freshness of the young heart was there; that freshness which in all things is the point of perfection—the moment of expansion to the flower; the hour of ripeness to the fruit, when colour and beauty, and scent, and flavour, and delight, are all at their full, before one petal has fallen or withered, before one tint has faded, before the bloom has been brushed off, before the enjoyment has palled, or the fine edge of sensation has been blunted. There are feelings in the human heart, and they are the brightest of those which have any reference to earth, which are like those small delicate flies, that live but an hour in their beauty, and then pass away, unable to sustain even the weight of the common air; and with Rose d'Albret that was the moment of their existence. She had never before known what it was to give the whole heart, to cling to another, as if in him she had a second life; to look to him for all her future joy; to trust in him for aid, protection, and support; to fear for him more than for herself; to believe her best gift was to render him happy. The world in which she had lived was a cold and dreary one; there had been no heart which had sympathies with hers; no voice to reciprocate kind words; no mind with which to exchange the thoughts that were busy in her own. All who surrounded her were different from her in years, in ideas, in feelings, in objects. It was a dark and shadowy state of being, whose only light had been memory—memory of him who now stood beside her, till he himself had returned, like her morning star, and the day of love had dawned upon her heart, driving the shades away, and gilding even the clouds that still hung over the sky.

Thus, though dread and apprehension still had some share in her feelings, poor Rose d'Albret was not now without a bright portion of happiness; and the gentle pressure of the hand, the mute caress, the word of tenderness and comfort from her lover's lips, produced sensations in her bosom which he did not know, which, perhaps man never fully knows, in his dealings with woman.

At length there came a hurried tread, as if more than one person were approaching, and *De Montigni took* a step forward before his fair companion, and loosened his sword in the scabbard. The rain was falling heavily; the night had become doubly dark; and he could only distinguish the forms of two men advancing quickly along the *coulisse*, without being able to discover who they were. One he thought indeed was Estoc, but he was not sure, till at length the man on the right hand paused opposite the sallyport, and appeared to unlock the door, while the other came on towards the spot where he stood.

"It is Estoc, dear Rose," he said; "it is Estoc with the keys."

"Be sure, be sure!" whispered Rose, laying her hand upon his arm; but the next instant Estoc himself stood before them, saying, "Quick, Louis! quick! there are more people stirring in the chateau than we wot of."

"Chazeul was on the walls but a moment ago," replied de Montigni, "but the sentinel would not less him pass."

"I know—I know," replied Estoc. "I heard it all, but the rain has driven him in, the white-livered knave. You will get sadly wet, sweet lady, I fear."

"Oh, I mind not a little rain," replied Rose d'Albret. "How often have you seen me drenched in hunting, Estoc! and it will not hurt me more now that I am being hunted; but what was the cause of the delay?"

"They had given the man the wrong key," replied Estoc, "and he knew not how to get the right one without betraying that there was something secret going on; the door is open now, however. Let us be quick. Hark! there is two! Moments are precious."

"I am quite ready," said Rose; but De Montigni, before he suffered her to issue forth into the rain, covered her as well as he could with his cloak, though the short mantles of those days afforded but a very inefficient protection against a heavy shower. They then crossed the passage, and gliding along under the wall, found the door of the sallyport open, and the guard holding it back.

"God bless you, lady! God bless you, sir," said the man as they passed. And the prayer of a plain and honest heart for our welfare has always its effect in comforting and reassuring.

Estoc lead the way along the stone-faced court, under the earthen mound which there defended the wall, across a little bridge over the ditch, and through the gate beyond, which he unlocked to let them pass. Beneath the shadow of the gate, and three or four old trees which grew beside it, stood a party of seven or eight men, with their hands upon their horses' bridles, ready to mount in a moment. Two other saddle horses were among them, and while De Montigni lifted Rose d'Albret lightly from the ground and mounted her securely, old Estoc said, in a low voice, "It is your own limousin, mademoiselle, so you know his mouth, and he knows your hand."

"Thank you, thank you for your kindness, Estoc," replied the lady; "these are moments never to be forgotten."

De Montigni pressed the old soldier in his arms; and then saying, "We shall meet again soon, Estoc, I hope, in the king's camp," he sprang upon his horse's back, and laying his hand upon Rose's rein, to lead her forward

through the darkness, set out upon the road to Dreux.

Estoc turned back into the castle, closed the gates behind him, made a turn upon the ramparts, listened for a few minutes till he could hear no more the retreating sound of horses' feet, and then retiring to the guardroom under the principal gate, dried himself by the blazing logs upon the hearth. In a few minutes, however, he gave some orders to one of the soldiers who was sitting near, and then stretching himself upon a camp bedstead in the corner, was soon sound asleep.

Every thing remained quiet in the chateau during the night. Unconscious of what had taken place, those whose cunning schemes had been frustrated, remained in the tranquil slumber of imaginary success, dreaming of the coming day, and of seeing the seal put upon their intrigues by the voluntary renunciation of De Montigni's right, through which not only the much coveted estates of Liancourt, but the hand of Rose d'Albret, and the inheritance which that hand conveyed, were, they thought, to be lost to him, for whom they were originally intended.

The only person who slept but little was the old commander De Liancourt, who, partly on account of the pain of his wounds, and partly from anxiety for his nephew's safety and success, lay tossing on his bed till within an hour of morning, wondering if all had gone right, and repeating a thousand and a thousand times, "All is quiet! They must have got off, otherwise I should have heard something."

With the first dawn of day, some of the inferior servants began to stir in the house. The scullions proceeded to their abhorred task of scouring the brazen pots and kettles in the kitchen; the turnspit dog waddled slowly from the hearth, the scene of his daily toil, where he found warmth and repose during the night, to hide himself in some corner from the eyes of the persecuting cook; and various other drudges, well called *femmes de peine*, went through the different halls and chambers, clearing off that dust which rises from the decay of every earthly thing, and falls every hour—a memento, if we would but see it, of the perishable nature of all here below—upon the polish and the gilding with which we seek to cover all the coarse materials from our eyes.

Soon the higher functionaries began to appear upon the scene; cooks, and grooms of the chambers, and all the officers and attendants, who, in those days, thronged the house of a French nobleman; and then the masters themselves. First came Father Walter, in his black garments, pacing up and down the hall, and gazing from time to time out of the high windows at the rainy sky. He was soon joined by Monsieur de Chazeul, followed shortly after by the Count de Liancourt. These three continued, stretching their limbs by a walk up and down the wide pavement for near half an hour, conversing over all that had taken place the day before, and speculating upon the coming event. Chazeul related to his two companions the intelligence he had received from Blanchette on the preceding night, and the application which De Montigni had made for another interview with Rose d'Albret.

"That was not right," said Monsieur de Liancourt. "One interview was all he asked; that was granted, and he ought not to have sought more."

How boldly do we judge of what is right and wrong in the conduct of others! how boldly do we censure and condemn, very often when we are doing them the bitterest injustice! Monsieur de Liancourt totally forgot, when he talked of right, that Louis de Montigni was really entitled, not only to one interview with Rose d'Albret, but to every hour of her time—to her hand—to her heart—to her fortune: he totally forgot it, I say, and thought that the schemes which he had so long nurtured, the ideas which he had so long indulged, formed the only standard by which to measure the conduct and the rights of others. Do not let the reader suppose this unnatural. Let him look around, he will find the same perversion of views in every country, in every house, in every family; let him look within, he will find it more or less in his own heart, whenever his own interests, wishes, prejudices, or passions are placed in opposition to the rights of others.

At length, when about half an hour had passed, the count began to think it strange that his fair ward, who was always an early riser, had not yet appeared, and asked if the others had seen anything of her.

"No," replied Chazeul. "I suppose, as she cannot take her favourite walk this rainy day, she keeps her own chamber, to be out of the way of De Montigni."

The priest looked down and mused, for he entertained some doubts as to Rose's feelings being exactly those which Chazeul's vanity led him to suppose, though, it must be remarked, he had not the slightest suspicion of the event which had just taken place.

"Have you seen Blanchette this morning?" inquired the count.

"No," replied Chazeul; "but I will send my knave Alphonso to see after her. It will but be courteous to inquire for her mistress's health."

He was turning towards the door, when his mother entered, and asked at once, "Where is Rose?"

"She has not appeared yet," replied Chazeul. "I am just going to inquire after her, most noble dame."

"See—see yourself, Nicholas," cried the marchioness, sharply. "One of my girls tells me, that, passing by her door just now, she heard a knocking, as if carpenters were at work. Is De Montigni absent too? Why, it is near the hour of mass!"

Chazeul left the room instantly by the door which led direct along the corridor to the apartments of Rose d'Albret. All was still, however; the noise which his mother mentioned had ceased; and it was not till he came close to the antechamber that he thought he heard a sound of moaning, as if some one was giving way to the expression of pain or grief. He instantly knocked at the door, and called to Blanchette, who demanded, in a voice half drowned by tears, "Who is there?"

"It is I," replied the marquis. "What is the matter, Blanchette? Open the door; let me in."

"I cannot," replied Blanchette; "the door is locked, and I can't get out."

"How is your mistress?" asked Chazeul.

"I do not know," replied the girl.

"Well, go in and see, then," said the marquis.

"I cannot," rejoined Blanchette, again; "that door is fastened too."

A sudden suspicion of the truth flashed through the mind of Chazeul, and he stood for a moment stupified with surprise and anger. Then, hastening back to the hall, he exclaimed, "Something is wrong! The girl Blanchette is locked into her room. We must force the door."

"To the window! to the window!" replied the marchioness; and, hurrying out to the flying bridge, they descended the stone steps into the *coulisse*, Monsieur de Liancourt exclaiming,

"Quick! some one bring a ladder."

"There is no ladder needed, my wise brother," said Madame de Chazeul the moment after, pointing with her hand to the spot where, underneath the window of Rose's chamber, might still be seen the instrument used in her escape. "You will find one ready. Those who like to go on in the rain, and see the nest of the flown bird, may go; I shall return to the hall;" and, thus saying, she ascended the steps, while the rest of the party hurried on.

By the ladder easy access was obtained to the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret; and it is not necessary to detail the state in which it was found. Rose, as the reader is aware, was no longer there; and all that remained for those who sought her was to liberate Blanchette, and inquire when, how, and why her mistress had fled.

The girl, however, could tell them nothing of the truth; and, though she made up for the deficiency by telling plenty of falsehoods, endeavouring, in the fear and agitation of the moment, to screen herself from suspicions which were never directed towards her, yet her information of having heard her mistress move in her chamber about three o'clock in the morning, without thinking anything of it, of having visited her the last thing before she went to bed herself, and seeing her soundly asleep in bed, together with sundry other fanciful pieces of intelligence, proved not in the least satisfactory to the hearers.

After much wonder, and some consideration, and a good deal of examination in the apartments of Mademoiselle d'Albret, the party were obliged to make their egress by the window again, the outer door being locked, and the key gone.

They found Madame de Chazeul in the hall, with an angry spot upon her cheek, and her brow knit, while the old commander, dressed as if for a journey, with his sword by his side, and the cross of his order round his neck, sat upon a bench at one side of the hall, tapping his leg deliberately with his staff.

"I am glad you are come, count," said the marchioness; "here is our brother Michael evidently knows all about this infamous abduction, but he will make no answer to my inquiries."

"Why, I told you I would not, Jacqueline, till Liancourt came," replied the commander. "Now he is come, I will tell you all I know, and also perform the task I took upon me yesterday."

"Well, sir, well, be quick," replied the count. "*I have borne your* humours too long; and I will endure no tricks and treachery, depend upon it."

The old soldier's cheek grew warm. "No tricks but your own, sir," he replied. "But we all know you are tool in the hands of others, and therefore to be forgiven, like all weak men who make themselves the instruments of knaves. Ay, you may stare, Jacqueline; but be good enough to remember, I was never afraid of those black eyes, even when the cheeks were round and soft, and am not more timid now, when they are shrivelled and skinny. The simple matter of fact is this, Anthony: you have all laid your heads together to deprive Louis de Montigni, the son of our poor sister Louise, of the inheritance which I renounced in her favour, and in favour of her children. I did not renounce it in your favour, Madame Jacqueline; for you were always able to take care of yourself, though Louise was mild and gentle, and, consequently, continually kept down, and deprived of just estimation."

"And may I ask, sir," said Monsieur de Liancourt, with a cold and haughty air, "what business it was of yours if Monsieur de Montigni chose to renounce also?"

"I don't know that," replied the old commander; "he cannot renounce without my returning to my rights. However, I would have made no noise about that, if he had done so willingly, and with his eyes open. But I did not choose to have him deceived, and so I was resolved he should know all. The priest there, like an honest man, told him that he had some right to the estates, and I told him what."

The marchioness turned a fierce look upon Father Walter, who met it with a calm and tranquil air, apparently in no degree taken by surprise or annoyed.

"But I told him, moreover, my good brother," continued the commander, "that if he gave up the estates, he gave up his claim and right to the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret—to our sweet Rose. It is right that every one should know how he stands and what he does, brother Anthony; and as you did not tell him, I did. I told him the contract was in his favour, not in that of yonder gentleman in ruffs and earrings, inasmuch as it engaged for the marriage of the young lady to the heir of Liancourt, which he is by my renunciation; and if he had given up his claim, I would have married her myself; for then I should be heir of Liancourt again. But as I am old, and somewhat battered in the wars, and should limp a little in following a bride through a ballroom, he thought fit to save me the trouble, and, consequently determined to hold his own."

"My son, my son, this is no jesting matter," said Father Walter, in a grave tone; "I beseech you, what you have to speak, speak seriously."

"If I speak seriously, Sir Priest," replied the old soldier, "I may have to say things not very palatable to many here present. But if it must be so, so it shall be. In a word, then, brother, he found that he had been deceived, kept in ignorance, cajoled to part with rights concealed from him. Had it been but the estates, he would have given them up at a word, as I did; but he would not give up her he loved, except at her own request. In this, too, he discovered he had been cheated. In-

stead of finding that she had freely and willingly promised her hand to a man who possessed her heart, he learned that she too had been misled into the belief that she was contracted to yonder gentleman, and that she was about, unwillingly, to yield to what she thought duty —poor thing!—without either loving, or having promised at all."

"But she did promise," exclaimed Chazeul. "I call upon all here to witness it."

"That's a lie!" answered the commander, sternly; "nor the first, good nephew, by many! She never promised; for only two days ago I heard her ask a short time to consider. You cannot deny it priest."

"I cannot," said Father Walter.

"Well, then," continued the old officer, "Louis asked to see her alone, to learn her own mind—"

"We did not know that he was going thus treacherously—" cried Chazeul.

"To tell her the truth," interrupted the commander, "or you would have taken care to prevent it. But when he had enlightened her on those subjects, and found that she very much preferred himself to you, he suggested to her that, to save needless trouble and dispute, it would be better for her to take her departure at once with the husband of her father's choice, and, placing themselves under the protection of the king, demand his sanction to their immediate marriage. Ay, *the king!* nephew—the king, Father Walter—Henry the Fourth, king of France and Navarre, who is so, and will be so whether it pleases you or not. But I forget," he added, "the boy left a letter with me for you brother Anthony. Ho! Estoc there, get me that letter, pray."

While this delectable conversation had been proceeding, Madame de Chazeul had seated herself in the chair usually occupied by the count, and, leaning her head upon her hand, had seemed more busied with her own thoughts than with anything that was going on around; but at the mention of the letter, she raised her head, with a bitter sneer upon her lip, asking, "Pray, whose manufacture is the epistle? Is it an extract from Cæsar's Commentaries by the Commander de Liancourt, or a parody upon Ovoid's Art of Love by Monsieur de Montigni?"

"Neither, Jacqueline," replied her brother, "but a good honest letter, from a youth whom you have not been able to cheat, with all your cunning. The letter—the letter, Estoc!" he continued, as his old comrade put his head into the hall. "Where is Louis's letter? You had it."

"Oh, ay! of course he had it," cried Chazeul, as the good soldier advanced with a paper in his hand; and then turning round the marquis whispered for an instant to the count, who, after taking the letter from the hands of Estoc, made him a sign to stay.

"You know of all this affair, sir," said Monsieur de Liancourt, fixing his eyes upon him, "and gave aid and encouragement?"

"I saw them at the last moment," replied Estoc, at once, "and had they wanted encouragement, would have given it to them; but they did not; and as to aiding them, I had no commands to stop any one quitting the castle."

"It was your duty, sir, to stop any fugitives from authority," replied the count, "and I have a great mind to punish you."

"To do that you have no power, sir," answered Estoc; "you forget I am not your servant, Count of Liancourt, but a gentleman and a soldier, though a poor one. I have, at the desire of my good old commander here, aided you voluntarily to keep your chateau in these troublous times; but I have taken no wage or pay from you or yours; and let me tell you, he is a bold man that talks of punishing a French gentleman that has done no wrong."

"Come, come, Anthony," cried the commander, "no folly, if you please. Estoc is my *guidon;* you have naught to do with him. If there be fault, it is mine. I aided, I encouraged them; I told them to go, and helped them to do it; and whoever says I had not a right to do so, lies in his teeth! But read the letter, brother o'mine, for you may have something to say to it, and I am away this morning. My litter and my men are ready in the court."

"And the sooner you go, Michael, the better," said Madame de Chazeul.

"Not at your bidding, Jacqueline," replied the commander, while his brother opened the letter and read it. "Ay, here comes your creature Blanchette. On my life, this has been a pretty honest scheme from the beginning."

"What does he say?" inquired the marchioness, as the count read.

"Oh, hear it, hear it!" answered Monsieur de Liancourt: "you will then see how grateful he is for all the care and kindness I have bestowed upon his youth;" and he proceeded to read as follows:

"SIR, MY UNCLE,

"Before this reaches your hands, I shall be far distant, feeling myself compelled to take a step which nothing but the desire of avoiding that strife and contention which must ensue, were I to stay and urge my rights in your house, would induce me to adopt. At the same time, it is necessary, for my own justification, that I should give some explanation of my conduct. You were pleased, on my arrival, to ask for my signature to certain papers, which, on examination of the documents themselves, and consultation with my uncle, the commander, and others, I found implied a renunciation of my clear right to the estates of Liancourt, and the acceptance of certain benefices as an equivalent. Had that been the only question, I would not have scrupled to consent; but I found that by a contract between you and the late Count de Marennes, made while I was considered certain heir to those estates, the hand of Mademoiselle d'Albret was promised to the person inheriting them. You had given me to understand that the lady's inclination led her to a union with my cousin De Chazeul; and had it been so, my love for her is too sincere not to have induced me at once to remove every obstacle that my prior claim produced. But certain circumstances led me to believe that in this there was an error; and I therefore required an interview with Mademoiselle d'Albret, that both she and I might know our real situation, which, by your pardon, let me say, had been concealed from both. I found, during that interview, that

she had been deceived into the belief that, in giving her hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, she was only fulfilling her father's contract. When the truth, however, was explained to her, I found that, far from desiring such an alliance, it was most repugnant to her, and that, on the contrary, she was willing to give her hand to him for whom it had been truly destined. We both saw that to urge my rights in person here would necessarily produce strife—nay, perhaps bloodshed; and we were well aware that it might be unsafe for her to remain after I was gone, as there are too many instances in these days of contracts forcibly violated, and compulsion used to produce alliances neither prompted by inclination nor justified by law. The course which had been pursued towards us for the last five years led us to apprehend that such might be the case now; and to avoid such a result, Mademoiselle d'Albret consented to accompany me to the court of his majesty, where, under his sanction and authority, I trust soon to fulfil with her the engagement between her father and yourself. As soon as that is accomplished, being in this matter moved by no sordid considerations, you will not find me indisposed, in gratitude for the care and protection which you bestowed on my early youth, to fulfil your wishes, whatever they may be, in regard to the disposal of your property, even to the sacrifice of what may be my own contingent rights. May God keep you in his holy guard!

"Your nephew,

"Louis de Montigni."

The latter part of the letter was but little attended to by Madame de Chazeul or her son, who were busily talking together in tones so low that but a word or two only was distinguishable even by the quick ears of the priest, who stood near them.

"Impossible!" said Chazeul, in reply to something which his mother appeared to have suggested: "we have not men enough. He has fifteen of his own old soldiers here; and a number of the men of Liancourt would take his part. I have but seven in the castle. No, it is impossible."

The countess muttered something in return, and then added, "Stay, Chazeul: a better plan!" She then whispered a word or two, which escaped all ears but those of her son, adding, "You see to it: bid him come back at full speed when he has seen them housed. Send notice to Nemours, too, and Mayenne; so you will have them in a net. In the mean time, stop this farce as soon as possible. I have a word or two to say to another personage: Good father, I would fain speak with you," she continued aloud, addressing Walter de la Tremblade, "either before or after mass."

"Which you please, daughter," replied Walter de la Tremblade; "we have still half an hour."

"That will be enough," answered the marchioness, rising: "and so good-day, good brother Michael. Like all fools who meddle with what does not concern them, you will one day rue the mischief that you have now made."

"Never, Jacqueline," replied the commander. "I am not so famous for scheming as you are; *but, be you sure that*, whatever you may be now plotting, I will find means to put it out of joint with plain honesty and truth, as I have done to-day. Farewell, brother Anthony," he continued; "let us not part bad friends; for what I have done has been as much to save your honour as anything else."

He held out his hand as he spoke, but the count put his behind his back, saying, "My honour can take care of itself, Michael; and I do not thank you for this insolent meddling."

"Poor man," said the commander; and, turning abruptly away, he strode out of the hall, followed by Estoc.

CHAPTER XIV.

There are dull pauses in human life when the mind, however anxious it may be to speed forward upon its active career, is forced by circumstances to halt and deal with minor things; as a traveller on foot, however eager he may be to hasten forward upon his way, is sometimes obliged to stop and take a small stone out of his shoe, lest it should impede the whole after part of his journey: and thus, though we would willingly go on with those in whom we are more interested, we must linger for a moment or two with the priest and Madame de Chazeul, in order to proceed more rapidly when we have related some things which, though not very entertaining, are absolutely necessary to the right understanding of this history.

The lady led the way to her own chamber with a step she intended to be perfectly calm and tranquil, but which, by its occasional irregularity and sharp jerking movement, betrayed the agitated and angry feelings which she struggled to conceal. The priest followed, with his still, even pace, his large dark eyes, as usual, bent down, and not a trace of any emotion upon his countenance. He seemed, indeed, like a moving statue, to the countenance of which the sculptor had successfully endeavoured to give an expression of great thought, of mind, and equanimity, but not of feeling or emotion.

When they reached the lady's chamber, the Marchioness de Chazeul took a seat, and pointed to another with a somewhat haughty wave of the hand; but Father Walter sat down deliberately, and, crossing one foot over the other, remained in an easy attitude waiting for Madame de Chazeul to begin, as if totally unconscious that there were any angry feelings in her bosom towards himself. He made no inquiry, even by a look, in regard to the nature of the communication which he was about to receive, but calmly bent his head a little forward as if to listen, and waited for her to begin.

"Well, Monsieur de la Tremblade," said the lady at length, "so you have thought fit to commence this system of sweet candour towards Monsieur de Montigni, and to tell him that he has a right to the estates."

"I always advocated candour, madam," replied the priest; "and if my advice had been followed, and the exact state of the case had been told him in Italy, with a request that he would remove all obstacles, he would have remained where he was, and you would not have been in such an unpleasant situation at present."

"And therefore, I suppose, because people judged differently from yourself," said the marchioness, "you thought fit to spoil their plans, when yours were not adopted."

"Not exactly," answered Father Walter, perfectly unmoved; "I only acted as was right and fitting on the occasion. I betrayed no secrets, lady; I gave no farther information than was merely necessary to induce this young gentleman to do what was required of him. The very act of renunciation itself bore upon its face the acknowledgment that he had rights; and I did not in any degree define them, but merely said that it was necessary he should sign the papers, to guard against any legal contest hereafter."

"Pshaw!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "do you think I do not see your motives, Walter de la Tremblade! You would fain have so managed that the greater part of the benefices, if not the whole, should fall into your hands. You were not content with the Abbey of Chizay—not you! You must have more: and now a fine business you have made of it, for you have lost all to yourself and to us too."

The slightest possible glow passed over the cheek of Walter de la Tremblade; but he replied, without the least alteration of tone, "You are wrong in your suspicions, daughter; and they are unworthy of you or me."

"Quite worthy of me," replied the marchioness, "for I like to see to the bottom of men's hearts. Now, I will answer for it, you persuaded him that it was very improper for laymen to hold the property of the Church; you showed him that he could not conscientiously keep these benefices, if he got them, without taking the gown. Ha! have I touched you? Can you deny it, sir?"

"Entirely," replied Father Walter. "He stated such objections himself; and it was not for me to argue against my conscience. I told him, however, that it was a constant practice in France for men, not ecclesiastics, to hold such benefices. The objections were his, not mine, though how you came to learn they were ever made, I know not, as his conduct turned upon very different feelings."

"How I came to learn!" exclaimed the marchioness, with a scornful smile; "because I know you both right well—by no other means, good father. Oh! I understand the whole. Think you I have lived for fifty years, with my eyes open, in this busy world, and do not know how a calm, quiet priest, by a few soft, half-whispered words, can instil doubts, and insinuate his own views into the mind of a weak-hearted youth; how, by a look, or even a faint denial of that which he seeks most strongly to impress, he can produce the effect desired, when seeming to oppose it."

"Madam, you are very learned in such arts," replied Father Walter, with a slight sarcastic curl of the lip.

"I am," answered the marchioness, boldly, "and I know that Father Walter can make use of them as well as others. But there is such a thing as overreaching one's self, sir; and methinks you have done so in this instance."

"Not in the least, daughter," replied the priest. "I am quite contented, if you are."

"But I am not!" cried the marchioness, vehemently, "and I will have no more of this. You think the game is lost; and, therefore, with the cunning of your cloth, you bear it tranquilly. I know that it is not so hopeless as you imagine; and for that reason I take the trouble of telling you, that if I recover the false steps taken, I will not be frustrated by you."

She spoke angrily and haughtily; and then, as if feeling that she had given too much way to passion, she rose, went to the window, gazed out for a moment, and played with the embroidery on her dress. Father Walter in the mean while remained calm and silent: not that thought—ay, and even passion, were less busy in his own bosom than in hers; but he was more habituated to command his own sensations, and to keep them, like those under-currents of the sea which carry ships far astray without producing a ripple on the surface, from showing, by any outward sign, the course in which they were bent.

At length the marchioness returned, with a smoother brow and more placable look. "Come, Father Walter," she said, "we must not quarrel; we are needful to each other. Let us act together, and, depend upon it, the interests of both will be better served by so doing than if each pursued a course apart."

"I deny that I have ever acted otherwise, daughter," replied the priest. "I am glad to hear you have hopes of retrieving what has gone wrong; and I will aid you to the very utmost of my power, not only to wrest from Monsieur de Montigni the estates of Liancourt, but also to unite Mademoiselle d'Albret to your son There are a few things that I would not undertake to accomplish this; but not from the motives you imagine—from very, very different reasons."

"What may they be?" inquired the marchioness; "if you promote my views boldly and unhesitatingly, and I can aid yours, I will, without scruple. What may they be, good father?"

"Listen, then, daughter," replied the priest. "To an ecclesiastic of the Holy Roman Catholic Church there are objects far higher, far nearer to his heart than any interests of his own. Indeed, rightly speaking, we should have no interest but one, though human weakness will occasionally have its share. When we enter into that body to which I belong, we lose our identity; we become but part of a great whole; we merge all our own passions, hopes, wishes, desires, all our personal feelings and views, in those of the Church, and for her interests, as the highest object at which we can aim, we are justified in taking means, and performing acts, which we should consider culpable were they undertaken for any individual end."

"Well, father," said the marchioness, as he paused, "to what does this tend?"

"To a very important point, daughter," replied the priest. "This young man, this De Montigni, boldly and straightforwardly acknowledges the heretic, Henry de Bourbon, as King of France. 'Tis but the day before yesterday, that, for the deliverance of the heretic named Chasseron, a man who, I hear, made himself bitterly obnoxious during what is called the Lover's War, he charged and put to death several good Catholics of the League. One of them was brought in here severely wounded, and I

confessed him last night before his death. The youth is, even now, gone to join his heretic monarch, excommunicated by the head of the Christian Church, and deprived by him of all right and title to the allegiance of any but heretics like himself. Think you, lady, that a priest of the true religion would willingly see estates and power in the hands of such a one? No, daughter, no; and I believe that any scheme would be justifiable to deprive him of the means of injuring the Church, of upholding heretics and infidels, and of overthrowing all true religion in this realm. It is with great difficulty I have kept your brother—whose wavering weakness in such things I need not tell you—from acknowledging Henry of Bourbon; and, if his heir goes over to that side, all my pains are lost. It has been for these causes that I have joined heart and hand in endeavouring to bring about the marriage between Mademoiselle d'Albret and Monsieur de Chazeul, one of the brightest ornaments of the Holy Catholic Union; and you have done me great wrong in supposing that any private interest whatsoever would induce me to risk, even by a word, the great object I have in view."

"Perhaps I have," replied the marchioness! "but yet, father, it was imprudent to let this youth know that he had any rights."

"Not at all," replied the priest, somewhat sternly. "That fact could not be concealed. The very papers showed it, and the attempt to keep it back naturally produced suspicion and inquiry. If others had played their part as well as I did, and had watched carefully to prevent all communication between your brother Michael and his nephew till de Montigni had signed, no harm would have arisen; but my advice was ill followed; they were suffered to meet in private—how and when, I know not; but five minutes was sufficient to do all the mischief. And now it is necessary that I should know what you are about to do—what are your hopes of retrieving this affair—and what scheme is to be followed for the future."

"What would you advise yourself, father!" inquired the lady, willing to test his sincerity.

"Methinks," answered the priest, "there is but one course to be taken. Lose not a moment longer in vain deliberation, surprise, and recrimination, but raise all the men of Liancourt, and send them out to overtake this runaway ward. A thousand things may occur to stop her. Despatch messengers to Mayenne, Nemours, Aumale, with information of the circumstances. Tell them to cut her off from the king's camp and send her back. Once here, we will find means to deal with her. This is your only chance;—but a clew to her course may be gained by the road which the old commander follows. Be you sure that he is going to join them; and it is even not improbable that they are waiting for him at no great distance."

"Give me your hand, Father Walter," cried the marchioness. "All that you propose is already ordered; and, if we succeed by your assistance, not only Chizay, but another abbey, richer still, shall show our gratitude—"

The priest waved his hand, and she added, with a smile, "to enable you to promote the true interests of the Roman Catholic religion."

Father Walter was about to reply; but at that moment one of the marchioness's women entered the room, saying, "Madam, here are Theodore and one of the men you sent back to Chazeul, who wish to speak to you directly."

Her mistress made a sign to be silent; and Father Walter observing her gesture, took his leave and retired.

CHAPTER XV.

The night was as black as Acheron. The rain poured down in torrents. The melting of the snow rendered the roads in the lower parts one mass of mud and water, while the higher ground, where the temperature was colder, afafforded nothing but a slippery and uncertain footing for the horses, over which they had the greatest difficulty in making their way. There was no possibility of seeing more than four or five yards in advance; the wind blew the falling deluge in the eyes of the whole party; and the heart of Louis de Montigni sank when he thought of all that Rose d'Albret was exposed to for his sake. He strove to cheer her, however, as she rode beside him; he guided and supported her horse in all the more difficult parts of the way; and often he expressed his fears and apprehensions regarding her, almost regretting that any inducement had led him to bring her forth in such a night as that.

Rose spoke little in return, for her heart was too full of manifold sensations, her mind too busy with thought for many words; but all that she did say was kind, and even cheerful; for she perceived clearly his deep anxiety for her, and strove to lighten the load as much as possible. She assured him that she did not mind the tempest, that she was accustomed to endure such things frequently; that her jennet was the most sure-footed beast on earth; that she doubted not the sky would soon clear; and when she saw how he reproached himself for all that she was enduring, she reassured him by expressing her joy and thankfulness at having escaped from a union which every moment's thought rendered more odious in her eyes. Thus they rode on for nearly an hour and a half, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, according to the nature of the ground: the horsemen who accompanied them keeping as close around them as possible, for even such a dark and stormy night was not without dangers of another kind, from the state of turbulent anarchy into which the country was plunged.

At length, however, the rain suddenly ceased; the air became hot and sultry; the wind died away; and Rose, turning to her lover, exclaimed, "I told you, Louis, it would be finer soon."

Almost as she spoke, a bright blaze flashed over the whole sky, illuminating the prospect on every side, which had before been hidden under the dark veil of night. The trees of the forest on the right; the wide, undulating country on the left; the village and the spire in the distance; the valley into which they were descending in front, were all seen for a single instant as clearly as if the day had suddenly dawned; while across the very midst of the glare which blazed over the whole heaven was

seen a thin and quivering line of more intense light, beginning near the zenith, and ending apparently at a tree some two or three hundred yards in advance, several large limbs of which were seen falling to the earth, with a rending and a crashing sound, just as the darkness swept over the sky again, and all was night once more.

The horses started at the blaze; and Rose d'Albret covered her eyes with her hand, while Louis de Montigni checked the speed at which they were proceeding, saying, "We must go more slowly, dear Rose. This is unfortunate indeed."

"It may be so, Louis," replied his fair companion; "but storm and tempest, and the fierce turbulence of such a night as this are nothing in my eyes, compared with the slow and lengthened misery of a home without affection, and the living death of a marriage without love."

"Look! look! sir!" cried one of the men, pointing forward toward the sky: but the eyes of his master, and of all the party were already fixed on the same spot, where, in the midst of the heaven, one of the most extraordinary phenomena of nature was suddenly presented to them. For a space of several degrees the clouds seemed to have rolled back, and were seen piled up in enormous masses on either hand, like the scenes flanking a wide stage, while between them spread out an expanse of pale whitish light, with a red, wavy streak below, resembling a plain which has caught the purple rays of the setting sun. On either hand, from among the masses of vapour, appeared to dash forth bodies of fiery combatants, horse and foot mingled together, rushing, charging, overthrowing each other, now mixed in furious combat, now separating for a moment, now chasing each other over the field. Again and again the squadron met, as if in deadly shock, and balls of fire, as of some unearthly cannonade, crossed the sky in the midst of that strange scene, till at length, while the fight seemed still going on, the clouds once more rolled over the whole, and all returned to darkness.*

"This is very strange," exclaimed Louis de Montigni: "I have heard of such a thing, but I never believed it before."

"We shall have a battle soon, sir," said one of the men; "I wish we could have seen which party won the day."

"The king's, to be sure," replied another; "did you not see how he drove them back?"

"And which do you call the king's?" asked the young baron, smiling to see how readily imagination had seized upon the strange sight they had beheld, to turn it to the purposes of superstition.

"That on the right, sir," answered the man. "The king has the right, I am sure; and, besides, I saw him in the front rank with a large plume in his casque."

"My eyes were not so good," said De Montigni. "Did you ever see the king, Hugh?"

"Not I, sir," replied the attendant; "but I am certain that was he, and his horse was as red as blood."

His master said nothing in return, but rode on slowly, conversing in a low tone with Rose d'Albret, while from time to time the lightning flashed across their path, but less vividly than before; and ere long the rain began to fall again, and the thunder ceased.

Now came the most fatiguing part of the journey, for the narrow path which they were following entered the hilly and wooded country about Montlandon and Champrond en Gatine, and they were forced to climb and descend continually, over a road on which the snow was but half melted and the mud up to the fetlocks of their horses, while still the torrents poured down from the sky, drenching their garments through and through. The wind had totally ceased, but the air was more sultry and close than ever, and both horses and riders suffered much from its oppressive warmth.

Rose d'Albret became silent from fatigue, for the agitation of the last twenty-four hours now had its full effect upon her, and fears lest her bodily strength should give way added to what she suffered. There is a calm and persevering endurance which goes far; there is a light-hearted and hopeful energy which carries one through innumerable evils; but the greatest burden upon all exertion is the fear of failing, if once we let apprehension take possession of us. Rose knew that it is so, and she strove hard, for De Montigni's sake, to banish all such alarm; but the time seemed very weary, the way interminably long. She looked anxiously for the first gray light of morning. More than once, when at the bottom of a hill, she thought she saw some streaks of light over the brow; and as often she was disappointed, till at length, as they issued forth from a thick forest that then lay between Marolles and the edge of La Beauce, her lover exclaimed gladly, "There, there is the daylight, Rose;" and, looking forward, she perceived distinctly the faint hues of coming day stretching over the eastern sky, and the dark walls and towers of the castle of Montlandon on its wooded height standing out in strong relief.

That castle offers now nothing but a picturesque ruin to the eye of the passing traveller; but at the time I speak of it was inhabited, and a beacon fire on one of the turrets, waning in lustre with the rising light, told that its owner took part for one side or the other in the civil war.

"If I remember right," said Louis de Montigni, speaking to the man who acted as their guide, "that is Montlandon; cannot we get shelter there?"

"No, sir, oh no!" replied the soldier. "We must change the colour of our scarfs if we do; for Monsieur de Montlandon is furious for the Union, and a great friend of Monsieur de Chazeul's."

"That is unfortunate, indeed," said De Montigni. "Alas! dear Rose, I fear you are well-nigh exhausted. Can you go on, my beloved?"

"Oh yes!" answered Rose, in as cheerful a tone as she could assume; "for another hour, Louis—or two, should it be needed."

"It will not be safe to stop, mademoiselle, till we get to Les Chatelets," observed the attendant, who was one of the old followers of the good commander de Liancourt, "and that is near three leagues; but the road is better

* This phenomenon was seen distinctly by many persons in both armies immediately before the battle of Ivry, and was visible over an extent of more than twenty leagues.

here in Beauce, and we can go faster in the daylight. But we had better use speed, sir, and pass this village and Champrond before the people are awake, or we may find enemies."

"With all my heart," cried Rose d'Albret: "this slow travelling in the darkness is more fatiguing far than a quick pace;" and, putting their horses into a brisk canter, they hurried through Montlandon before any of the cottage windows showed signs of waking life. When they reached Champrond, however, a good many of the villagers were standing out under the shelter of their doors. The greater part, indeed, seemed more terrified at the sight of the body of horsemen than desirous of impeding their progress, and retreated into their houses as soon as the white scarfs appeared. But one stout blacksmith stood before his forge, and shouted as they passed, "What news from the armies?"

"The king has taken Dreux," replied one of the attendants in the same loud tone, "and is marching upon Chartres."

"Curses on the Maheutre!" cried the blacksmith, and retired grumbling into his dwelling.

No opposition, however, was offered to their passage, and at a quick pace they hurried on; but the anxious eye of De Montigni saw that Rose's cheek was very pale, her fair head bent down, and the hand which held her bridle resting on the pommel of the saddle, as if she could hardly manage her reins.

"Ah, dearest girl," he said, "let us stop at the first cottage. You are faint—you are ill."

"No, no," she answered, "I can go on, Louis. I am somewhat tired, but I can go on," and in about five minutes more their guide exclaimed,

"There is the Eure! We shall soon be safe!"

Such words of encouragement revived the poor girl's strength for a few minutes longer, till a hamlet, containing some half dozen houses, appeared a little to the left, and De Montigni, without further question, turned his horse's head thither, sprang to the ground at the door of the first cottage, and throwing his arm round his fair companion, lifted her from the saddle.

Rose leaned upon his bosom, for she could not support herself; and, raising her in his arms, he carried her into the hut, where they found a peasant and his young wife taking their early meal. The good people of this place seemed to know little, or care little, of Royalists and Leaguers. They were of the best party, the party of human nature; and the young woman rose eagerly from the table, with expressions of kindly compassion, to assist poor Rose d'Albret, laid her upon her own bed, all dripping as she was, and insisted upon making her put on some of her own apparel, while she dried the lady's wet garments at the fire. Fatigue and exhaustion, however, were the greatest evils under which Rose was suffering; and De Montigni eagerly asked for wine, as her pale cheeks and bloodless lips showed him how faint she felt.

"Here is cider," said the peasant, "but that is poor stuff for such a lady; and wine we have none."

"Run, Victor, run down to the priest's," cried his wife; "you will get wine there."

"Or at Master Leger's," answered the cottager; "*he* has better wine than the priest."

"I will go myself," cried De Montigni. "Come with me, good man; and, while we are gone, your wife can undress the lady and assist her to bed. A few hours' repose will do her much good."

"I am better now, Louis," said Rose d'Albret, stretching out her hand to him; "do not leave me long. I am afraid of some one coming while you are gone."

"I will be but an instant, dearest Rose," replied her lover, "and in the mean while our people shall remain round the house. You had better take off your wet clothes, dear one;" and he added, with a faint smile, "I have no title to be present at your toilet yet."

The colour came faintly into her cheeks again; and, once more promising not to be many minutes absent, the young nobleman hurried away with the peasant, closing the door behind him, and bidding the attendants remain on guard before the house till he returned.

At the end of the little straggling hamlet stood a house with a projecting pole, from which was suspended a withered bush, giving clear indication that there was the place where village festivals, marriages, and merry makings usually were celebrated. Here some tolerable wine was easily procured; and, hurrying back with it, De Montigni was soon by the side of her he loved, who, now stretched on the low bed of the good peasants, had already somewhat recovered the rosy look of health, and spoke cheerfully to him of being soon able to proceed.

But De Montigni did not feel so confident of Rose's powers, and inquired anxiously of the peasants whether any carriage or litter could be procured in the neighbourhood. Nothing of the kind, however, was to be heard of, and they assured him that to seek any conveyance but a horse or a mule nearer than Chartres or Dreux was quite out of the question. He then proposed to construct a litter in haste, but Rose would not hear of it, declaring that in an hour's time she would be quite ready to pursue her journey on horseback; and, indeed, she seemed so eager to go on, and so fearful of being overtaken, that she would fain have risen even before an hour was over, declaring that she had had rest enough. De Montigni, however, persuaded her to remain for half an hour longer; and, going out of the door with their young host, he made some inquiries regarding the state of the country in the neighbourhood, and the best road he could follow towards Dreux.

The replies he received were not altogether satisfactory. Several large bodies of men, the peasant said, had passed through the village the day before, but whether they were Royalists or Leaguers he could not well tell, as he took no great heed of such things, and the soldiers had passed on without stopping, even to drink. One corps had taken up its quarters for the night, he heard, in a village about a league and a half farther on; but every fact he mentioned showed the young nobleman that it would be needful to use every precaution, during their onward journey, in order to avoid falling into the hands of the Leaguers. For this purpose, he determined to send forward one of the attendants, with directions to keep about half a mile in advance of the rest of the party, while another preceded them by about three hundred yards, so that

early intelligence might be obtained of any approaching danger. A man, too, was left to follow at a little distance behind, for the purpose of guarding against being overtaken suddenly by any party of pursuers from the chateau of Marzay, though he had good hope that the speed with which they travelled had removed all risk of such an event.

Everything being prepared, all orders given, the horses refreshed and fed, and Rose d'Albret dressed in the clothes which had been dried before a large wood fire, she was once more placed upon the back of her jennet, and, at a slower pace than before, they again set out upon their journey, after De Montigni had amply paid for all that he had taken. At a distance of about a mile from the village, the man who had been thrown forward returned to say that the ropes of the ferryboat over the Eure had been cut by the soldiers as they passed on the preceding day, and that they must go farther up the stream to seek a ford.

The weather, however, had become somewhat finer. The rain had ceased, except a few drops from a flying cloud now and then. Rose looked and spoke cheerfully, and seemed really to have recovered from the fatigue she had undergone; the fear of being overtaken had grown fainter with every league they had advanced; and though the Eure was somewhat flooded by the rains that had fallen, they soon found a ford. The marks of horses' feet showed that some persons had passed not long before; and, causing the whole of his little troop to keep on the left, in order to break the force of the water, De Montigni led over the lady's jennet without much difficulty, and gained the opposite bank.

This obstacle overcome, they proceeded for half an hour more without encountering any fresh impediment; and, giving way to hope and love, they talked of future happiness and bright days to come, and gave way to all the dreams that visit the young heart in the season of fancy and expectation, and clothe the coming years with all the glittering garments of imaginary joy. They were both too young, they were both too inexperienced not to feel the heart rise the moment that danger and apprehension ceased; and, to say truth, though Hope may be, as she is often too justly called, an untiring deceiver, yet, even in the midst of her false promises, she confers real and inestimable benefits, giving us strength to endure and courage to go on, which none of the truer and more substantial things of life can afford.

Thus the happy dreams in which Rose d'Albret and her lover indulged, during that brief half hour, comforted and refreshed her more than the repose she obtained at the cottage; but the pleasant moments were soon interrupted. At the end of the time we have named, the man who was farthest in advance rode back at speed to the one behind him, and, taking his place, sent him back to tell De Montigni that a body of some two hundred horse were moving over the country before them, in the direction of Tremblay. The first soldier had halted; and, riding up with the man who served them as guide, De Montigni asked him, with some anxiety, if he had been seen. The reply was in the negative; and a consultation was held as to what course should now be pursued in order to avoid encountering the party which he had observed. It was at length determined to take the crossroads to the east, and, once more passing the Eure, to endeavour to reach the king's camp at Dreux from the side of Paris.

"We shall have better roads there, sir," said their guide, "and shall run less risk; for the country about Hauteville, Poigny, Epernon, and Maintenon generally holds for the king."

"It will lengthen the way," replied De Montigni, "and I fear for Mademoiselle d'Albret."

"Oh, do not think of me, Louis," exclaimed Rose; "if it is a safer road, it will seem to me a shorter one."

"Besides, Monsieur le Baron," rejoined the guide, "we can rest as long as we like at Nogent Leroy, for it has always been loyal; and, though little more than a village, it defended itself against the Chevalier d'Aumale and three hundred of the League. We can reach it in less than two hours."

"Then let us thither with all speed," answered De Montigni, "for there we shall find safety and repose combined, dear Rose."

This plan was accordingly followed, and in less than the time mentioned, Nogent Leroy was reached without any farther peril or impediment. Though, as the guide had described it, the place was in fact but a village, yet gates and freshly-erected barricades gave it at that time the air of a town; and the marks of musket-balls in the woodwork of the palisade showed that it had been fiercely attacked, and had shown a gallant resistance. The little party was stopped for a moment at the barriers, but the white scarfs worn by De Montigni's men, and the answer of "Vive le Roi!" to the "Qui vive?" of the guard, soon obtained them admission; and, on riding down the street, they reached a small but clean and neat-looking inn, over the door of which was written the usual inscription, "Lodging for man and horse."

The host came out to meet them, showed them into a room strewed with rushes, called forth his wife in eager and imperative tones to wait upon the lady, and began in the same breath to ask tidings of his guests, and to communicate all the information which he himself possessed. The intelligence he afforded, indeed, was much more important than any that De Montigni could supply in return; for the very first news he gave imported that a battle might be expected every hour, that the two armies must be within a few leagues of each other, and that parties of Leaguers and Royalists were hurrying up from every quarter to swell the ranks of Mayenne and the king.

These tidings somewhat startled Montigni and his fair companion; but the host, who was an eager Royalist, spoke so confidently of the certain defeat of the League, and the triumph of the king, that the apprehension of fresh dangers and difficulties, which the intelligence had at first produced, soon died away; and De Montigni, turning to her he loved as soon as they were alone, pressed her hand in his, saying, "God send the king good success, dear Rose; but even if it should be otherwise, which I will not believe, we can but pursue our flight somewhat further, and the very hurry and confusion of such events will serve to conceal us from the eyes of those we have most cause to fear."

Rose, indeed, could scarcely view the matter so cheerfully; but she would not show her apprehensions, and only asked what course her lover would pursue if it should be found that a battle had been fought and lost by the king before they reached his camp.

"That cannot well be, dear Rose," replied De Montigni, "for I trust we shall reach his camp to-night. They say he has raised the siege of Dreux, and is now at Annet. You can take three or four hours' rest here, and yet reach that place before dark. We must do so, if possible; for, in case of success, we shall then be free from danger; and in case of reverse, we shall have the means of judging in what direction to turn our steps. If farther flight should be necessary, which heaven forbid! I know that my own dear Rose will not hesitate to give me her hand at once, to remove all chance of separation; and I would fain obtain the king's written sanction to our union, to obviate all difficulties before a battle takes place, the event of which is always doubtful."

He held Rose's hand in his as he spoke, and, though she bent down her eyes under his eager gaze, she gave no sign of hesitation or reluctance. Yet he could not be satisfied without full consent; and he asked, "Shall it not be so, dear Rose? Will you not be mine at once?"

"I am yours, De Montigni," replied Rose d'Albret, in a low tone. "You will never ask aught that is wrong, I am sure, so that I may well promise to grant whatever you do ask. But I hope we shall find the king, and that he will win the day, and then I may be yours openly and happily, and not in flight, and dread, and concealment."

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CHAPTER XVI.

It was once more night—dark solemn, and sad: the country was a wide, undulating plain, raised high above the course of the river, which might be heard, swelled by the melting of the snows and the heavy rains that had lately fallen, rushing on with a hoarse murmur through its hollow banks. No hedgerows, as in England, diversified the scene by daylight, or gave, even in the obscurity of night, that appearance of care and culture which always brings with it the idea of comfort. On the contrary, all was bleak, wide, and desolate. The sight lost itself in the dark expanse, except where part of a distant village might be faintly seen by a sort of lurid glare that hung over it, rising in black masses against the sky upon the right, with its tall yet heavy spire towering above the rest, and where, towards the left, an indefinite something, confused and vague, rested upon the horizon, as if the rounded tops of trees bounded the plain in that direction. Such was the scene through which Louis de Montigni travelled slowly with Rose d'Albret on the night of the 15th. She was weary, exhausted, anxious; and he, with his heart sinking on her account, looked forward into the deep and sombre scene before him, seeking some object to give hope of repose and shelter, but finding little to encourage or console.

Suddenly a light flitted along by the side of the village, feeble and small as a glow-worm's lamp: but still it raised expectation; and De Montigni said in a low voice, "Surely that must be St. André."

"Perhaps the king may not be there either, Louis," replied Rose, in a faint tone: "all these reports may be as false as that he was at Annet. But, whatever be the case, De Montigni, I fear I must stop at the first houses, for, to say truth, I can go no farther."

"I wish we had not quitted Annet, my beloved," exclaimed the young nobleman; "but see, there are more lights. 'Tis this orchard that hid them. Yes, yes! dear Rose, we are at length coming near the camp."

"Thank God!" replied Rose d'Albret: but she said no more; for with the sense of relief which she experienced at the thought of finding repose even for a night, were mingled manifold doubts and apprehensions regarding the future, as well as all the complicated emotions which might well thrill through a woman's heart at the idea of presenting herself before the many eyes of a strange court, under such circumstances, and at such a moment.

As they advanced, and turned the low wall of a small farm, a new scene broke upon their sight. The village, which was extensive, stretched away to the right; and among the gardens and orchards, a thousand lights were to be seen, either passing along from one place to another, as officers and messengers sped from regiment to regiment, or fixed though flickering in one place, where the soldiery had lighted fires to keep themselves warm during the night and to dry their clothing, wetted by the frequent showers which had diversified the day.

Sounds innumerable, too, met the ear as they came nearer: first a faint noise, then a mingled roar like the rushing of a torrent, and then various noises began to detach themselves from the rest—loud laughter—the merry song—the solemn hymn—the hoarse shout—the word of command—the call of one companion to another—the hammering of the blacksmith's anvil—the groaning of the forge—the clash of steel, as the armorers and farriers plied the busy stroke, repairing arms and shoeing horses, and once or twice the shrill blast of the trumpet.

No challenge was given as they rode on, for the position of the enemy was now exactly ascertained, and surprise was not expected; but one or two of the officers advanced to the side of the road from the neighbouring gardens, and gazed for an instant upon the passing troop, to see if they recognised any friends among the new-comers, as the light of the watchfire flashed upon their faces.

Notwithstanding fatigue, anxiety, and fear, Rose d'Albret could not but feel the excitement of the scene. Sometimes guarded by palisades, sometimes sheltered by the low walls, sometimes in the open field, they passed innumerable groups of soldiers seated round their fires, and just concluding their evening meal. Marks of toil and strife were on the faces of all, whether of the gay Catholic or the stern and rigid Huguenot; and no glittering coats of arms, no jewels and embroidery were there, nothing but cold gray steel, and buff coats, and caps rusty with long exposure to the rain, and scarred and weather-beaten countenances, on which how-

ever, sat an expression of confidence and fearless preparation, which is often an omen of success.

Round some of the fires the veterans were telling tales of former wars, and victories long since achieved. At others, one selected for his voice or skill was singing; and, whether Papist or Protestant, whether his song was the gay ballad of the day, or one of the canticles of the Reformers, it still spoke the fearless expectation of triumph.

At a slow pace, for the weary horses could hardly drag their limbs along, De Montigni and the lady advanced till they reached the entrance of the village; but here a guarded barricade opposed their farther progress, and as they could not give the word, the soldiers refused them admission.

"I am seeking the king," said the young nobleman; "send hither the officer of the watch as fast as you can, for we are very weary and must have repose."

Even as he spoke, a plain old man, whose dress betokened some rank in the army, approached the barrier, and replied to the last words he had uttered by saying, "Good faith, young gentleman! you will find no lodging in St. André. Two thirds of us are obliged to sleep in the streets. There is not a dog-kennel untenanted."

"It is not for myself, sir, that I care," answered De Montigni, "but for this lady, who in truth can go no farther. At all events, I must see the king, if you will kindly cause him to be informed that the Baron de Montigni is here."

The old officer gazed in the face of Rose d'Albret with a look of inquiry, not rude, but compassionate; and, after a moment's pause, he answered, "I think, Monsieur de Montigni, the king expected you. There was a messenger arrived an hour ago from the Commander de Liancourt, and your name was mentioned, I know; but I am sorry to say his majesty is not now in the village, and may not return for some hours. You will find him about a league hence, placing the artillery. But stay! I will make inquiries: there may be some orders left for you. Here, Jacques, run up to the king's quarters, and tell them that Monsieur de Montigni is here. Ask what his majesty said about him. Ah, my poor young lady, you look tired enough," he continued, as the soldier sped away; "and yet I cannot ask you to alight and repose yourself, for every cottage is filled to the door with soldiery—a rude scene for such as you. I can give you some refreshment, however," he added, suddenly, as if the thought had only just struck him. "Here, D'Avesne! D'Avesne! run in and get out some wine. In the pannier behind the door you will find a bottle of good old Burgundy and a horn cup; bring them hither, quick. There, stand back, good fellows! Did you never see a tired party come in? They do not want your company."

The last words were addressed to three or four idlers who had sauntered up, and, leaning their folded arms upon the barricade, were staring rudely at Rose d'Albret and her companions. They now, however, walked away with a laugh, which made the warm colour come back into poor Rose's cheek, as she felt herself the object of scorn rather than pity. The moment after, the man who had been sent for the wine returned, and after much persuasion from De Montigni she took some, though it tasted hot and burning to her parched lips rather than refreshing. It seemed to revive her a little, however, when she had swallowed it, and she saw that there would be need of all her remaining strength; for the picture which imagination had painted of a royal camp, and of immediate admission to the king's pavilion, and of a brilliant circle of nobles forming his court, had by this time all faded away, and she found sterner realities and more homely, but not less painful annoyances in place.

It was nearly ten minutes before the man sent to the king's quarters returned, and they seemed hours to Rose d'Albret; but when he did come, he turned to his officer, saying, "They are to go to the farm at Mainville; and the king will see Monsieur de Montigni to-morrow morning. He is to wait there without stirring till he hears more."

"But where is Mainville?" asked de Montigni, almost in despair at the idea of poor Rose having to travel further that night: "if it be distant we shall never reach it. The lady now, as you see, can hardly sit her horse."

"'Tis half a league, down by the river," answered the old officer: "but stay! we can help the lady. Have out the hand litter on which they brought Jules de Sourdis from Dreux. Get out a party of bearers, Jacques. We will soon manage that for you, young gentleman; and a crown piece will make the men go willingly. They will serve for guides, too, for in this dark night you would never find it. But, in the mean time, she had better dismount, and rest upon this bench. You seem sadly weary lady: have you come far?"

"Many leagues," replied Rose, as De Montigni sprang to the ground by her side to lift her from her horse. "I thank you much for your kindness, sir," she continued, still addressing the old officer. "I do not think I could ride another hour to save life itself."

Seated upon a bench by the side of the barricade, which had been opened to give her admission, with the light of a large watchfire, and two resin torches casting a flickering glare over the figures of the soldiery as they came and went, wearied, exhausted, faint, and sick at heart, Rose d'Albret remained for several minutes with her fair head bent down, and her hand dropping as if powerless by her side. At length, however, a light seemed to come in her dark eyes, a warm and well-pleased smile crossed her lip, and she raised her fair face towards de Montigni, who stood beside her, with a look of renewed hope and satisfaction which he did not comprehend.

The reader, too, may ask what it was that seemed so suddenly to revive her; what it was that called up that expression of pleasure and relief. It was not that she saw any friendly form—it was not that she heard any well-known voice. The cause was in no external things, but in her own mind. As she sat there, she had felt deeply and bitterly all that was painful in her situation, with lassitude of limb and sickening heart, fears, anxieties, and gloomy anticipations, which every sight, and sound, and

circumstance tended but to increase. Her thoughts and her sensations had been full of all that was sad and depressing, when suddenly she had asked herself if she could recall the last eight-and-forty hours, return to the mansion of her guardian, lay her head on the pillow of luxury and ease, remove afar peril, and difficulty, and terror, and weariness, become the promised wife of Nicholas de Chazeul, and give up Louis de Montigni forever, would she do it? Her heart answered the question in a moment —no! Whatever she might suffer was light in comparison. All that she had undergone, all that she endured, lost half its weight when she remembered that she was free—that she was with him she loved; and looking, as I have said, in his face with a heart lightened and grateful, she felt that to share poverty, sorrow, flight, exile, care, with him, would still have joy enough to compensate for all.

De Montigni could not, of course, see what was passing on in her mind; but still there was a look of affection in her eyes which was not to be mistaken, which told him that she was thinking of him, and that she did not regret what she suffered on his account; and, bending down his head, he spoke those words of tenderness and love which well repaid her for her endurance and her sacrifices.

Shortly after the litter was brought forward, with four stout men to bear it. It was apparently a rude and hastily-contrived machine, in which some wounded man had been brought from the siege of Dreux, with a little sort of tilt over it to shelter him from the wet; but the lower part or couch, was thickly covered with dry hay, over which the old officer cast his cloak; and De Montigni, placing Rose in it, thanked their new friend warmly for his assistance, and, walking by the lady's side, issued forth from the village of St. André, and was soon once more wandering on in the darkness of the night.

The lights were speedily left behind; the glare of the watchfires faded, or were hidden one after the other by the windings of the road; nothing but a faint reddish streak in the sky showed the position of the village and the camp. The busy sounds of the army, too, died away into an indistinct hum, like that of a swarm of bees, and then was lost to the ear altogether; while the voice of the swollen Eure, murmuring as it rushed along, was the only noise that broke upon the ear of night.

The way grew narrower and narrower as they went along, so that it was sometimes with difficulty that De Montigni kept by the litter. But yet he would not leave the side of Rose d'Albret, cheering her from time to time by words of affection and of hope, till at length he saw the glistening of the water before him as they descended the steep hill, on the table-land of which the fields of Dreux and Ivry are situated; and in a moment after, a single light, apparently streaming from the window of some house, shewed him that they were approaching a human habitation.

"That is Mainville, sir," said one of the bearers. "Ah, you are well off! for there are comfortable quarters there by the side of the ford: but the king would suffer none of our people to lodge more than a quarter of a league *from the field, for fear* the enemy should get possession of his ground early in the morning. You late comers sometimes get the best accommodation."

"Is the enemy so near, then?" asked De Montigni.

"Near!" cried the man; "why, we were two hours in presence this afternoon, and every one thought they would have begun the battle; but none were engaged but the light horse, who had a short fight for the bottom of the valley."

De Montigni mused for the rest of the way, for he loved not to be so near a field of battle without taking part in it; and yet he had no arms but the sword he wore, nor horses in a fit state to bear him through a long day's fight.

A few minutes, however, brought them to the door of the farm-house, where they had to knock for some time before any one appeared to answer them. The first sight of life within was the head of a man protruded from a window above, with the faces of two women looking over his shoulder.

"Who's there?" he cried; "is that the king?"

"No, no, Gros Jean!" replied one of the men who had come with them from St. André, "the king has something else to do than visit you at this hour, even to see your pretty wife;" and he added a loud laugh, in which the farmer good-humouredly joined. "Come down, come down, Gros Jean!" he continued; "these are the people his majesty told you he would quarter upon you—two regiments of horse and three companies of infantry."

"Go along, buffoon," said the farmer; "the king never said he would quarter anybody on me but two or three ladies and gentlemen."

"Well, these are they," replied the soldier; "so come down and open the door, or, on my life, we will break it down. We have got to fight to morrow, and cannot stand here talking all night. It's the Baron de Montigni, I tell you, and his lady."

"Well, wait a minute," said the farmer, withdrawing his head; and in a few moments they heard bolts and bars removed, and the door was opened. There was still a little doubt and apprehension in the good round countenance of the jolly farmer; but the sight of the litter, with De Montigni standing beside it, clothed in the common riding costume of the day, speedily took away his fears, and, calling forward his wife and sister to welcome the lady, he showed every sort of alacrity that could be desired in providing for the comfort of his guests.

"Here is a room to sit in," he said, as De Montigni assisted Rose from the litter, and drew her arm through his own to give her support. "Dear heart, lady, you seem tired enough, and as if you had been wet through too. Take the light, wife, and show the gentlefolks the way." Thus saying, he led them on into a good wide room, where he and his farming men were wont to take their meals, and then opening a door which gave admission to another chamber, he said, "And here's your bedroom, with as comfortable a bed as any in all Normandy."

"I shall keep watch in the hall, my good friend," replied de Montigni; "but Mademoiselle de Albret will go to repose, I dare say, directly, for that is what she needs more than anything else, if these two ladies will kindly

give her their attendance. A bundle or two of straw, thrown down in the corner there, will do for me and my men; but, as there are seven of them, and hungry enough too, I doubt not, by this time, you had better give them some wine and some provision. Whatever I take," he added, in a significant tone, seeing that the farmer was somewhat confounded at the number of his undesired guests, "I will pay for on the spot."

Gros Jean, as the Royalist soldier had called him, scratched his round head for a moment, and then replied, "I thought that you had been man and wife, from the king's message; but, however, as he said ladies, and there seems but one, there is another little room up stairs, and a good bed too, which you had better have, sir."

"No, no," replied De Montigni, "I will stay in the hall, if you will give me some straw. We will be your guard during the darkness, dearest Rose," he added, pressing her hand in his, "so take a cup of warm milk, if it can be procured, and lie down to rest for this night, at least, in peace and security. I must go now to speak to these good fellows without."

"Let me see you again for a moment, Louis, before I sleep," said Rose, gazing in his face with an anxious look; "you will not be long absent?"

"Not five minutes, my beloved," replied De Montigni; and, leaving her with the farmer's wife and sister, he went out to speak with the men who had carried the litter from St. André.

Let not the reader think, with the cold spirit of censure which is so ready at all times to blame everything that is not customary in our own times and in our own country, that there was aught unusual or improper in the invitation which Rose d'Albret had given her lover to visit her in her bedchamber. In those days, though certainly not purer than the present—and bad enough are both—the common reception-room of a lady, especially in Paris, was that in which she slept. Often before she quitted her chamber, too, in England as well as France, the beauty of the hour received her train of admirers, in her bed; and every art of coquetry was displayed to win or increase admiration, as she lay in what was supposed to be the toilet of the night, but which had often cost her and her maids more than one hour of labour to arrange and render becoming. Such was not, indeed, the custom of Rose d'Albret, but still the habits of the country and the period would not have suffered her to feel that she was committing the slightest impropriety in admitting her lover to her room, even after she had retired to rest, nor would she have doubted the safety of her honour in the hands of De Montigni, under any circumstances of opportunity or of temptation. She knew him well, with that knowledge of the heart which perhaps can only be acquired by the intimacy of early youth, and she was certain that nothing on earth would induce him to blemish the being he loved, were there no eye but that of God to witness his actions.

The first task of De Montigni, when he had found the men who accompanied him thither, was to reward them fully for the trouble they had taken. They had already removed the litter into the road; and, after having given his own attendants orders to carry in the little baggage they had brought, he drew the chief of the litter-bearers aside, and questioned him eagerly as to the hour at which the battle was expected to take place on the following day.

"Not before noon," replied the man, "for the duke and his people have retreated beyond Ivry, we hear, and that's a two leagues' march."

"Then I may have time to get horses and arms," said De Montigni, joyfully. "I must not be so near, my friend, without having some share in this matter. Here is another crown for you; and if you can send me down an armorer, and some of those men who generally follow camps with horses for sale, they may find a good market."

"What arms do you want, Monsieur le Baron?" asked the soldier; "you will not find them easily. One might get a casque and a cuirass for yourself, with pistols and such things. but I doubt your obtaining much more."

"I must take what can be found," answered De Montigni. "I would fain, indeed, arm my men likewise; but, at all events, I will be present myself, if I go in my pourpoint."

"A dangerous trick that, Monsieur de Montigni," said a voice near, which the young nobleman thought he recognised; "but you must not try that experiment. His majesty monopolizes all uch follies a hat, nd suffers no one to fight in their ourpoints but himself."

"Ha! Monsieur de Chasseron," said De Montigni, "is that you?"

"It is, indeed," replied Chasseron. "I am here before you, you see, and I will get you arms, if you want them; but, in the mean time, you must do me a service. Take up the litter, good fellow, and away," he continued, turning abruptly to the man who had been speaking with De Montigni; "I will see to what this young gentleman wants. No answer, but away. Now, Monsieur le Baron—so you have arrived safe; you have brought the lady with you, I suppose, by seeing the litter."

"I have," answered De Montigni; "but she is well nigh dead from fatigue."

"'Tis a long way," said Chasseron; "but when I gave the advice, the king was at Dreux, some seven leagues nearer."

"Even now," answered De Montigni, "I have not been able to see his majesty."

"What! he is absent?" said Chasseron; "ay, he is always running about. Parbleu! I fear the enemy will catch him some day, if he does not get wiser with years. However, you remain quiet where you are to-night; the king shall have notice of your being here, for I have a few friends at the court, and you shall hear from him to-morrow; in the mean time, I will procure you what arms you need, though, good faith, you must pay for them yourself, for I have spent all my money in his majesty's service, and have scarcely a cross left in my purse."

"That I am quite prepared to do," replied De Montigni; "but I could have much wished to have seen the king to-night."

"That is impossible," cried Chasseron, in his usual rapid manner. "But what do you want with him? I will get Monsieur de Biron to ask it for you; he will see none but his generals after his return."

"I much wished," replied the young noble-

man, in a lower tone, "to obtain his majesty's written sanction to my marriage with Mademoiselle d'Albret; but, of course, he will need long explanations and proof of the contract between her father and my uncle."

"Oh, I know not that," replied Chasseron; "he will be glad enough to give her to a Royalist rather than a Leaguer. At all events, we will try for you. It's as well that, while you are thus wandering about together, you should have the holy bond of matrimony round your necks, if you must needs poke your heads into it; and who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth? God's purposes are dark and wonderful," he continued, in a more solemn tone. "We none of us know what is good for ourselves or others. It may please Him, Most High, still farther to chastise this poor land of France; and even the king himself, for aught we know, if raised by a great victory, might forget his former character, and prove a scourge instead of a blessing."

"Oh no!" exclaimed De Montigni, vehemently, "never believe it. More than forty years of noble and upright dealing with all men, of love for his people, of generous forbearance, and high-hearted kindness, may well be warrant to the most suspicious for his conduct in time to come. Do not suspect him, Monsieur de Chasseron."

"I do not," replied the other, laying his hand emphatically on the young man's arm; "but I say still, God only knows what is good and what is evil for the land of France, and He it is who must decide the fate of all to-morrow. However," he continued, "it is well you should be prepared, and we will make the trial for you, whether it succeeds or not. Good-night; I must hasten back, for I have much to do."

He turned away as he spoke, but De Montigni stopped him, saying, "There was some service you said I could render you."

"Ay, parbleu! I had forgot," replied Chasseron. "There is a young lady, Monsieur de Montigni, who has been ill treated and injured by those who ought to have protected her. She is here, in the midst of the camp; and though, to say truth, I know little of her, yet I am sure she deserves not all that has fallen upon her. She has applied to me for protection and assistance, but I am in no condition to give her what she seeks effectually. Were I to send her to the village, ill tongues might fall upon us both unreasonably. There is no woman in the camp but your fair lady here, and love makes a man kind-hearted towards others of the sex that has enthralled him. If, then, you would give this girl protection, and aid in case of need, I should feel grateful, and you would do a good act towards one who, God help her, has few to take her part. From injury I could protect her; from insult and grief it would need much time and attention to defend her, were she to take up her dwelling in the camp; and, though woman may cling to man as her support and stay, she has no true companionship but with woman. Will you, then, beseech your sweet lady-love to befriend her, and let her pass the night in the farm."

"Willingly," replied Montigni; "but where is she?"

"Oh, at a cottage hard by, above," answered Chasseron; "she has been there since last night, when we had a rougher journey than even you have had. I will send her down immediately by some of my men, who are there at the top of the hill. So once more good-night, and God speed us all to-morrow."

Thus saying, he turned away, and De Montigni trod back his steps to the farm, musing over the request that had been made and the promise he had given. It was not that he doubted, it was not that he entertained suspicions; his mind was too clear and free from that fatal experience, which mingles the dark drop with the brightest cup of life, to entertain one injurious thought; but the responsibility, the care that already rested upon him, was enough to weigh him down. His anxiety for her he loved, his longing desire to remain with her, never to leave her till she was placed in security, contending with his strong and overpowering desire to be present at the struggle which was approaching, surrounded him with difficulties enough; and now they were to be increased by the presence of a third, placed under his protection for the time, and demanding from any one of kindly and courteous feeling equal care and attention. He could have wished it otherwise; but still he felt that he could not have refused, and he hastened back into the house to tell Rose d'Albret of what had occurred, and to ask her countenance and sympathy for the stranger.

De Montigni found his men already in possession of the hall, with the good farmer busily employed in placing food and drink before them, encouraged to produce the best of his store by his young guest's liberality towards the bearers of the litter, for nothing flies so fast as the report of a generous spirit. He passed through them without notice, however, and, knocking at the door of Mademoiselle d'Albret's chamber, was at once admitted by the farmer's sister. De Montigni's tale was soon told; and, notwithstanding her weariness, Rose listened with all that tender interest which the heart of a kind and gentle woman, unhardened by either vicissitudes or the vices of the great world, is sure to feel in the misfortunes of a sister.

"Oh, bring her hither whenever she comes," exclaimed the lady, as soon as he had done. "Poor thing, she has suffered as well as we have, and perhaps far more severely, Louis. I will keep my eyes open till I see her, though they are heavy; but if I should be asleep, you must wake me, De Montigni. Promise me that you will."

"If you wish it, dear one," replied her lover; "but these good people will, I am sure, show her every kindness."

"No, no," answered Rose d'Albret, "I would not have her find a cold reception for the world. Oh, De Montigni, what would I have given, as we stood before the barrier at St. André, to have met a woman to speak kindly to me, and tell me to take comfort."

"Well, then, I will wake you, sweet, kind girl," said De Montigni; "but I do not think she will be long, for he said she was hard by."

Perhaps the lover would fain have lingered beside his fair promised bride; but, after a few more words, he withdrew into the hall and conversed for a short time with the people who had accompanied him from Marzay. Scarcely

five minutes passed ere the farmer, who had remained with them, was summoned to the door, and returned the moment after with a fair and beautiful girl, in her first youth, who gazed wildly round upon the strange faces as she entered. De Montigni, however, instantly advanced towards her, and took her by the hand, saying, "Do not be alarmed. We are all friends."

"Friends!" said the poor girl; "friends!"

"Yes, indeed," replied the young nobleman; "but come with me; there is a lady in the next room waiting anxiously to see you;" and he led her on to the door. The good farmer's sister was still in the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Rose had by this time sought her couch, though she had not yet fallen asleep; and when De Montigni and his fair companion were admitted, she raised herself upon her arm and gazed at the stranger for an instant, shading her eyes with her hand. The next moment, with a look of utter astonishment, she exclaimed, "Helen! Helen de la Tremblade! Good heaven, dear Helen, can it be you?"

The poor girl paused, trembled, wavered for a moment, as if she would fain have retreated from the room; but then, running forward, she cast herself upon her knees by the side of Rose's bed, and burying her face in the clothes, seemed to sob convulsively. Rose d'Albret cast her arm round her tenderly; and De Montigni, seeing that there were deeper sorrows in their fair visiter's bosom than he had imagined, withdrew from the room and closed the door. The farmer's sister followed in a few minutes, and Helen de la Tremblade was left alone with Rose d'Albret.

CHAPTER XVII.

The morning was bright and beautiful; the heavy clouds of the preceding days had passed away, leaving behind them nothing but a few thin fleecy remnants, that were whirled over the blue sky from time to time by the quick wind. It was a true spring day that dawned, genial and soft; and in the clump of trees by which one side of the farmhouse was shaded, the early birds were singing sweetly, rejoicing in the blessings of God and the return of the bright season to the earth.

De Montigni had watched the greater part of the night, and had not closed his eyes till an hour before the break of day; but he then fell into a heavy and profound slumber, which even the various noises of the farm, the rising of his own attendants, the coming and going of the farmer and his family, and the arrival of several people from the village, bringing intelligence of the movements of the army, did not disturb. He lay so calm and still, his servants would not wake him, till at length a messenger from the king spurred quickly down to the farmhouse, delivered a sealed packet addressed to the young baron, and rode back again without a moment's pause. It was then thought fit to arouse him; and, starting up as one of his followers shook him by the arm, he passed his hand across his brow, exclaiming, "Good Heaven! it was a dream!" Then taking the packet, he opened it, and found a few brief words in the handwriting of the king.

"Monsieur de Montigni," so the letter ran, "I am informed of your arrival, and also that your uncle the Commander de Liancourt, will be here before ten o'clock with a small corps. He has orders to join you at Mainville. Wait for his arrival, then come up by the road to St. André as far as the first turning, which will lead you to the plain. There, as soon as you reach the army, fall into the light horse of the Count d'Auvergne.

"I enclose you the paper which you requested by message last night.

"Your very best friend,
"Henry."

There was a small slip of paper enclosed in the letter, and to it De Montigni now turned, reading, with joy and satisfaction, the following words:

"Henry, by the grace of God King of France and Navarre. It having been certified to us, upon good and sufficient authority, that by contract existing between the late Francis d'Albret, Count de Marennes, our well-beloved cousin, and Anthony, count of Liancourt, the hand of the only daughter of the said Francis d'Albret was plighted, promised, and engaged to Louis, baron de Montigni, and that the said parties are now of an age, and willing to fulfil the said contract, We do by these presents authorize the said parties to proceed to the celebration of their marriage, notwithstanding any let, hindrance, or protest on the part of any person or persons whatsoever, consenting to, ratifying, and sanctioning the said marriage by the power and authority in us being.

(Signed) "Henry.
(And lower down) "Revol."

"Is Mademoiselle d'Albret awake?" asked De Montigni, eager to show the precious document to her he loved.

"Oh yes, sir," replied the man to whom he spoke; "she is awake and up an hour ago; but she bade us not disturb you."

De Montigni hastened to the door and knocked. "Come in," said the sweet voice of Rose d'Albret; and entering, he found her sitting with her hand clasped in that of Helen de la Tremblade, who had passed the night with her. She rose to meet him, and was immediately pressed to his heart, while he whispered in her ear, "You are mine, dear Rose. Here is all that was wanting to our immediate union;" and he placed the paper in her hand.

There was not less light in the eyes of Rose d'Albret than in those of her lover as she read the king's sanction to their marriage; but when she turned to the letter that accompanied it, her cheek grew pale, and a tear trembled upon her eyelids.

"Oh, Louis! must you leave me so soon?" she cried; "and to battle?"

"Nay, dearest Rose," answered De Montigni, "you would not have me avoid the path to honour and renown."

"No, Louis, no," she answered; "I will not say another word. Ten o'clock! That is very soon; 'tis past nine now."

"Indeed!" said De Montigni." "I have slept too long."

"Oh no!" answered Rose. "I came and looked at you as you lay, and it would have been cruel to rouse you from so calm a slumber."

"And yet I dreamed sad dreams, dear Rose," said her lover. "But what is to be done?" he continued; "neither arms nor horses have arrived, and our poor beasts are jaded with yesterday's fatigue."

"But you cannot go without arms," said Rose rejoicing in the hope that something might detain him from the perilous field; your uncle will never let you go unarmed. Perhaps they will come soon; but, in the meantime, take some refreshment, Louis. Run, dear Helen, run and tell them to bring him some food."

Helen de Tremblade had remained sitting at the table, with her hand covering her eyes; but now, rising, she approached the door, pausing, however, with a glowing cheek ere she went, to whisper something to Rose d'Albret.

"Not for the world," replied Rose; "oh no, Helen, do not suppose it;" and her cheek too grew red.

The breakfast was soon brought, and Louis de Montigni ate a few hasty mouthfuls: but he was too much excited and too anxious to find any long repose. More than once he rose and looked out; more than once he questioned the farmer as to whether no one had come during the morning to furnish him with arms. He asked eagerly, too, for intelligence from St. Andre, and heard with feelings of impatience and pain, that the king had marched at an early hour to take up his position on the ground he had chosen for his field of battle. He then sent out two of his men to gain further information, and to see if any horses could be procured; but minute after minute passed by; the hour of ten arrived; and every moment he expected to see the old commander and his party at the ford before the farmhouse, before anything that he required could be obtained. The men brought back word that the village was nearly deserted, except by a few sick and wounded: but they had seen the army of the king, they said, extending in a long line across the plain, and they thought they had also perceived the heads of Mayenne's columns advancing from the side of Ivry.

"Well, we must go as we are," said De Montigni; "we fought the other day at Marzay without a scratch, and we shall ride lighter without armour. Have everything ready to set out the moment my uncle appears. Two of you, however, must stay with these ladies. You are all anxious to go I know, so choose by lot, and make haste that all may be ready."

The moments that thus passed were sad and terrible to poor Rose d'Albret. She would not say a word to stay him, and yet she would have given worlds, had it been possible, without damage to his honour, to have withheld him from the field. Each order that he gave, each inquiry that he made, roused fresh tears and apprehensions in her breast; and the words of tenderness and affection with which he strove to cheer her, but rendered her more sad, while again and again she asked herself if she should *ever hear* that voice again.

Nor were the feelings of Helen de la Tremblade less painful, though perhaps they were less anxious; as, seated near the window, she gazed forth in sad and motionless meditation. To those who stood beside her, all was risked upon that battle; but to her, the bright hopes of life, which in their case were but checkered with fears that an hour might sweep away, were gone forever. Their words of love, their anxiety for each other, all awoke painful thoughts and bitter memories; and over all her contemplation spread the dark cloud of self-reproach, leaving not one bright spot in the future or the past.

Still minute after minute passed away, and no one appeared. The impatience of De Montigni became extreme. "The battle will begin," he thought, "and I shall be absent. Disgrace and shame will fall upon me. Who will know of the king's commands! and men will say I was within half a league of a stricken field, and kept aloof. I cannot bear this much longer. Ride out upon the top of the hill, Victor, towards the side of Annet, and see if you can perceive my uncle coming. But hark! what is that!"

As he spoke, the loud boom of a distant cannon struck upon the ear; another and another succeeded, and then several shots still farther off were heard replying to the former.

"It is begun," he said; "I can wait no more. Bring round my horse! Dearest Rose, I must go and see what is taking place. I will be back soon, my beloved;" and he once more pressed her to his heart.

"But the king's commands," said Rose. "He told you to wait here for your uncle. You ought not to go indeed, Louis."

"There must be some mistake," he answered; "and I cannot stay here like a coward or a fool, while my king is fighting for his crown, and the fate of France is in the balance. I will be back speedily—I will but see;" and, tearing himself away, he sprang upon his horse's back, followed by those upon whom the lot to accompany him had fallen, and spurred up the hill at full speed. On the top he paused, looking towards Annet. The whole country was open before his sight, but no body of men was to be seen; and, hesitating no longer, he rode on till the plain of Ivry lay before his eyes, covered with squadrons and battalions of horse and foot, and presenting the wild, confused, and busy scene of a field of battle.

When he was gone, Rose d'Albret covered her eyes, and for a few moments gave way to tears; but Helen de la Tremblade came round to where she stood, and laid her hand timidly upon her arm. Rose dashed away the drops from her eyes at this mute appeal, saying, "No, Helen, no, I will not doubt it! It were wicked, it were wrong to think that God would so abandon us."

"Besides," lady, said Helen, "Monsieur de Montigni is good and noble; you are virtuous and wise. Can such people ever be unhappy?"

"Ah, my poor Helen, replied Rose d'Albret, you reproach yourself too bitterly, when the fault was his. Shamefully have you been used; and though God forbid that I should say you have not done wrong, yet I can well believe that with such vows and promises, you fancied your

self his wife as much as if the priest had joined your hands. Perhaps," she added in her ignorance of man's nature, "perhaps, now that he has lost the hope of obtaining my estates, which was all he sought, he may make you his wife indeed, and deliver you from self-reproach"

"That he can never do," replied Helen de la Tremblade; "I feel that I am a degraded being, lady, unworthy even of your kindness."

"Nay, do not call me lady," answered Mademoiselle d'Albret; "you used to call me Rose, Helen, and you must do so still. But indeed, dear Helen," she continued, willing to pass away heavy time with any other thoughts but those of what was taking place so near her, "but indeed I will trust you may still be happy; and one thing you must do for my sake—you must tell your uncle all. He will give you absolution for the past, and direction for the future."

"Ere this, he has been told," answered Helen; "told by that harsh and cruel woman. She would never spare me that."

"Ay, but you know not how she may have told it," answered Rose d'Albret. "Oh, she is false and deceitful, Helen, and may have cast the whole blame and shame on you, when, in truth, yours is but the lighter share. See him, dear Helen, see him, and let him know the whole. Shrink not from his reproaches; hear them with patience and humility; but let him know the plain truth, just as you have told it me; and he will forgive you, I am sure. Hark! there are the cannon again. Oh God, protect him! Helen, I will go and pray."

"May I pray with you?" asked Helen de la Tremblade, timidly.

"Come," said Rose, taking her by the hand, 'come, let us raise our voice to him from whom all need, and all are sure to receive, forgiveness and mercy if they seek it."

An hour passed by in anxious expectation. Oh, how long an hour may be to those who watch; to those who, with the faint sickening of the heart, know that upon its events may hang the long misery of a hopeless, cheerless, loveless life! It seemed as if it would never go; and every device they used to make it speed the faster, seemed like the ticking of a clock, marking the slowness of time's progress, not accelerating its flight. Now they spoke of things past, hoping to lose in retrospection the sense of things present; now they talked of the future, the wide indefinite blank, which to all men is a chasm that the eye searches in vain. But still to the present, the overburdened present, their minds and their words returned, whether they would or not. To the quick imagination of Rose d'Albret, all the horrors of the battle-field presented themselves in more than even their real terrors. She pictured the dead, the dying, and the wounded; the fierce contention, the sanguinary triumph, the unsparing cruelty, loss, flight, defeat; and though she laboured zealously with her own mind to lead it to other themes, yet it was all in vain. She might speak of anything, of everything but the battle, yet still her thoughts wandered back to that overwhelming image, which, like some vaster mountain in a hilly country, was ever seen towering over all the rest, and presenting itself to contemplation whenever the eyes were turned from other objects.

Sometimes she would strive to speak calmly with Helen de la Tremblade upon what should be the poor girl's future conduct; sometimes she would inquire gently and tenderly into the past; but ever her mind would come back again to the battle, and she would give way to all the apprehension and anxiety she felt; would ask how the time went; would call the good farmer, and demand intelligence; would send out one of the attendants to bring her any news that he could gather.

Half an hour more flew slowly away, and De Montigni did not return; but then, quick spurring down the road, as if for life, came a small party of horse. The farmer, who was upon the watch, suddenly closed and barred the doors, and Rose saw from the window that over their dusty armour they wore scarfs of green, a sign that they belonged to the faction of the League. The worthy countryman called her and her compasion quickly from the lower story, put up the strong oaken shutters, and bade them, if they needs must gaze, look from the rooms above. But the cavaliers paused not even to notice the house as they passed, and, hurrying on, plunged their horses into the stream, and gained the other side.

"Surely the king has won the day!" said Rose, turning to the farmer; "the Leaguers fly. Is it not so?"

"I know not, mademoiselle," replied the peasant. "It often happens, in strifes like these, that men run away before the battle is lost or won. Their own corps may be defeated, but there may come many more to turn the fight."

Even while he spoke, a single horseman, with a scarf of white, rode down more slowly on a wounded horse, looked up to the window where they stood, and crying aloud, "the king is killed," passed on without farther pause.

The heart of Rose d'Albret sank as she caught his words; but she grew fainter still when she beheld upon the road a party of four, one on foot, leading a horse, on which sat a wounded man, with two others supporting him. For an instant she fancied—for the imagination of fear is as vivid and as false as that of hope—that she recognised the figure of De Montigni. The next moment, however, she saw that it was an older and a heavier man, clothed in armour, and with the visor of his casque closed, but with the white signal of the Bourbon party thrown over his shoulder.

"Oh, let us go and help him," she cried.

The farmer hesitated. "Do, do!" cried his wife.

"Well, quick, then!" said the man; and, hurrying down, the door was unbarred and opened; but still he held it in his hand, ready to close it in an instant if he saw others following.

"What news? what news?" cried the peasant, as the others came near.

"Victory! victory!" shouted one of the men: "Mayenne in full flight and total rout!"

"And the king? and the king?" demanded the farmer.

"Master of the field, and following them like a thunderbolt to Ivry," was the reply of one of those who rode beside the wounded man; "but help us here," he added; "he is sadly hurt."

They lifted their master from his horse at the gate, and were bearing him in, while Rose d'Albret, who had come forth with the farmer and his wife, gazed on him with looks of sympathy, when suddenly, at full speed, but waving joyfully his hat and plume, De Montigni appeared upon the road above, followed by an attendant, and, giving way to all she felt in that moment of exceeding happiness, she ran on to meet him, and in an instant was in his arms.

"Oh, this has been a glorious day, dear Rose," he cried, "and the crown of France is firm upon our monarch's brow. By his own right hand he has won it, and God grant him life to wear it long."

Tears were the only reply that Rose could make; but the good farmer tossed up his hat, and cried "Hurrah!"

"Whom have you here?" asked De Montigni, as his eyes fell upon the group just arrived, who were now entering the farm, with the wounded man borne in the midst. But, ere any one could answer, coming up the road from the other side, as if seeking a ford across the stream, were seen a body of some thirty horse, with a young and graceful man at their head. The farmhouse hid them from the young baron and the lady till they had passed the angle, but then the green scarfs mingled with the black too plainly showed to what party they belonged.

They rode fast, but not at the headlong speed of fear; and when they saw the marks of a ford, the leader paused, marshalled his men to pass two and two, and then looked round him with a calm, deliberate air. His eyes instantly lighted upon De Montigni, his attendant, and Rose d'Albret, for the farmer had retreated into the house; and exclaiming "Halt!" to those who were passing the ford, the officer of the League spoke another word or two to a gentleman near him.

De Montigni drew Rose rapidly to the door of the farm, and pushed it violently with his hand; for by this time it was closed, and the good farmer, seeing the arrival of the troop, had barred and bolted it as before. In vain De Montigni looked about for a place of refuge; they were shut in between the bank, the wall of the garden, and the ford, and in an instant they were surrounded by the horsemen.

"Ha, ha! we shall not go without some prisoners, at least," cried the leader of the troop; "your sword, sir, your sword—it is vain contending."

De Montigni hesitated, but he was seized in a moment; and while Rose clung in agony to his breast, his sword was snatched from his side, and a pistol levelled at his head.

"Surrender, or die!" cried a fierce-looking man, who had sprung to the ground beside him. "We have no time to waste upon Huguenots."

"We are no Huguenots," replied De Montigni, "but faithful Catholics, though servants of the king. I surrender, as it needs must be so; but of course you will let this lady retire into the house: you do not make war upon women, I suppose."

"That depends upon circumstances," replied the leader, who had now come up. "Your *name, sir?*"

"The Baron de Montigni," replied the young nobleman.

"We are in luck," exclaimed the leader, turning to one of his companions; "then this fair lady is Mademoiselle d'Albret!"

Rose only replied by her tears; and the leader continued, turning to De Montigni, "Mount your horse, sir, and follow! You are a prisoner of war, and shall be treated as such. The lady shall be restored to those from whose care you took her. No words, for time is short Have you a litter or a horse for the lady?"

"Her jennet is in the stable," replied De Montigni, "but she is too much fatigued and weary to ride. If you have the spirit of a gentleman and a knight, as you seem to be, you will not force her to do so."

"Weary or not weary," said the stranger, "She must come along. Quick, bring out the jennet! Lose not a minute, or we shall have some of the enemy upon us. Lady, it seems your friends have kindly shut the door in your face, so that if you have goods and chattels within, they must even remain where they are."

"You are discourteous, sir," said De Montigni, "and abuse your advantage."

"How now!" cried the leader, grasping his sword; but Rose held up her hand in entreaty, exclaiming, "Nay, nay, De Montigni, say not a word: I am ready to go. I trust this gentleman will use no needless harshness. Here is the jennet: I will go directly."

The horseman looked down somewhat gloomily, murmuring, "Discourteous! Such a term was never used to Nemours before."

"Monsieur de Nemours," replied De Montigni, "I am free to say I believe it never was; and I am sure, now I know you, it never was deserved. You have lost a great battle, sir, and some irritation may be forgiven; but I beseech you, if it must be shown, let it fall upon my head, and not upon this lady's."

"Fear not," said the duke, turning to him frankly; "I must send her to her guardian, as I have been required, but she shall be treated with all kindness by the way; and, in the mean time," he added, aloud, "she is under the protection of my honour. Quick, quick!" he continued; "see! there are people coming down already. Stand to your arms, there! Mount, sir, mount!"

Before De Montigni did so, however, he lifted Rose into the saddle, and then sprung upon his horse, saying, "I will not detain you, my lord duke; but you need not fear," he added; "those are but two or three of my own servants."

"On!" cried Nemours to his soldiers; "steady through the ford."

"Which way, my lord?" asked the guidon of the party.

"Towards Chartres," answered the duke; and the troop took their way across the stream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The sight of pain and suffering, to which man's heart, even if it do not become totally hard and obtuse by his own dealings with the

rough things of the world, grows less sensible every day as he advances in life, is always matter of painful interest to woman. There is something in her bosom that tells her it is her own destiny to suffer. There are fine links of sympathy that bind her affections to the sufferer, and not alone the general tenderness of her nature, to which such feelings are commonly altogether ascribed. The words of a woman's compassion are always different from those of a man's; they show that she brings the pain she witnesses more home to her own heart. Man may grieve for another's anguish; she sympathizes with it: man feels for the man; she actually shares his pain.

Helen de la Tremblade remained in the lower story of the house even after the shutters had been put up and the door closed by the farmer, when the first party of fugitive Leaguers passed by. She took little note of anything that followed, but sat meditating over her own fate, with her head leaning on her hand, till the sound of a groan struck her; but then starting up at once, she advanced towards the door of the room, which led into a wide, long passage. There she found four stout soldiers bearing in a wounded man; and though she could not see his face, from his visor being down, the languid attitude in which he lay, as his men carried him in their arms, showed her clearly that he had received some terrible injuries. Self was forgotten in a moment; her own sorrows, her own wrongs, the bitter regrets of the past, the desolate despair of the future, were all swept away for the time, and, clasping her hands, she exclaimed, "Alas! alas! he is dying, I fear. Bring him hither, bring him hither," she continued; "there is a bed in this room;" and she led the way through the hall to the chamber, where she and Rose d'Albret had passed the preceding night.

Carrying him slowly forward, the soldiers laid the wounded man, still in his dinted and dusty arms, upon the couch, and instantly began to unfasten his cuirass, through which a small hole, as if pierced by the shot of an arquebuse, might be seen, stained at the edge with blood; but he waved his hand saying in a faint voice, "The casque, the casque! take off the casque! Where is my newhew? Where is Louis? He should be here."

"Ah," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "he went out to the battle not an hour ago. Perhaps he too is wounded or dead."

"Mad-headed boy!" cried the old commander as they removed his casque, "he had no arms! Why did they let him go? Ha! Is not that Helen, the priest's niece?"

"Yes," replied Helen, approaching timidly and taking his hand, "it is poor Helen de la Tremblade."

"Ay, I remember," said the old commander; "but where is Rose? Where is Rose d'Albret? She was with my nephew Louis."

"Oh, she is without, here," cried Helen; "I will call her directly;" and away she ran, through the hall, into the passage, and to the door. But she found it barred and bolted, and the farmer bending down, with his ear to the keyhole, striving to catch the sounds without.

"Where is Mademoiselle d'Albret?" asked Helen

"Hush," he cried, sternly, waving her back with his hand, and still listening to the door. Helen listened too, but she could hear nothing but the indistinct murmur of several voices speaking, mixed with the sound of horses' feet trampling and stamping, as if brought to an unwilling halt; but a moment or two after, some one spoke in a still louder tone, crying, "To Chartres!" and then came the noise of a party moving off, and the plashing sound of cavalry marching through the ford.

"Where is Mademoiselle d'Albret?" repeated Helen, as the farmer raised his head from the keyhole.

"Good faith, I cannot tell," replied he; "run up, wife, run up to the room above, and see what is going on without."

The farmer's wife did as he bade her, and the next instant her feet were heard over head, coming back from the window to the top of the stairs. "Ah, heaven!" she cried, in a loud voice, "they have carried off the young lady, and Monsieur de Montigni, and his servant, and all. You should not have shut the door, Jean. You are a cruel, hard-hearted man. I heard them push it myself to get in; and now they are prisoners, and no one can tell what will happen."

"Hold your tongue! You are a fool, wife," answered the farmer, angrily. "Do you think I was going to leave the house open for the Leaguers to come in? We should have had the place pillaged, and all our throats cut."

But the woman's tongue, as is sometimes the case with that peculiar organ in the female head, was not to be silenced easily, and she continued to abuse her husband for excluding poor Rose d'Albret and her lover in no very measured terms, while Helen de la Tremblade, sad and sorrowful, returned to the bedside of the old commander to communicate the painful intelligence she had just received.

"Where is Rose?" demanded the old officer as soon as he saw her; "why does she not come?"

"Alas!" replied Helen, "a party of the League, just now sweeping by, have taken her away with them."

The old man, who by this time had been stripped of his arms and laid in the bed, raised himself suddenly, and gazed in her face with a look of grief and consternation. Then sinking back upon the pillow again, he closed his eyes, but said not a word for several minutes. At length one of his attendants, coming forward, inquired if he had not better ride away to St. André and seek for a surgeon.

"No," replied the old commander, abruptly, "'tis no use. This is my last field, Marlot, and the sooner I go the better. I am fit for nothing now. I could scarce sit my horse in the battle, though I did drive my sword through that fellow on Aumale's right hand. But it's all over, and I shall soon go too. No use of being tortured by the surgeons. I've had enough of them. No; but I will tell you what you shall do. Go and seek for Louis—though that is most likely vain also. Why the fiend did he go to the field without arms? Yet, Ventre Saint Gris! I love the boy for it, too. But he never can have escaped from that *mêlée*. He is dead, so there is nothing worth living for"

Helen had refrained hitherto from telling him that his nephew was in captivity, as well as Rose d'Albret, for fear of weighing him down, in his weak state, under the load of misfortune; but now, seeing that his apprehensions for his nephew's fate had a more terrible effect than even the reality could produce, she said, "No, sir, he is not dead. They have carried him away too, with Mademoiselle d'Albret!"

"Ha! girl, ha! Are you not lying?" demanded the wounded man.

"No, indeed," replied Helen, "it is the truth. The farmer's wife saw them a moment ago."

"Well, then, seek a surgeon," said the old man; "I will try to live, though it is idle, I think. Look for Estoc, too. Where saw you him last?"

"He was in full pursuit with the Grand Prior, sir," answered one of the men.

"I saw him take the red standard of the Count of Mansveldt," replied another

"That's well—that's well," said the old commander; "take means to let him know where I lie; then bring a surgeon if you will: they shall do with me what they like. Will you be my nurse, little Helen?" he continued, extending his hand towards her.

"That I will, if I may," replied Helen, kneeling by the bedside, and kissing the large bony hand he had held out.

"Well, get me a cloak or something," said the old man, "to cast over my feet, for I feel very cold. Then come, sit down and talk to me; and you fellows go away and get your dinner. It must be noon by this time."

"'Tis one o'clock, sir," replied one of the men.

"Get your dinner, get your dinner," cried the commander.

"I have no heart to eat, sir," said the one nearest to him, "seeing you lying there."

"Pooh!" exclaimed his master; "did you never see an old man die before? I have seen many; and they will die, whether you eat your dinner or not. Leave this young lady to tend me; dine, and, if you will, say a paternoster for my sake. That's the best you can do to help me, though you are good creatures, too, and love me well, I know—as I love you. But we must all part, and my march is laid out."

The men departed, one by one, and Helen remained alone with the old Commander de Liancourt, doing the best she could to tend and serve him. He suffered her to examine his wound, for the good old chivalrous custom which required that ladies should know something of leechcraft had not yet passed away; but it was one beyond her skill. The ball of an arquebuse or pistol, fired point blank at a short distance, had pierced his chest on the right side, a little more than a hand's breadth below the arm. Some blood had followed the wound, but not much; and all hemorrhage had ceased. He declared that the only pain he felt was a burning sensation near the back.

"That's where the ball lies, Helen," he said; "I wish it had gone through, for these things taking up their lodging in the body often make the house too hot to hold the proper tenant. However, God's will be done. I never valued life a straw; and now, after having known it sixty years, I certainly do not prize it more for *the acquaintance*. 'Tis an idle and a bitter world, fair lady, as I fear you have found out by this time."

Helen shrunk and turned pale as the old man seemed to allude to her situation, and his eye rested upon her face, she thought, with a look of meaning. He said no more, however; and, in a moment after, the farmer entered to offer his services to the wounded man, with whose rank he was now acquainted, and to give him farther tidings which had just arrived from the field, how the Swiss and French infantry had surrendered without resistance, and all the standards and cannon had fallen into the hands of the king.

The commander cut him short, however, asking after his nephew, which way they had taken him, how many the party numbered, and many other questions, all of which the man might have answered without betraying the fact that to his own fears was in some degree owing the capture of Rose d'Albret and the young Baron de Montigni. We put our armour where we are weak, however, and the first words of the farmer were in his own defence, betraying, at once all that had taken place. As the wounded man heard him, and began to comprehend what had passed, his cheek turned fiery red, and raising himself partly in bed, he bent his eyes sternly upon him, and cursed him bitterly, calling him coward and knave, and telling him he knew not what he had done.

"Fool!" cried the commander, "do you think they would have stayed to plunder your pitiful house with the sword of the king at their heels? Curses upon you, sir! you have delivered a fair, sweet lady to the hands of her persecutors, as gallant a gentleman as any in France to his knavish enemies. By the Lord that lives, I have a mind to make my men take thee and drown thee in the river, poltroon!"

The farmer was irritated, as perhaps he might well be; and, but little inclined to bear from another reproaches which he had endured quietly from his wife, he was about to reply in angry terms, when Helen interposed; and with gentle firmness, which might, perhaps, not have been expected from the tender and yielding disposition which she had hitherto displayed, she led him from the room, and insisted upon his making no reply.

She then turned all her efforts to calm and soothe the old commander; and so tenderly, so kindly did she busy herself about him, that the heart of the rough old soldier was moved, and he exclaimed, "Bless thee, my child, thou art a sweet, good girl, and I wish I could but live to do thee some service. But it is in vain, Helen, it is all in vain; not that I mind this burning pain, for that more or less follows every wound, but 'tis the sudden failing of my strength. All power seems gone, and in an instant I have become as if I were a child again. I was lame and wellnigh crippled with old wounds before, for I never was in battle or combat but I was sure to receive some injury—such was my ill-luck; but still in my hands and arms I was as strong as ever, could bend a double crown between my thumbs, or break the staff of a lance over my knee. Now it is a labour to me to lift my hand to my head, and that has come all in a moment. This means death, Helen, this means death!"

"Nay, perhaps not," replied Helen de la Trem-

blade. "The body is strangely composed, and the ball may rest upon some sinew or some nerve that gives strength; yet all may be well again."

The old man shook his head, but still he remained cheerful, often talking of death, yet never seeming to look upon it with dread or horror. In about an hour a surgeon arrived, examined and probed the wound, and descanted learnedly upon its nature. But with him, the good old commander showed himself irritable and impatient, writhed under his hand, declared he tortured him, and seemed to shrink more from pain than from death itself. The man of healing soon saw that he could do but little. To Helen's anxious inquiries, however, he did not give the most sincere answers, leaving her to hope that the wound might be cured, and saying that he would come again at night. He calculated, indeed, that his patient would live over the next day, and that there would be time enough for a priest to be summoned. That was all that his conscience required; and he judged—perhaps kindly—that it was useless to torment a sick man with the thoughts of death for many hours before the event took place.

During the whole of the rest of the day, Helen seldom, if ever, quitted the bedside of the Commander de Liancourt. Though careless of life, inured by long habit to suffering, and even somewhat impatient of anything that seemed like forced attention to his state, the old warrior was not at all insensible to real kindness. He saw that she sympathized with him, that she really felt for all he endured, that she did her best to soothe and to allay, to comfort and support him. He could not but see it; for though, ever and anon, the shadow of her own fate would fall upon her again, and she would sit for a moment or two in gloom and darkness, yet, at his lightest word, at his least movement, she was up and by his bedside. The cup was always ready for his lips, the pillow was constantly smoothed for his head; his wishes seemed anticipated, his very thoughts answered, and even the burning impatience of growing fever could not run before her promptitude. When he obtained a moment of repose, she was calm and silent; when he wished to speak, she was ready to answer, in sweet and quiet tones, that sounded pleasant to his ear; when his breathing became oppressed, she was there to raise his head upon her soft arm, to open the window for the air of spring to enter, and to bathe his fiery brow. To another young and inexperienced being, the scene might have been terrible, the task hard; but to her, it was all a relief. A share in any sorrow was lighter than the full burden of her own, and aught that took her thoughts from herself delivered her from a portion of her anguish.

More than once the old man gazed upon her fixedly for two or three minutes, as if there was something that he wished to say, and yet did not; more than once he sent away his followers, who came and went during the afternoon between his room and the next, as if he were about to speak of something that lay at his heart; but still he refrained, till, just as the light was beginning to fade, he turned painfully in the bed, and murmured "Helen."

The poor girl was by his side in a moment, and, putting forth his now burning hand, he took hers, continuing, "Helen, I wish to talk to you about yourself before I go."

Helen trembled like an aspen leaf. Four-and-twenty hours before, in the first agony of desolation and despair, she would have poured forth her whole soul to any one who offered her a word of kindness and sympathy; but a change had come over her since then; the power of thought had returned; conscience, and shame, and remorse had made themselves heard over even the tumultuous voices of grief, and indignation, and hopeless agony. The still, but all-pervading words of self-reproach filled her ear continually, and in the blank wilderness of existence she saw but her own folly. She shrank, then, and trembled when he spoke of herself. There was no name but one that he could have pronounced which would have sounded more horrible to her ears than her own.

"Oh, not now, not now!" she cried, drawing back.

But the old man still held her hand in his, which seemed to scorch her; and he went on, "Why not now, Helen? It will soon be too late. The minutes are numbered, my poor girl. The hand upon the dial seems to go slow, but it will soon point to the hour when this fire shall have burned itself out, and nothing but the ashes will remain. I have learned something of your story, Helen, from the people who came with my keen, harsh sister Jacqueline. Old Estoc heard it, and told it to me; but I would know more—I would know all—"

"Oh, not now, not now!" cried Helen, again; and by a sudden movement of anguish and terror she drew her hand from him, and with a gasping sob ran out of the room.

There was no one in the hall, and when she reached the middle, she paused. "Shall I leave him!" she asked herself; "leave him because he means and speaks kindly—leave him because I cannot bear to hear my own folly breathed—leave him? Oh no!" and with a movement as sudden, but with a downcast eye and burning cheek, she returned, and seated herself near in silence, gazing upon the ground.

"Helen," said the old commander, "I have grieved you. "Come hither and forgive me."

She sprang towards him, and casting herself on her knees by the bedside, covered her aching eyes with her hands, exclaiming, "Oh no, no! It is I who need forgiveness, not you. Do not speak so kindly, sir, do not speak so gently, for it goes farther to break my heart than all your sister's harshness."

"Hush, hush!" said the old soldier. Do not move me, there's a good girl; but listen to me, Helen, for I wish you well, and you have been tender and affectionate to me this day, when I have much needed it. I am a rough old man, Helen, and know not how to speak gently; but I would fain talk to you about yourself before I depart from this place. Listen to me, then, and do not think I mean anything but kindness. I hear that my sister has been hard upon you—driven you out of her house—given you harsh names. Nay, never shake so: she is a bitter woman, Helen, to all faults but her own; and I am sure, if you have any, they have been but too much gentleness. Why, I remember you as a little child in your good father's time. There now, you weep! I know not how to

speak to you. But never mind, I'll talk no more about yourself. But, whatever be your faults, Helen, take my advice: go to your uncle, tell him all. He will forgive you, for he is a good man at heart, and loves you; and, besides—"

"Oh no, no!" cried Helen, "I cannot go to him, for his look would kill me. Rose, so kind and good, so gentle to the faults of others, she too persuaded me to go to him: but you do not know him. He is good and kind, and loves me well, it is true, but he is not forgiving. Besides, how can I go there? How can I see him without meeting—" and she gave a quick shudder, without concluding the sentence.

"Ay," said the wounded man, "that must be thought of. But all this is partly your uncle's own fault, Helen, I warned him, when he put you with my sister, that he was giving his dove to a vulture: I told him it would be your ruin; but none of those people heeded the old soldier. They followed their own plans, and thought plain truth foolishness. Hark! do you not hear horses? It is good old Estoc, come to see his dying leader."

The next moment there was a knock at the chamber door, and before any one could say "Come in," it opened, and the tall, bony figure of Estoc, clothed in armour, such as was worn in that day, but with the headpiece laid aside, appeared striding up with his wide steps to the bedside of the wounded commander.

"How goes it, sir!" he cried, "how goes it?"

"Fast, Estoc, fast!" answered the old knight. "I am glad you have come, for there is much to talk about before I go. Helen, dear child, run away for a while, and take some repose and refreshment, for you have scarcely tasted aught since I have been here. She has been an angel to me, Estoc—like my own child."

"Thank you, mademoiselle, thank you," cried Estoc, taking her hand and kissing it, while she turned away her head; "God will bless you for it!"

The tears rolled over Helen's cheeks; and saying, "Call me when you want me, sir," she left the room.

For more than an hour the old Commander de Liancourt and Estoc remained together, while Helen, at the window of a room above, sat and gazed out upon the sky, seeing the last rays of light fade away, and the stars look forth one by one. "Ah!" she said to herself, as she watched them, "other lights come in the heavens when the sun sets, but there is none so bright as that which is gone. The moon, too, may rise with her pale beams, but it is still night, shine she ever so brightly."

At length the surgeon arrived, and went in again. The next moment he sent for Helen to aid him; but when she entered the old commander's room, she found that he would not suffer his wound to be meddled with.

"It is of no avail, Master Surgeon," he said; "I know I am dying. You can do no good, and you do but torture me. Let the ball alone; it has performed its work right well; you only make it angry with your probes. Put on a cool cataplasm if you will, and tell me about what hour will be the end, for I see in your face that you know what I say is true. I would not go out of the world like a heathen; but the Church is the only surgeon for me."

The man of healing answered in a vague and doubtful manner, but assured the old soldier that there was no immediate danger; and, after some vain persuasions, to the end that he might once more examine the wound minutely, he took his leave, after having applied what he thought fit externally.

Helen was about to follow, and leave the commander and his friend together once more, but the wounded man called her to him and bade her stay. "Here is Estoc will be a friend to you, Helen, when I am gone," he said; "but listen to me, poor child, and do that which is for your own good, and for that of others. I pressed you, a little while ago, to go to your uncle for your own sake, but now I ask it for the sake of those who were once dear to you. You used to love Rose d'Albret: I think you do so still—"

"Oh! that I do," cried Helen, clasping her hands.

"Well, then," said the commander, "her whole happiness, her future welfare and peace, may altogether depend upon your going to Marzay, and with your own lips telling Walter de la Tremblade all that has happened to you."

"Then I will go directly," cried Helen, eagerly, though sadly, "I will go directly, if I die the next moment. But does he not know the whole already?"

"I think not," replied Estoc, who stood near. "I don't think Madame de Chazeul has told him anything, for the good man who spoke to me about it said she would kill him if she knew that he had mentioned anything. But he thought you hardly treated, mademoiselle, and wished me to speak to the commander about it, that the matter might be inquired into."

Helen covered her face and sat and mused, till at length the wounded man woke her from her painful dreams, whatever they were, by saying, in a compassionate tone, "Ah! my poor girl, you suffer worse than I do, for your pains are of the heart."

"I will go, sir, I will go!" cried Helen; "though it is very bitter so to do, yet I will go, if it can serve Mademoiselle d'Albret even in the very least."

"It may serve her much, young lady," said Estoc. "As this sad affair has happened, and she has fallen into the hands of the Leaguers, beyond all doubt they will send her to Marzay; and then the old story will begin again, and no devilish scheme will be too bad to drive her to marry Monsieur de Chazeul."

"Oh no, no, no!" cried Helen, vehemently; "he will betray her—he will make her miserable, as he has made me. What right has he to marry her?" she continued, with her brow contracted and a wild look coming into her eyes. "Is he not married already? Is he not contracted by oaths that he cannot break?"

"Ay, but he will break them," replied Estoc.

"I rave, I rave!" said Helen, after a moment's pause; "he has broken them already—every vow he made—every pledge he gave—every oath he took! and what at should he hesitate? But how can I prevent this? What can I do to avert it?"

"Much," answered the commander. "Your uncle, Helen, has been one of the prime movers in all this. Without him they could do little,

for he is a skilful and a scheming man, not moved by the same passions that both prompt and embarrass him. What are his motives or his views, I know not; but, *pardie*, right sure am I, when once he hears how you have been treated, he will find means to frustrate all their plots, and to save your dear Rose by one means or another."

"Yes, yes, he will, he will," cried Helen; "I know he will, if it be but in revenge. Oh! he never wants means to work his own will. My poor father used to say he had ruled all his family from infancy. But I will go at all risks, at any cost. Yet," she added, hanging her head, "yet I could wish that it were possible for me to avoid that cruel and hard-hearted man whom I must see if I go there openly."

"Oh! that will be easily managed," said Estoc; "I will answer for that, mademoiselle, for I took care to ensure myself and my good commander here the means of entering the chateau of Marzay when we liked. God forbid that I should use it wrongly! But I foresaw the time might come when, in justice to ourselves or others, we might need to stand face to face with those who have been plotting so darkly against people whose rights they should have protected."

"You are right, Estoc, you are right," said the old commander, whose voice was growing feeble with fatigue of speaking so much. "You are right, my good friend. I thought not of that precaution, but it was a wise one. Have you got the key of the postern, then?"

"No," answered Estoc; "that would be missed; but I have got a key to the chapel, which, as no one uses that way in or out, will never be wanted by any one but ourselves."

Helen raised her eyes and smiled, with the first look of satisfaction that her countenance had borne since she had been driven from the chateau of Chazeul. "That makes all easy," she said; "for not only can I enter by that means, but dear Rose d'Albret can come out; and oh! what would I give to guide her back again to liberty and him she loves!"

But Estoc shook his head. "That may not be so easy," he answered; "now they are once upon their guard, they will watch her closely. She will henceforth be a prisoner indeed. Her only hope is in the priest, mademoiselle. Gain his aid for us, and we are secure."

"I will try," answered Helen, "I will try. But look," she continued, touching Estoc's arm, and speaking in a low voice, "Monsieur de Liancourt seems weary, and asleep, I think."

Estoc bent down his head and gazed in the sick man's face by the pale light of a lamp that stood upon the table. He almost feared, from all that he had seen, that what Helen imagined slumber was the repose of death; but as he leaned over him, he saw a red spot upon the cheek, and heard the quick low breath come and go; and, turning to her again, he whispered, "He sleeps; that is a good sign. I will sit with him till he wakes."

"No, no," answered Helen, "leave me to watch him. You take some repose; I neither want it nor could obtain it."

Estoc accordingly left her, gaining the door as noiselessly as he could. Then, clearing the hall of all the persons by whom it was now crowded, he seated himself on a bench, ate some bread and drank some wine, and leaning his head upon his hand, soon fell into slumber, with that easy command over the drowsy god which is often acquired by those habituated to the labours and the dangers of the camp.

It was past one o'clock and all the noises of the house was still. The farmer and his family had retired to rest, the soldiers and attendants were seeking slumber in the kitchen and the barn, when Helen de la Tremblade opened the door between the sick man's chamber and the hall, and called "Estoc! Estoc! Monsieur de Liancourt is awake," she added, as he started up; and then continned, in a lower tone, "he is very ill—there is a terrible change—come quick, come quick!"

Estoc followed in haste; and, approaching the wounded man's side, he saw too clearly the change she spoke of, that awful change which precedes dissolution; that inexpressible dim shade, that cold, unearthly look, never, never to be mistaken. Fever may banish the rose from the cheek; the eye may grow pale and glassy; the lip may lose its red; and sickness, heavy sickness, may take away all that is beautiful in life; but yet, while there is a hope remaining, the countenance of man never assumes that hue which death sends before him as his herald on the way; and there it was. To the eyes of Helen it was strange and terrible, and made her heart sink, though she knew not all it meant; but Estoc had seen it often, and knew it well; and whispering to her, "This is death!" he took his old friend's hand in his.

"Ah, Estoc!" said Monsieur de Liancourt, "where is Helen? Come nearer, my kind nurse; let me see your face, for my eyes grow dim."

"Shall I send for a priest, sir?" asked Helen.

"Not yet," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "for I have much to say. Bring me my cross of St. John. Lay it on my breast, that I may die under the standard of my salvation." Helen hurried to get it, where it lay with the armour and clothes in which he had been dressed, and placed it gently on his bosom as he told her. The old man gazed wistfully in her face for an instant, and then said, "I am going, Helen—fast. If I had lived, I would have been a father to you. Estoc, will you protect her—defend her? Do you promise me?"

"I do, from my heart," replied Estoc. "As long as I live, she shall never want a home to receive her, or an arm to do her right."

"Kiss the cross!" said the old commander; and, bending down, the good soldier pressed his lips upon it, as it lay upon his dying leader's bosom.

"So much for that," said the commander. "When I am gone, Estoc, give her all that I have brought with me. You I have provided for long ago. See me buried as a soldier should be. Lay me before the altar at Marzay, and bid the priest say masses for my soul. Now give me the papers, that I may explain them well."

Estoc proceeded to the corner of the room in which the old commander's garments had been laid down in a heap, and searched for some minutes before he could discover the packet of papers for which he was looking. He found it at length, and, turning round, approached the

bedside where Helen de la Tremblade sat watching the wounded man. She held his hand in hers, she gazed upon him eagerly with her beautiful lips slightly open, showing the fine pearly teeth within; and as the light of the lamp fell upon her, she was certainly as fair a creature as ever man beheld; but there was a look of anxious fear in her eyes that startled Estoc, and made him hurry his pace. The eyes of the old commander were closed, and Helen whispered, "He has had a terrible shudder."

"Here are the papers, sir," said Estoc.

The old man made no answer but by a heavy sigh.

"Send for a priest, quick," cried Estoc, and Helen running hastily from the room, woke one of the soldiers in the kitchen, and despatched him to the village in haste. When she returned to the chamber, however, all was still; and, approaching with her light foot the bedside, she saw Estoc with his arms folded across his chest, and his eyes, glistening with an unwonted tear, fixed upon the countenance of his old friend and leader, from which all expression seemed to have passed away. She listened but could hear no breath. The lips were motionless; the breast had ceased to heave; the hand, which he had lately held in her own, had fallen languidly on the bed; the other, by a last movement, had been brought to rest upon the cross which lay upon his bosom. Life had passed away, apparently in an instant, and the sufferings of the stout old soldier were at an end.

The moment after, several of the men, who had been awakened by a voice calling to one of them to seek a priest, crept into the room to see their good leader once more before he died; and Estoc, brushing away the moisture from his eyes with the back of his hand, turned towards them, saying, "You may come forward. You cannot disturb him now. He is gone; and a better heart, a stouter hand, a kinder spirit, never lived, my friends. Few there are like him left; and we, at least, never shall see such another. God have mercy on his soul, and on ours too."

Thus saying, he knelt down, murmured a prayer, and kissed the hand, still warm with the life that was departed. The soldiers did the same one by one, and then carried the tidings to their fellows who were still asleep. Starting up as they had lain down, they all ran hastily into the room; and, of course, among the number, there were many different ways of expressing their grief. Most of them, however, had tears in their eyes, and one man wished aloud that he knew the hand that fired the shot.

"Fy," said Estoc, "it was the chance of battle. No soldier bears revenge for anything done in fair fight. He has sent many to their account, and now is sent himself; but, by the grace of God, his is no heavy one, and he will find mercy for that."

There was a momentary pause, and then two or three of the soldiers whispered together, after which, one of them, stepping forward, said, "Will you lead us, Monsieur Estoc?"

"I am not a rich man, my friends," said the old soldier, "and cannot pay you as the good commander did. What I have, however, you *shall freely* share; and if you are willing to serve the king as you have done this day I will lead you willingly in that cause."

"We will fight in none other," replied the man who spoke for the rest; "and as for pay, we will take our chance, so that we have food and arms."

"That we will always find," replied Estoc; "but we have a duty here to perform before anything else. We must carry the corpse to Marzay, and fulfil our dead leader's last commands; then we will seek the king; and if he cannot entertain us himself, we shall easily find some banner under which to fight upon his side."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was about two o'clock in the day when the party of the Duke of Nemours entered the little town of Maintenon, for that prince hurried along his prisoners at a rapid rate, although he was aware that, the main body of fugitives from the field of Ivry having taken a different direction, he was less likely to be pursued than if he had followed the same course towards Mantes. As he approached Maintenon, indeed, he somewhat slackened his speed, and gave orders for putting his men into better order; and before he reached the gates, he brought his own horse, and those of the rest, to a walk, as if quietly marching through the country.

All appearance of flight and apprehension was banished; and De Montigni heard one of the soldiers, speaking to a citizen as they entered, declare, that they had had a skirmish at Ivry, in which the king had been defeated and driven back. A somewhat bitter smile curled his lip; but he made no observation; and the good townsman, shaking his head with a doubtful look, replied,

"Ay, it may be so; but different tidings are about the place; and if you have won a battle, why are you marching away from the field?"

"Why, Coquin?" replied the soldier, readily, "because we are carrying the tidings to Chartres, with orders to the governor to send out his people and cut off the fugitives from Alençon."

Still the man looked unconvinced; but the soldier rode on after his troop; and the duke stopped in the town two hours to refresh his horses. While there, he sent for the officer commanding in the place, and held a long private conversation with him, which afforded an opportunity to De Montigni and Rose d'Albret to speak together unnoticed for the first time since their capture. The duke had ordered dinner to be prepared, and had courteously invited them to partake of it, leaving them alone in the dining hall of the inn while he held his communication with the governor without. But though it was a solace and a comfort to both of them to be enabled to pour their griefs and anxieties into each other's bosom, yet their conference was a sad and fruitless one, for they could arrange no plan of action for the future, they could extract no hope from the painful situation in which they were placed. All they could do was to promise and repromise faith and constancy to each other, and to wait for coming events in the hope of ultimate deliverance. De Montigni

found no difficulty in binding Rose to fly with him whenever the opportunity should offer, and each vowed to the other to look upon their engagement as complete and inviolable, whatever means might be employed to break it.

"Let us regard ourselves as wedded, dearest Rose," said De Montigni, "and fear not for the result. The king is each day gaining advantages over his enemy. This faction must soon be crushed, notwithstanding the assistance it receives from Spain; my ransom will soon be agreed upon; and should they attempt to detain my bride, I will deliver her, should need be, with the strong hand. If bloodshed be the result, let Chazeul answer for it. The fault is his, not mine."

"Oh! no, no!" cried Rose, "do nothing rashly, Louis. I am yours, will be ever yours. Better to wait for months—ay, even for years, than dip your hands in kindred blood. But I will trust that there is no need for such terrible deeds. When once the king's authority is at all established, Monsieur de Liancourt will soon yield to it. He is not one of those who will hold out to the last in favour of a failing cause. But, at all events," she added, as the door opened, "be the time long or short, be the trial hard or light, I am yours forever."

She knew not how hard that trial was to be.

As she spoke, the Duke of Nemours, with one or two of the gentlemen attached to him, entered the room, and the meal which he had ordered was soon after served. The irritation under which he had laboured on account of the loss of the battle, when first De Montigni and his fair companion had fallen into his hands, had passed away, and towards Rose d'Albret, at least, he had resumed all that courtesy for which he was renowned. To De Montigni his demeanour was varying and uncertain; never, indeed, returning to the harsh rudeness which he had at first displayed, but sometimes cold and icy, sometimes gay and almost kind. He was a prince who had acquired, without much cause, a high reputation throughout Europe, and De Montigni knew him by report to be brave to a fault, generous to prodigality, and affecting a chivalrous tone in his conduct and manners; but he was not aware of the faults which afterward developed themselves so remarkably, and caused the duke's ruin and his death—selfishness, ambition, tyrannical severity, and a wild vanity, that led him to over-estimate in all things his own abilities and his own importance.

As they sat together at the table for a time, the fairer points of the duke's character were alone exhibited to his prisoners. He addressed De Montigni more than once, pressed Rose to partake of the meal before them, spoke of the events of the battle, and even lauded highly the skill and character of the king. The young baron deceived himself into the belief that these external signs of a high and noble nature might be the genuine indications of the heart, and he resolved to cast himself upon his generosity, to explain to him the circumstances in which he stood, and to beseech him to refrain, at least for a short period, from placing Mademoiselle d'Albret in the power of those who were but too likely to misuse the opportunity. As if to check him in such purposes, almost the next moment Nemours resumed towards him his haughty and overbearing manner; and thus he went on from time to time, at one moment appearing to forget that De Montigni was an adversary and a prisoner, and the next treating him almost as if he were a condemned criminal.

After the space of repose I have mentioned, the march towards Chartres was resumed, but the pace at which they proceeded was now slow; and before they reached that fair old town, the sun set in cloudless splendour, and the stars looked out in the sky. Weary, silent, anxious, and distressed, Rose d'Albret rode on, replying to the frequent attentions of Nemours with but a monosyllable, till at length they reached the gates, where they were detained during a few minutes, for the news of the defeat of Ivry had already reached the city, and all was anxious precaution to guard against surprise. At length the party was admitted; torches were procured at the corps de garde; and by their red and gloomy light, flashing upon the tall houses with their manifold small windows, the cavalcade wound on, through the narrow streets, towards the castle.

Intelligence of the arrival of the Duke of Nemours had been sent on to the governor from the gates, and the outer court of the citadel was filled with gentlemen and officers when the party entered. Nemours dismounted from his horse as soon as he had given the word to halt, and, advancing to a stern-looking, middle-aged man, who seemed to be the chief of those present, he embraced him, saying,

"Well, Monsieur de la Bourdasières, I have come to you sooner than I expected. We have been badly served at Ivry, and the foreign troops have once more betrayed our confidence. However, I bring two prisoners with me—or at least one," he added, "for the lady is not a prisoner, and of her I will speak to you by-and-by, if you will have the goodness now to place her for the time under the protection of Madame de la Bourdasières."

The governor seemed to ask a question which De Montigni did not hear; but Nemours replied immediately, "Oh, yes, of the highest. It is Mademoiselle d'Albret, the daughter of the late Count de Marennes."

"Right willingly," replied the governor. "We will give her what poor entertainment we can;" and, advancing with Nemours to the side of Rose's jennet, he assisted her to dismount, saying, "My wife will be most happy to entertain you, Mademoiselle d'Albret."

Rose turned an anxious look towards De Montigni, who sprang from his horse, and, approaching her before any one could interfere, took her hand, saying, "I am rejoiced to find you placed under such protection, dearest Rose."

The governor turned a grave and inquiring look towards him; but De Montigni added, loud enough for all to hear, "Do not fear. The contract for our marriage between your father and my uncle cannot be broken, let them do what they will."

"Come, come, enough of this, sir!" said the Duke of Nemours; and the governor taking Rose by the hand, led her away into the castle.

"Monsieur de Nemours," said the young nobleman, as soon as she was gone, "I am your

prisoner, and I cannot blame you for seizing the momentary advantage you had obtained to make me so. I know the reputation of the Duke of Nemours too well to suppose that he will show any want of courtesy towards one placed in such a situation; I therefore demand to be put to ransom, and that without further delay, according to the common customs and usages of war."

Nemours gazed at him for an instant from head to foot, and then turning on his heel, replied, "I will consider of it, sir."

A sharp reply was springing to De Montigni's lips, but he repressed it, recollecting how much the fate of himself and one most dear to him might depend upon the man to whom he was speaking. The colour came in his cheek, however, and he bit his lip to keep down the anger which could scarcely be suppressed, while Nemours, calling one of his gentlemen to him, gave some directions in a low tone.

"Take a parole from his servant," he said aloud, in conclusion, "and let him have free ingress and egress to wait upon his master. As to the chamber, speak with some of the people of Monsieur de la Bourdasières about it;" and then, turning round to De Montigni again, he added "we shall meet to-morrow, sir; in the mean time, good-night."

Thus saying, he walked away and entered the castle, marshalled by some of the officers of the governor. De Montigni remained for a moment or two, while the followers of Nemours and the people assembled in the court conversed together round about him in regard to the events of the day, and many an anxious inquiry was addressed to those who had shared in the battle as to the course which it had taken, and the result which it was likely to produce. Each man answered according to his particular character and disposition. Some made light of it; asserted that it could scarcely be called a battle lost; that Mayenne was at the head of nearly as many men as ever; and that, though the enemy did possess the field, they had paid dearly for it. Others more sincere or more alarmed, acknowledged that at least it had been a complete rout; that each had fled as best he could; and that the king was pursuing Mayenne, sword in hand, towards Mantes. Others contented themselves with a significant shrug of the shoulders, or a simple exclamation of anger and mortification; but, upon the whole, the governor's officers easily divined that a great victory had been won by the Royalists—a terrible defeat sustained by their own party.

At length, the gentleman to whom Nemours had last spoken, and who had been conversing with another man at some distance, advanced towards De Montigni, saying, "Now, Monsieur le Baron, if you will follow me and Monsieur de la Haye, we will show you to your chamber. Come hither," he continued, beckoning to De Montigni's servant, who had been taken with him; "you can wait upon your master till he is ransomed, so you will see where he lodges;" and, leading the way with the officer to whom he had been speaking, he conducted the young nobleman into the castle. Following the walls, which in those days were extensive, he approached a small detached *building, which* seemed to be used as a house of refreshment for the soldiery, or what we should, in the present day, call the canteen.

The lower story was thronged with men drinking and talking; but, walking through the passage, they reached a narrow and ill-constructed stairs, which led to some rooms above. In one of these was found a bed, a table, and a chair, all of the homeliest description. The casements were not in the best state of repair, and no curtains were there to keep out the glare of day or the winds of night. The walls were in the rough primeval state in which the hands of the mason had left them, and everything bore an aspect of misery and discomfort, not very consoling to the eyes of the captive.

This, he was informed, was to be his abode while he remained in the city of the Druids; and well knowing that remonstrance was in vain, he seated himself in the solitary chair, while the officer of Nemours took the parole of his servant, and then, making a cold bow to the prisoner, retired.

De Montigni remained in silence, with his head resting on his hand, for a moment or two, while his follower gazed on him with a disconsolate countenance; but at length the man ventured to interrupt his master's revery by saying, "This is a strange place to put you in, sir. Not very civil, *pardie*, though you be a prisoner."

"The place matters little, my good friend," answered the young nobleman. "We slept in the Alps in worse abodes than this. It is the being a prisoner that makes the lodging bad—and at such a time, too!" he added, with a bitter sigh, "when happiness was within my grasp—when the cause of the king was victorious—when another minute would have saved us both."

"'Twas unlucky indeed, sir," said the servant. "They say fortune changes every seven years; God forbid that ours should last as long, for we have made a sad beginning in France. But, at all events, I will try to render the place somewhat more comfortable for you, sir. Money will do anything in Chartres, as well as elsewhere."

"Would to Heaven it would get me out of it!" replied De Montigni. "He will never dare refuse to put me to ransom, surely!"

"I do not know, sir," rejoined the man. "I have heard that, in these civil wars, they have done strange things; but if he do, you must make your escape, sir; and, as I was saying just now, money can do everything."

De Montigni shook his head, but he suffered the man to proceed as he thought fit to give the chamber an air of greater comfort. A sconce was brought up from below, to replace the solitary lamp which had been left by the officer; a piece of tapestry was obtained from some other quarter to cover the window; a bundle of rushes was found to strew the floor; a white sheet was spread over the bed, to cover the somewhat dirty furniture with which it had been previously decorated; and, thanks to the proximity of the canteen, wine and provisions of various kinds soon ornamented the table, which was covered with one of those fine white cloths for which, Le Grand assures us, France was at that time famous.

But when the door opened and closed, De

Montigni saw the figure of a soldier either passing to and fro, or leaning on his partizan; and he felt bitterly that he was a prisoner, without power to alter the course of events which were taking place around him, to the destruction of all his hopes, to the frustration of those dreams of joy in which he had indulged but a few hours before. With the usual course of bitter and unavailing regret in a young and inexperienced mind, he reproached himself for not having done every act that might have averted the misfortune which had fallen upon him. He blamed himself for having joined the battle when he had no occasion to do so; he forgot all the inducements and arguments to which his mind had yielded when he left Rose in the farm at Mainville, in order to share in the glories and the dangers of the field of Ivry. He next regretted that, anxious to bear her the first tidings of success, he had hurried back as soon as he saw the fight irretrievably turned against the Leaguers, and acknowledged that he ought to have gone on with the king in pursuit of the enemy.

He who knows by frequent trial the fallibility of human judgment, and how often the best calculations are proved false by the unexpected turns of fate, judges as surely as he can by the light of reason, acts resolutely when his decision is formed, and leaves the rest to the will of God, thanking Him who alone gives success if his efforts prove effectual, bowing without self-condemnation if disappointment follows. But the young cannot do this; for it is the invariable fault of youth to attribute too much to human powers. We only discover their feebleness when we have tried them; and this is one of the first lessons of earthly existence, the great school wherein we learn, or, at least, may acquire, the knowledge that fits us for a higher state of being. The world is a school, and we are but schoolboys, and all that we obtain is destined for another scene.

The night which De Montigni first passed as a prisoner was without repose, as it well might be. Had his busy thoughts permitted sleep to visit his eyelids during the first five hours of the night, the noises which rose up from below would have effectually banished the gentle guest; but those sounds were hardly heard by the captive, and, long after his servant had left him, he sat and mused—now reviewing the past; now forming airy schemes for the future, destroyed as soon as raised; now pondering over the bitter present with unavailing anger and regret. Shortly after daylight he was up and dressed; and when his servant again appeared, he sent him at once to the Duke of Nemours to know when he would fix his ransom, according to the custom of the day. The answer was cold and formal, "That Monsieur de Nemours would see the Baron de Montigni in the course of the morning, and would then inform him of his intentions."

This was all that the man had been able to obtain; and, for many another impatient hour, De Montigni paced his narrow chamber, giving way to every dark and painful imagination, till at length a step different from that of the guard at the door, was heard without, about an hour after noon, and the voice of the Duke of Nemours was instantly recognised by the prisoner, telling the soldier he might retire to the room below.

They were words of good augury to the young nobleman, who mentally said, "He comes to name my ransom;" and the impression was farther confirmed by the cheerful and courteous countenance of the duke, who entered the moment after, more with the air of an old acquaintance than a captor.

"Well, Monsieur de Montigni," he said, "how have you passed the night? By heaven, they have assigned you but a paltry lodging here. 'Tis none of my doings, this. La Bourdasière should have known better."

"The lodging matters little, my lord," answered De Montigni; "it is the imprisonment that is painful;" and, resolved to follow the determination he had formed the day before, and cast himself and Rose upon the generosity of the duke, he added, "Nor is it my own captivity that is the most grievous to me. It is the imprisonment of the lady you found with me."

"But she is not a prisoner, Monsieur de Montigni," replied Nemours; "therein you have made a mistake."

"She is worse than a prisoner, my lord duke," said the young nobleman, "if you send her back to the chateau of Marzay. Nay, hear me out, my lord. I have ever heard that the Duke of Nemours is the flower of the French nobility for chivalrous generosity. His name has reached me even in Italy, where I have so long sojourned; and if, when I entered France, I had been asked on whom I would soonest rely for aid and protection in any honourable enterprise, I should have answered 'on Monsieur de Nemours.' Now, my lord, I will tell you the plain truth regarding the situation of myself and Mademoiselle d'Albret, and if your own heart will suffer you to send her back to the captivity in which she is held at Marzay, I am much mistaken."

He then proceeded to relate the circumstances in which he had found Rose on his return from Italy; the arts that had been employed to deceive them both; and the recourse which they had had to flight as the only means of delivering the lady from the position in which they had placed her. Nemours listened with a varying countenance, but without any interruption. At one moment De Montigni thought he was touched; at another, a heavy frown came upon his brow; at another, a look of impatience passed over his face, as if he were tired of the tale; and when the young nobleman had ended, he replied in an indifferent tone, "All very lamentable, Monsieur de Montigni; but still, unless you were prepared to subscribe to the Holy Catholic Union, I should not be justified in retaining Mademoiselle d'Albret from her guardian. Even if you were, indeed, it would still be a consideration whether the long services of Monsieur de Chazeul would not require us to bestow the hand of the lady upon him, rather than upon a fresh and uncertain convert."

"What!" exclaimed De Montigni, hastily; "the contract with her father, her own inclination, and my undoubted right to count for nothing!"

"I am no lawyer," answered Nemours coldly; "I know nothing of contracts. If you think

yourself injured in regard to that matter, the courts are open to you."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur de Nemours," cried de Montigni, "do not for your own good name's sake treat the matter in such a tone! Do not sanction by the approval of the Duke of Nemours, a line of conduct which you must feel has been most base and dishonourable!"

The duke coloured. "Well, sir," he answered, I will not sanction it. If all the circumstances be as you say, wrong has been done. But I am very sorry I cannot help it now. A very different statement of the affairs has been made to me in letters from Chazeul; and to end all in one word, the lady is already far on her way towards Marzay."

De Montigni started, and gazed on him with a stern and angry brow. "And you have really done this thing!" he asked.

"I have," replied Nemours, returning his glance with one of equal fire.

"Then probably," said De Montigni, in a tone of bitter calmness, "Monsieur de Nemours is prepared still farther to favour his friend's honest and honourable proceedings by retaining the lady's affianced husband in prison, and refusing to put him to ransom, as is customary among gentlemen in honourable warfare? Pray let me know my fate at once."

"No sir," answered the duke, "I do not intend to do any such thing. I propose to set you free as soon as possible, either by exchange or ransom, for the very purpose of suffering you to pursue your claims to this lady's hand as you may think fit. There is one little preliminary, indeed, but that is a trifle which will be soon arranged."

"That is like the Duke of Nemours again," exclaimed De Montigni, warmly. "What is the amount of ransom you demand?"

"Name it yourself, Monsieur de Montigni," replied Nemours.

"Will twenty thousand livres suffice?" asked the young baron.

"Fully," said Nemours.

"Then they shall be yours with as much speed as can be used," replied De Montigni. You will give me a messenger to my intendant at Montigni, who has more than enough in his hands to discharge the sum at once."

"Nay, I will do more," said Nemours; "I will set you free to seek it yourself, and send it when you can. Your time may be valuable to you just now, and Heaven forbid that I should detain you."

"Now you are generous indeed, my lord," answered De Montigni, "and my best thanks and gratitude are yours forever."

"There is, however, one little preliminary," continued Nemours, in a somewhat dry tone, "which we must settle before you go."

"I suppose you mean a bond or engagement to pay the ransom?" said De Montigni.

"Not so, my young friend," answered Nemours, with a bitter smile. "You will have the kindness to recollect that yesterday, on the pleasant banks of the Eure, at a place I believe called the ford of Mainville, you thought fit to charge me with want of courtesy towards a lady. Now such charges should not be made *lightly; and you* have, moreover, by your conduct *since, though not* exactly in the same words, implied that you sustained that charge. The Duke of Nemours, sir, lies under imputation from no man living; and, therefore, waving the privileges of his rank as a prince of a sovereign house, he is ready to wipe it out in your blood without farther delay."

"Ah, Monsieur de Nemours," said De Montigni, "can you so tarnish the bright generosity you displayed just now by—"

But Nemours waved his hand. "No more sir," he said, "no more! Arguments on such subjects are vain. The man who submits to insult is a coward. You have heard what I have said. I pray you give me an answer."

"Assuredly, my lord," replied De Montigni, "I am happy that I have some privileges too to wave, in order in some degree to put me on a level with so high a prince."

"Indeed, sir!" said Nemours, in a tone of some surprise; "may I inquire what they are?"

"Those of a prisoner, my lord," answered the young baron, calmly. "It is an old law of honour and arms, that no prisoner or person under ransom can receive a challenge from any man, much less from his captor. Nor is he bound to take the slightest notice of such an invitation, the shame, if there be any insult or provocation given, resting upon the giver." Nemours coloured; but De Montigni proceeded: "This, my lord duke, is the privilege that I now wave to gratify you; but it is upon condition that I name the terms and circumstances of our combat."

"Assuredly," replied Nemours; "that you have a right to demand. What are the terms?"

"Somewhat numerous, my lord," replied De Montigni, after a moment's thought. "First, that we fight without the town; next, that our combat be restricted to one pistol shot on each side; next, which is absolutely necessary, my time being precious, as you justly said but now, that we be without seconds; for, as perhaps you are aware, I have no friends in this town.* Moreover taking you at your word, I will request you, in all courtesy, to give me under your hand a passport to come and go, in return for which I will give you a bond for the amount of the ransom, and, by your permission, will send my servant, who is with me, to bring it at once from Montigni."

"Agreed, agreed," cried Nemours, with a well-pleased air. "But you have forgotten to name the time, Monsieur de Montigni. I am at your disposal to-morrow, the next day, the day after—the day following that I must quit Chartres."

De Montigni smiled: "I hope to quit it to-day, Monsieur de Nemours," he replied. "It may take half an hour to have the ransom bond drawn; as long, perhaps, for me to buy a pistol, for you know that I was unarmed when you

* The duel of one to one, without seconds or witnesses, was not uncommon at this time in France, especially when men were of high rank, and wished to void a serious quarrel without danger of interruption. They often, also, took place on horseback with the pistol; but Monsieur de Montell is wrong in stating, under the reign of Henry IV., that it was a new custom to introduce seconds into duels. During the reign of Charles IX. and Henry III., the practice of fighting with a number of seconds, who all took part in the affray, was general; and in the famous challenge of Henry IV. himself, when King of Navarre, to the Duke of Guise, he offered to fight him one to one, two to two, or ten to ten.

made me prisoner: say half an hour more for any other unexpected impediment, and then I am at your service."

De Nemours embraced him as if he had done him the greatest favour, for such was the spirit of those times; and then calling to the guard from below, he discharged him from his task, bidding him bring materials for writing as speedily as possible.

"I will save you the trouble of purchasing pistols, Monsieur de Montigni," he continued; "you shall have one of mine; and there are no better in all France."

"You do me honour, sir," replied De Montigni, "and I accept your offer with gratitude; but you must name our place of meeting, as I am unacquainted with this locality."

"There is a stone cross," said Nemours, "little more than a quarter of a league from the Porte Drouaise: it is so far on your way; and there is a convenient field hard by, where we can have room to turn our horses. Yours is somewhat weary, I fear, from yesterday's exertions, but mine is not less so, so that there will be no inequality."

Everything was soon arranged. The pistols were sent for, the ransom bond drawn up, the passport given, the signature of La Bourdasière obtained to it; and, as nearly three quarters of an hour yet remained of the appointed time, to which the duke determined to be very punctual, he ordered refreshments to be brought up into the chamber of De Montigni, and there, talking gayly over a thousand indifferent subjects, passed half an hour as if he were occupied by no thoughts but those of peace and pleasure. De Montigni, on his part, did his best to maintain the same tone, and played his part as well as might be; but he was less accustomed to such transactions than his companion, and his mind would revert from time to time to Rose d'Albret, and a cloud of care would settle on his brow.

As time wore by, and the appointed hour approached, the duke called to the people below, and ordered his horse to be brought from the stables of the castle. Then turning to De Montigni, he added, "I think, as you are not acquainted with the spot, it may be as well if I conduct you thither myself; but, in the first place, despatch your servant on his errand. I will take care that none of mine follow us; and your horse can be brought round after he is gone."

De Montigni made no objection, and the plan proposed was pursued. Nemours left his young companion for a few minutes, to make the arrangements necessary to guard against interruption, and, during the time that he was thus left alone, De Montigni wrote a few hasty lines to Rose d'Albret, telling her of the circumstances in which he was placed, and bidding her farewell if he should fall. The letter was hardly sealed when Nemours returned; and now that it was arranged they were to go forth for the purpose of taking each others' lives in deadly combat, he was all courtesy and urbanity, according to the customs of the day; and to have heard his words, or to have witnessed his demeanour, one would have supposed that De Montigni was a dear and intimate friend, or perhaps a younger brother. Each charged the pistol of the other; each opened his pourpoint, to show that he had no secret or coat of mail beneath; and then, after some ceremonies as to who should first descend the stairs, the Duke of Nemours led the way. Mounting their horses, which they found, held by some of the soldiers, at the door, they rode together towards the gates of the citadel. Several of the gentlemen attached to the Duke of Nemours were assembled near the bridge, and De Montigni thought that there were somewhat grave and even angry looks upon their countenances, which might indicate that they were not quite so ignorant of the object of his companion and himself as they affected to be. A little farther on, at the outer gate, Monsieur de la Bourdasière came out of the guardhouse, and, approaching the horse of the Duke of Nemours, spoke to him for a moment in a low tone.

"Not if you value the friendship of Nemours," replied the duke, sternly. "The man who interferes in the slightest degree is my enemy from that hour."

Thus saying, he rode on; and, passing the gates of Chartres, they advanced for some way along the road to Dreux, till at length the stone cross which the duke had mentioned appeared in sight, and, dismounting from their horses, they knelt before it, and prayed for some moments in silence. Then mounting again, they took their way across the plain till they had lost sight of the cross, it being considered in those days improper to commit murder in the neighbourhood of that symbol of salvation, although, with the heart full of every passion and every purpose condemned by Christ, they would kneel and pray as they passed under the cross of Him who died to bring peace upon earth, good-will among men. Then choosing an open field by the bank of the river, the duke made his companion a low bow, and wheeled his horse, saying, "Here, Monsieur de Montigni, we shall have space enough. We fire as we pass; and mind your aim be good!"

De Montigni bowed in return, and took his ground on the opposite side of the field.

CHAPTER XX.

The journey was long and tedious, the road heavy and bad, the coach which had been procured at Chartres ponderous and cumbersome, and the horses which had been put in it unequal to drag its weight except at a slow and lingering pace. Poor Rose d'Albret sat far back in the vehicle, with her hands over her eyes, and the tears streaming fast down her cheek as they passed through the gates of Chartres, and as the last faint traces of the dream of happiness in which she had been indulging faded away, and left her a reality of misery, anxiety, and care.

Tardy as was their progress, the feet of the horses seemed all too quick in drawing her towards a scene in which she anticipated nothing but distress of many kinds; reproach from those who themselves deserved the bitterest censure, threats, importunity, persecution, and that constant effort to deceive, which she knew would

require on her part continual watchfulness, and a guard upon every word, and look, and action. She could no longer hope to give way to one feeling of the heart; the free spirit was to be chained down and bound; the candid and the frank was to put on reserve and policy; the trustful and the confiding was to assume doubt and suspicion: every bright quality of her own mind was to be cast away for the time, as useless in the warfare in which she was about to engage; and she was to be called upon to take up the weapons of her adversaries, in order to meet them upon equal terms. It was all bitters, in effort; and Rose shrank from the contemplation, and felt a sickening hopelessness of heart, to which she had never given way before.

Then her thoughts turned to De Montigni, and for the first time she felt to the full how much she loved him. Short as had been the time that they had passed together since his return to France, those few hours had been as much as years in binding heart to heart, so full had they been of events, thoughts, and feelings; and now that she was separated from him, she asked herself what would be his fate; meditated over all that he would suffer on her account, as well as the weary weight of imprisonment; and, judging rightly of his sensations, knew that his grief and anguish for her would be the most painful, part of all he had to endure. She felt as if she were bound in gratitude to repay his anxiety by equal grief for him; and, instead of endeavouring to console herself by listening to the voice of hope, she added, I may say voluntarily, to her own sorrow by dwelling upon his.

Thus passed hour after hour, as they rolled slowly on, while the party of horsemen who guarded her urged the coachman to greater speed, though, if her voice could have obtained a hearing, she would have besought him to delay at every step, rather than hurry on to a place the very thought of which was horrible to her. The driver, however, was not one to be moved in any degree by the exhortations of his companions, and neither slower nor faster did he go for all that could be said to him. At the same dilatory pace he proceeded, paused twice to water and to feed his horses, and seemed as deaf to the apprehensions of the guard lest they should be overtaken by any party of the enemy, as to the threats which they held out of the anger of the governor and the Duke of Nemours. Thus night fell just before they reached a little town not much more than half way to Marzay; and the coachman, declaring that his horses could proceed no farther that day, pulled up at the door of what was then called a *gîte* or sleeping-place, and proceeded unceremoniously to detach the cattle from the vehicle, giving no heed whatsoever either to the questions or remonstrance of an old man who was in command of the troop.

As nothing could be done but to remain where they were, Rose was led to her bedchamber, and told, in civil terms enough, that, by her leave, they would proceed at daybreak on the following morning. The old man paid every attention to her comfort, according to the orders he had received; and even listened while, encouraged by his courteous manner, she ventured *to remonstrate upon* the conduct pursued towards her, in carrying her against her will to a place so hateful to her. He replied, coldly, that the affair was none of his; he did but obey his orders; and Rose soon found, by the strictness with which she was watched, and by the placing of a guard at her chamber door, that the hope of escaping, and flying on foot at any risk, was altogether vain.

The journey of the next day went on as that of the day just gone, and it was evening when the sight of many well-known objects, the wood through which she had often ridden, the little chapel where she had frequently stopped to pray, the hamlet, the church, the fountain, the stream, all of which she recollected, showed her that they were within a few miles of the place in which her youth had been spent. How changed were now all her feelings from those with which she had wandered through the same scenes in girlhood! Where was now the sunshine of the heart, which at once lighted up every object around? Where was the interest with which imagination had invested all that now seemed so dead and cold? Some light had gone out in life since she was last there, and the visionary splendour had departed.

In about half an hour more they came to the side of a hill, from which the chateau of Marzay was visible at the distance of about a mile. The evening sun was just setting, and casting long streams of light and shadow over the undulating country below. The snow had disappeared; the green herbage of the fields was seen; the brown branches of the wood grew warm and glowing in the evening rays; the river, swollen with rain, rushed on like a torrent of blood, reflecting the glowing crimson of the west, and every window of the chateau flashed back the bright beams of light in lines almost too dazzling for the eye. Round the summits of the towers, however, as they rose above the eminence on which the castle was built, rolled a thin, dull cloud of leaden vapour, faintly tinged with red on the side next to the sun; and as the carriage moved slowly on, it descended lower and lower over the building, rendering the lines and angles indistinct to the eye, like the fate which awaited the poor girl who was journeying thither. She gazed out eagerly towards it with a heavy sigh, and a heart weighed down with the certainty of coming sorrow; and then turning her eyes over the open ground below, she traced the road which she had followed in her flight with De Montigni, and could have wept to think how vain had proved all the hopes that bore her up through the fatigues and discomforts of that journey.

Suddenly from behind a clump of trees, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, emerged slowly a figure on horseback, bearing in his hand what Rose at first imagined to be a lance. The next moment, however, she perceived that it was a cross; and, at the same solemn pace, following the first on foot, came six other men, carrying something like a litter on their shoulders. The light caught upon it, however, as they began to ascend the slope towards the chateau, and Rose saw the fluttering of a pall; several other persons followed, likewise on foot, and then a party of some fifteen or sixteen horsemen, with lances lowered, and a pennon flickering in the wind.

"They are bearing back a dead body to the chateau, mademoiselle," said the old man, who was riding by the side of the carriage at the moment; "likely some one who has fallen at Ivry. Perhaps we had better stop and let them get before us. It is unlucky to go in with a corpse."

"Unlucky to go in at all," said Rose, sadly: "do as you will, sir; I am a captive, and have no authority in such matters."

The old man gave orders to halt, and the funeral procession of the good old commander De Liancourt, which was following a road that formed an acute angle with the one they were themselves pursuing, moved slowly on towards the chateau. When it had come within three or four hundred yards of the gates, the Count de Liancourt, with his nephew Chazeul, and a number of the soldiers and attendants, came forth to meet it, preceded by Father Walter, and two boys belonging to the chapel, dressed in their robes. The procession immediately halted, and Estoc, dismounting from his horse, advanced a few steps in front to confer with the count and his companions.

The loss of a brother, to a man in the decline of life, can never be a matter of indifference, and Monsieur de Liancourt was evidently much agitated; but there were other feelings in his bosom besides those of mere grief, and his manner was hesitating and embarrassed as he returned Estoc's grave salutation, and listened to the solemn words,

"I have brought back to you, sir, the corpse of your brother, Michael de Liancourt, commander of the Order of St. John, who fell, gallantly fighting for his king, on the glorious field between St. André and Ivry; and I claim your permission to carry it into the chapel of the chateau, according to his own request."

"I receive my poor brother's body at your hands, Monsieur Estoc," replied the count, "and thank you for your letter of this morning; but as you know we have few people in the castle, and many of us not altogether holding the same opinions as yourself, you cannot expect us to suffer you to enter with such a body of armed men."

"We are armed, Sir Count," answered Estoc, "as soldiers carrying the body of a soldier; but you know right well we come in peace upon so sad an errand. As soon as we have performed our duty, we will depart in peace, if we are suffered to do so; but what we have undertaken we will perform, and trust to meet with no opposition."

"This is foolishness, sir," cried Chazeul, sharply; "you cannot expect such permission, after all that has taken place; and, in one word, you may enter yourself with any two or three, but no more shall have admission."

Estoc's cheek grew red. "To you, young man," he replied, "I do not speak, for you are not the lord of that chateau, and never will be; but to you, Monsieur de Liancourt, I answer, we have all of us sworn to lay the body of our old leader before the altar of the chapel of Marzay, and we will do it. If you will give us admission, well; if not, I will bear it back to the church in the village, there set it down till we are joined by the men of Montigni, and then forcing my way in at the point of the sword, will keep my oath, whoever tries to stay me. You know old Estoc too well to believe that he will break his word; so choose, and that quickly, for it is growing late."

But at this moment Father Walter interposed, advancing with an air of grave authority, and saying, "Cease, cease! in the name of decency and Christian charity, cease! and in the presence of the dead, let us have peace. My son," he continued, turning to the count, "you will never, I am sure, oppose Monsieur Estoc in carrying in the body of our poor friend into the chapel according to his vow, if he pledge his word to retire immediately after it be accomplished. You, Monsieur Estoc, will never refuse to plight your word as a French gentleman, to retread your steps as soon as you have laid the corpse before the altar, without doing injury to any one, or interfering in any way with the affairs of the castle."

"Most willingly, good father," replied Estoc; "I come but for one purpose; and as soon as that is accomplished, I am more anxious than any one to leave this place at once, for I have promised to lead these good fellows back to join the king, and reap our share in the fruits of this great victory."

"Then it is true that Henry won the battle?" asked Monsiuer de Liancourt.

"Ay, sir!" answered Estoc, "most true: and a decisive battle it was. The league is now nothing but a name."

Chazeul smiled contemptuously; but the priest brought back the discussion to the point, saying, "Monsieur de Liancourt, you have not answered. I trust you will be satisfied with this promise."

The count hesitated; but Estoc, turning towards him with a reproachful look, demanded, "Have you known me so long, Monsieur de Liancourt, and yet doubt my word! I promise you, sir, to quit this castle with these good men as soon as I have laid that bier before the altar, and given Father Walter here the message which I have to deliver to him regarding the watching of the body and the masses for the soul."

"Well," said the count, whose eyes had been turned for a moment to the hill behind Estoc, "well, I consent, on condition, sir, that you immediately retire to the village without meddling in any way with what you may see within the castle. Do you promise as a man of honour?"

"I do!" replied Estoc; "though I know not what you are afraid I should interfere with. But as I come here for a fixed purpose, when that is accomplished, I will go."

"Well, then, march on!" said the count; "and we, as mourners for my brother, will bring up the rear."

The order was accordingly given, and the funeral train was once more put in motion. The party of the count, with the exception of Father Walter, who remained in front, paused till the rest had passed, and then fell in behind; but, on a word from Monsieur de Liancourt, one of his attendants quitted the line, and at a quick pace sped up the hill to the spot where the coach containing poor Rose d'Albret was still standing. Had Estoc been aware of whom that vehicle contained, it might have changed the fate of many an after day · but as yet he

had not perceived it at all; and, following the corpse of his old leader with a slow and heavy step, while a thousand memories of other days, associated with the very building he was now entering, pressed sadly on his mind, he ascended the slope with his eyes bent down upon the ground, till the body passed the low arch of the gate, and he found himself in the outer court, so long familiar to his footsteps.

The priest, in the mean time, sped on into the chapel, in order to receive the body with the usual ceremonies; and, dismounting from their horses, the soldiers who had followed the old commander to the field of Ivry soon thronged the space before the altar, with their armed forms falling into fine but sombre groups, as the last faint rays of the setting sun streamed through the stained glass window on the western side, and cast their long shadows across the floor, covered with many a monumental stone and inscription. The Count de Liancourt and Chazeul stood behind, with their followers and attendants; and even when the ceremony was over, they lingered still, as if to see the old soldier and his comrades quit the chapel.

Estoc looked round more than once in the hope that they were gone. Perhaps he wished to give way to the feelings of sorrow and regret that were strong in his heart, without the presence of colder witnesses. Perhaps he wished to have some private conversation with the priest before he departed. But the count and his companions remained where they were; and, finding that they had no intention of retiring, he at length turned to the priest, saying, "Monsieur de la Tremblâde, I have now to ask you, on behalf of him who is gone, first, to say one hundred masses for the repose of his soul."

The priest bowed his head, replying, "It shall be done right willingly, my son."

And Estoc proceeded, "Secondly, to keep vigil this night and to-morrow by the body, till the hour of matins."

"It is unusual, my son," answered the priest, "except in the case of very high personages; but still, as you require it, it shall be done."

"I beseech you in charity to do so, father," replied Estoc; "and I know that which you promise you will accomplish."

"Without fail," answered Father Walter; and Estoc, turning from the chapel, led his men back into the court. The first object his eyes fell upon was a carriage, apparently just arrived, and surrounded by several armed men bearing the green scarfs of the League. The door of the coach was open, and a lady in the act of alighting; and the next moment Rose d'Albret held out her hands to the old soldier, exclaiming, "Ah, good Estoc!"

Yielding to the first impulse, Estoc sprang forward towards her, exclaiming, "Have they brought you here already, dear lady?"

"Much against my will," replied Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Chazeul and the Count de Liancourt instantly interposed.

"You promised, sir," exclaimed the latter, "to retire from the chateau without interfering with anything that you might see or hear. Is this the way you keep your word?"

"I will keep my word with you, sir," answered Estoc, "better than you have kept yours with this lady's father. Alas! Mademoiselle d'Albret," he continued, "I am bound to quit this place at once; and all I can say is, that steadfast truth and firmness will prevail at last, and so I must bid you farewell."

As he spoke, he kissed her hand and turned away; and Rose, yielding to a violent burst of tears, suffered herself to be led into the building by the Count de Liancourt, who remained silent till they reached the hall, where the first object that presented itself to her eyes, in the dim twilight that now reigned through the wide chamber, was the tall, harsh form of the Marchioness de Chazeul, advancing as if to meet her. For a moment Rose's heart sunk at the sight; but the next instant she murmured to herself, "I must not give way. My task is one of firmness, and I must not yield to any weakness like this."

"So, girl, so," cried Jacqueline de Chazeul, "all your fine plots have proved of no avail! Was it not decent, delicate, and feminine, to fly from your guardian's protection, and cast yourself, unmarried, into the arms of a man you scarcely know?"

"Scarcely know!" exclaimed Rose d'Albret; "whom do I know so well! But, madam, to fly with him was my only choice, in order to escape the arts and persecutions which I was sure to encounter here. I believe that I was justified by the contract of my father, which had been so long concealed from me. I could trust to the honour of the man to whom my father had engaged my hand; and I went to seek from the king that protection and justice which I was not likely to meet with where I was best entitled to expect it."

"You have learned boldness enough, it seems, minion," replied Madame de Chazeul, in a sharp tone; "and if you think to justify yourself here by saying that it was to a heretic usurper you fled, to one condemned and degraded by God and the apostolic church, from your lawful guardian and the husband whom he has selected for you, you are very much mistaken."

"To you, madam, I seek not to justify myself at all," replied Rose; "I have naught to do with you, nor you with me. To Monsieur de Liancourt, when he thinks fit, I am ready, in private, to assign the motives of my conduct, and to none else am I responsible."

"I will teach you that I have to do with you, pretty lady," replied Madame de Chazeul. "Have you not deceived and ill-treated my son? and you shall make him full atonement before I quit this chateau."

"I have not ill-treated nor deceived him, madam," replied Rose. "'Tis he that has ill-treated and deceived me, and many others too. He cannot say that I ever affected to love him, that I ever did more than yield a cold and unwilling acquiescence to that which he made me believe, by a shameless falsehood, was my poor father's will. I learned, at length, what that father's intentions really were, and then, contempt and abhorrence of the deceiver took place of the indifference I before felt towards him. He knows it well," she continued, "that I am bound to him by no tie, no promise, no engagement whatsoever. I was told that I must marry him—"

"And so you must, fair lady," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, in a mocking tone, "and

so you must, and so you shall! As sure as my name is Jaqueline de Chazeul, you shall be his wife before two suns set."

"Nay, nay, my dear mother," said Chazeul, who had been speaking to the Count de Liancourt at a little distance, "you are too harsh, and too unkind to Mademoiselle d'Albret. She will yield when she finds that it must be so. She will also yield when she finds she is mistaken about this contract, and that, in reality, her father left it open for Monsieur de Liancourt to bestow her hand on which of his nephews he thought fit. I can assure you, Rose," he continued, in a soft but emphatic tone, "Monsieur de Marennes believed that my uncle, here, could bequeath his estates to myself, if he chose it, and therefore I might as well be meant by the contract as my cousin."

"Cease, sir, cease," answered Rose; "it is vain to stain yourselves with any more deceits. I now know the whole truth, that the good commander resigned his claims in favour of Madame de Montigni; that to her son those claims appertained when my father signed the contract, and, therefore, it was to him he pledged me. But I have something more to say, and I beg you will mark it. Had you been even meant by the contract, which you know right well you were not, nothing on earth should ever make me give you my hand, now that I know some other of your doings. I would rather, a thousand fold, vow myself to the seclusion of a convent, than pass my life with a man whom I can neither respect, esteem, nor love."

"We will not give you the choice, minion," cried Madame de Chazeul; "your fate is sealed and determined; you are to be his wife, if not by fair means, then by force. This will bear no farther trifling, Liancourt; you must exert your power over her, and compel her to do what is right."

"I hope he will exert it," exclaimed Rose, "to protect me from those who would do me wrong. Monsieur de Liancourt," she continued, "I have always loved you well. You have ever been kind to me till this last sad occasion, when, persuaded by others, I am sure, rather than by your own inclination, you have wellnigh sacrificed my happiness and peace. For my part, I have tried, from my young days, to show you the affection of a daughter, and I would willingly show you the obedience of one, were it possible; but in this instance it is not so. My father's contract I will fulfil, happy that my own inclinations and the earliest affections of my heart go with it, but still more happy that it saves me from wedding one with whom I could expect nothing but misery. I beseech you, then, give me that protection which you promised my father you would afford me; suffer me not to be injured and insulted in your own house, even by your sister; and do not allow me to be persecuted to break the engagement made between you and your wife's brother. Rather aid to maintain it to the utmost of your power, and be my support and stay in this hour of difficulty and distress."

"You ask much at my hands, Mademoiselle d'Albret," replied the count, coldly, "and yet do not offer much in return. You cannot suppose that I approve of your quitting my house with Monsieur de Montigni; and your claim to protection on my part must be founded on your obedience to my commands, which I trust you will now honour somewhat more than you have lately done."

Rose turned away with a sad look and sickening sinking at her heart. Every one was against her; and, though it was what she had expected, yet it made her feel more deeply desolate and hopeless. To reply she saw was vain; and she felt that she could not much longer keep up the firm and determined tone in which she had forced herself to speak, for tears at every other moment were ready to betray the feelings that she laboured to conceal. "I am weary," she said, abruptly, "and I would fain retire to rest. By your leave, Monsieur de Liancourt, I will seek my chamber."

"I will show you which is your chamber," said Madame de Chazeul, "for you must not fancy that you are to tenant a room so easy of access. Who can tell," she continued, in a jesting tone, "what gay gallants we may have in the castle, who may be pleased to scale a lady's window when they know she is so ready to receive them!"

Rose could bear no more, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Hush, Jacqueline, hush!" said Monsieur de Liancourt; "I will show her the room myself;" and, taking her hand, he led her away from the hall.

CHAPTER XXI.

For one moment—it could scarcely be more—the old Marchioness de Chazeul gazed down upon the pavement of the hall after her brother had left them, and then looking up with the demon smile which was not uncommon upon her countenance when anything especially daring and evil was working in her mind, she took her son's arm, and, gazing in his face, said in a low, sarcastic tone, "Do you know, my son Nicholas, you are but a fool, after all?"

"Indeed, sweet mother?" said the worthy offspring of such a parent, with a look of supercilious indifference, "I am glad to hear you think so. Variety is charming in a family; and I have heard men say that you are no fool. But may I know how I have merited the pleasant appellation you so glibly bestow upon me? What have I done, said, or thought which deserves that ancient and honourable title?"

"You have thought that this girl can be won by civility, flattering, coaxing, and tenderness," replied the marchioness, "and therefore you are a fool, as well as my weak brother, your uncle. It needs but a glance of her eye, it needs but a word from her lip, to show that such means are as vain as whistling to the wind. I tell you, Chazeul, and I tell you true, that force—force—do you mark me? force is the only engine you can employ against this haughty spirit. Ay, and it must be applied quickly, if you would have your bride. She knows more than we imagine—she knows all, that is clear. There is now no stopping in midway. You must overleap all idle barriers; rend to pieces all morsels of black and white parchment. You must render yourself the only man she can marry and all will be soon yours."

"But what course would you have me pursue, my most politic mother?" asked Chazeul. "If one frightens and alarms her, she will only shrink from me the more."

"Let her shrink," cried the marchioness. "What matters her shrinking to you? Do not pretend to things you do not feel. She must be your wife, Chazeul, shrinking or willingly; and which, matters not much either to you or me. She must be yours, I say; and as it is clear that she will not with her consent, it must be without."

"But how? but how is this to be accomplished?" demanded her son. "Here are a thousand obstacles, good lady. We must work through my uncle, and you must see that it is vain to hope he will use any violent means. How weakly he answered me this morning, when Nemours's trumpet came!"

"We must act through some one else," answered the marchioness. "He is not to be trusted but when he considers his rights invaded, and 'tis useless to think of employing him. We must find another, and get him to aid our plan."

"But what is that plan?" demanded the young nobleman. "Let me hear, in a word, what is the purport of all these hints?—How is it to be done!"

"By various ways," replied Madame de Chazeul. "First, and above all, you must remove from this busy scene the man whom she fancies that she loves."

"Remove him!" exclaimed Chazeul; "I know not how. He is surrounded by people devoted to him. I should find some difficulty. He is now in the hands of Nemours, too, who would not suffer it. The duke is scrupulous in such matters."

Such were the words of Chazeul. He expressed no surprise; he displayed no horror at the proposal; but in those days such thoughts were familiar to the minds of most men. In the preceding reign, private assassination had been one of the means of war, so often really committed by persons high in station and education, that rumour, as usual, exceeded the truth, and no death took place with circumstances at all out of the common course without being attributed to the agency of man. The revenge of individuals, the malignity of faction, the policy of states, all took the same direction; and kings and princes prompted and paid for dark deeds of blood, as well as the corrupt minions of the court, and the vicious women with whom it was thronged. Each day some murder had stained the records of the country, and men had more cause to guard themselves against the covert enmity of the rival in ambition or in love, than against the open wrath of the acknowledged foe. So common, indeed, had such crimes become, that circumstances were supposed to justify, and custom to palliate them; and when they were discovered, no wonder or disgust was excited, and multitudes who had taken no part in the deed itself, were found to conceal, protect, and plead for the assassin. It was an age of crime.

Chazeul, then, and his mother discussed the means of removing De Montigni from their path as calmly as if they had been laying out some *party of pleasure;* there was no hesitation, no repugnance, no tragic movings of remorse. The difficulties were all that were considered, and how to obviate them. It was of every-day deeds and events they spoke, and they conversed over them in an every-day tone.

"I do not see," replied the marchioness, "why that should prevent the business. His being in the hands of Nemours but fastens him to one spot, where he can always be reached."

"But there will be guards and people about him," said Chazeul, "who would give him help. To accomplish it we should need too many men to be able to introduce them quietly."

"Too many men!" cried his mother, with a laugh; "why, you soldiers are always thinking of violence and swords, and daggers. You do not fancy, do you, that I would have recourse to means so rough? Out upon such coarse handiwork! One little cup of drink—one savoury ragout—will do the deed better than bullet or steel, and put you in possession of Liancourt as well as Marennes. But leave that to me, for you seem unskilful in such matters. You must have both; and your task must be with the girl—leave me the man. We must have no more trifling, Chazeul, or secrets may come out which it were well to hide till you have obtained all that you can desire. The girl must be yours before two days have past: did you not mark her words?"

"I marked many of them," replied Chazeul; "they were well worthy of notice. But which do you mean?"

"Are you so dull!" asked his mother. "Did you not hear her say that you had deceived others as well as herself? and did not your own mind read the comment? Hark ye, boy! did you ever see or know a person—a sweet, tender, delicate creature, called Helen de la Tremblade?"

Chazeul's cheek grew pale and then red—not from remorse, not from shame, but from dread. It was dread, however, of only one human being. All the world might have been made aware of his baseness without causing him a care or anxiety, if he could have kept it from his mother. But he knew her well, the dark and fiendish nature of her character, her remorseless seeking for her own ends, her vindictive hatred of all those who offended her, and the little regard she had for any tie in pursuit of her own objects. Vanity, vice, and intemperate passions had not yet altogether quenched every natural feeling in his heart, and some lingering affection for the unhappy girl he had injured made him apprehensive for her more than for himself. His mother might use the knowledge she had obtained to drive him in the course she thought fit, or to frustrate his purposes, if he opposed her, but she would do no more as far as he was concerned. The result to Helen, however, might be death, or worse than death; and for a moment or two he remained silent, considering how he should act.

The keen eye of Madame de Chazeul was upon his countenance all the time, marking every change of expression, and translating all she marked; but after waiting his answer for some time she demanded, "You have heard of such a person, have you not?"

"Well," he replied somewhat impatiently,

"what of her? What has Mademoiselle d'Albret to do with Helen?"

"Ha, ha, ha," cried Madame de Chazeul, with a bitter laugh. "What has she to do with Helen? Why, simply to tell Walter de la Tremblade that gay Nicholas de Chazeul has made a paramour of his niece, in order to raise a devil that will soon send all our projects flying to the wind. You now see there is no time to be lost. The thing cannot long be kept secret. This girl has got some inkling of the truth, and she must be your wife before she can hint her suspicions to him, and he inquire into the facts."

Chazeul paused, and thought for a moment, and then repeated his mother's words. "The thing cannot long be kept secret!—why not? What have you done with her, my good mother? Something, assuredly; for Helen would keep her own counsel. You have not put her to death, surely?"

"Not I," cried Madame de Chazeul. "I am not called upon to punish such sins as that. It's only when people stand in the way that wise men put them to death. There, be satisfied—be satisfied. I have done her no harm; but, as I told you, the thing cannot long be concealed. Rose d'Albret has obtained some intimation of it. Of that I am sure by her manner. The old priest will wonder that his niece does not come hither, for I told him she was ill, or I would have brought her; and he will go to see her, so that I say it cannot be long concealed. You must use your time, therefore, busily."

Chazeul saw that his mother did not tell him all, but he was well aware that it was impossible to obtain the straightforward truth from her when she wished to conceal it, and accordingly following the bent which she gave to the conversation herself, he asked, "But how—how am I to use my time busily and to good purpose? I, unaided cannot force Rose d'Albret to give me her hand. If my uncle would assist vigorously, we might indeed succeed. But he is timid, as you know, in action, however bold he may be in words; and depend upon it, we shall need strong measures to induce her to yield."

"Ay, strong measures, indeed," replied his mother, "but they may be used without my brother's will or consent; and if you manage matters rightly, you may make the lady less positive than she is at present. Hark ye, Chazeul, a word in your ear!" He bent down his head, and the marchioness whispered to him a few brief words.

"No, no! Impossible," he cried: "utterly impossible! the maid sleeps in the ante-chamber, the priest in the next room. 'Tis quite in vain."

"Why, foolish boy," replied his mother, "I mean no violence—I mean no wrong. You do not comprehend me. Do you not know how much store she sets upon virtue and reputation? She would never consent to carry to Louis de Montigni a sullied name. Let but her fame be in your hands; let us but be able to prove that you have passed the night in her chamber, and we shall have no more idle resistance. The girl Blanchette will give you admittance, and be a witness also. Then keep as still as death for an hour or two, leave something on the table—a glove—a hat—anything in short, to mark that you have been there, and to show her herself that it is so, without your telling her."

Chazeul paused and meditated. He thought the scheme not unlikely to succeed, and yet he feared to undertake it. If discovered, he knew that it would prove his ruin with his uncle; and he did not see how he could bring it to work upon the mind of Rose herself, without acknowledging the truth, or more than the truth, to Monsieur de Liancourt. Just as he was about to reply, the count himself returned with Father Walter, and one of the servants entered at the same time, to light the sconces in the hall. Madame de Chazeul held up her finger as a warning to be silent; and, as soon as the attendant was gone, the marchioness turned to her brother, inquiring, "Well, what have you done with this obstinate girl, Anthony?"

"In good faith, nothing," replied the count; "she was more mild and gentle than with you, and I left her weeping; but she is as firm as ever."

"Well," said Madame de Chazeul, in an indifferent tone, "if she will not by fair means, she must by force. We have every right to compel her to do that which is good for her."

Monsieur de Liancourt shook his head doubtfully, saying, "I do not know."

"Ah, my good brother," answered Madame de Chazeul, in a bitter tone, "a battle lost makes great difference with doubtful friends. What say you, Monsieur de la Tremblade? Are you for giving up the Holy Catholic Union, and bestowing the lands of Marennes and Liancourt upon a supporter of the heretics?"

"Far from it, madam," replied Walter de la Tremblade. If anything, this unfortunate defeat should make us more zealous, active and determined. The party of the League is the party of truth and religion, and, doubtless, it will ultimately triumph. It should be our part to promote it the more strenuously as each new obstacle arises; and I must say that, conscientiously, no guardian could bestow the hand of his ward upon a man who, like Monsieur de Montigni, has drawn his sword against his religion."

"But that is a different thing," said Monsieur de Liancourt, "from forcing her to a marriage without her consent."

"Not altogether," answered the priest. "If you do not compel her to wed the one, she will wed the other; and when she finds there is no escape, most probably her resistance will give way."

Madame de Chazeul watched the countenance of Father Walter while he spoke, and listened, well satisfied, to words which showed her beyond all doubt that neither her own conduct towards his niece, nor that of her son, was ever dreamed of by Walter de la Tremblade. "If we can accomplish this marriage," she thought, "within a few hours, all will be safe. He may rage then as much as he will. It is amusing enough to make him aid in bringing about that which he will most wish undone when he knows the truth."

"What you say is very true, father," rejoined the count; "but I see not what means one can employ actually to force her. As she said to me but now, we may drag her to the altar, but she

will refuse the vow, and protest against it in the face of God and man."

"Such things have taken place," said Walter de la Tremblade, "and yet the ceremony has proceeded."

"But then the contract," said Monsieur de Liancourt. "If she will not sign it, how can we force her?"

"Oh, leave all that to me," cried Madame de Chazeul. "If you, brother, will only promise not to interfere, except by exerting your authority on behalf of your nephew, and laying your commands upon her to marry him, I will do all the rest."

"But I fear your violence, my good sister," replied the count.

Madame de Chazeul was about to answer, when a servant again entered the hall; and Monsieur de Liancourt exclaimed impatiently, "What now?"

"A messenger is just arrived from Chartres, sir," replied the man, "with orders for Monsieur de Mattraye, who escorted Mademoiselle Rose back, to return without a moment's delay, as the town is menaced by the king. He brings tidings, too, sir, that a duel has been fought between Monsieur de Montigni and my lord of Nemours."

"Nemours has killed him, for a thousand crowns!" cried Chazeul, as joyfully as if De Montigni had shown himself his bitterest enemy through life.

"What more? what more?" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "which of them fell?"

"He knew little about it, sir," replied the servant, "for he came away before the matter had spread over the town."

"I will go and see him," exclaimed Chazeul. "Nemours has killed him, without doubt."

Thus saying, he hurried away, and was absent for several minutes, during which time the marchioness talked in a low voice to the priest. But the count remained standing in the middle of the room, with his eyes bent down and his heart sad. He could not but recollect the days that were passed: the boy whom he had brought up from early years, the graces and high qualities he had displayed, and many a little act, and many a little scene, forgotten till that moment, rose up reproachfully before his eyes, and for the time filled him with grief and with remorse. The voice of conscience, which in its own hour will be heard, told him that the deed was his; that, had he not attempted to injure and deceive his sister's son, all the long train of dark and sad events which had filled the last few days would not have happened; that joy, and peace, and mutual love, and kindly affection might have reigned where strife and evil passion, violence and death, had been introduced, as the black followers of fraud. His brother and his nephew both were gone in a few short days; and his heart told him that the virtuous and the good had been cut off, while the dishonest and the vile remained!

It was but during a few minutes, however, that such thoughts oppressed him; for vanity, his besetting sin, the besetting sin of so many, the salve with which the devil medicates all the wounds of conscience, was soon brought to his relief. He was too vain to believe for any *length* of time that he could do wrong, even though the warning angel of the human heart thundered it in his ear. "Had De Montigni done as he was asked," he thought, after he had mastered the first impression, "nothing of this kind would have happened. It is all in consequence of his own obstinacy. What a sad thing it is that men will not be persuaded to their own good!"

As these comforting reflections passed through his mind, Chazeul re-entered the hall. "He is dead," he cried, "beyond all doubt he is dead. The man himself saw Nemours come back into the city alone and uninjured."

"Well, then," said Madame de Chazeul, "we are saved all farther trouble, for now you are the only heir. You had better go and tell her the news, Chazeul. Perhaps it may deliver her from as great an embarrassment as any one feels."

"Fy, now, Jacqueline! fy, now!" cried the count. "You know not her heart or feelings."

"I know very well, my good brother," replied Madame de Chazeul, "that women, if they have said a thing, often adhere to it with the constancy of a martyr, when they would give their right hand for a fair excuse for changing; but vanity keeps them to the point with a much firmer sort of resolution than conviction can supply. Do not tell me about her feelings! I know my own sex far better than you do; and I am sure there is not one woman out of ten who would not rejoice at the death of her dearest friend, if it delivered her from a great embarrassment."

"I find the Church is merciful as well as wise in imposing celibacy upon its priesthood," said Father Walter, with a cold, sarcastic smile. "But, indeed, I think it would be better not to tell Mademoiselle d'Albret to-night. She must be fatigued; her mind depressed with disappointment and anxiety; and she should be allowed some time for repose."

"No, father, no!" replied Madame de Chazeul. "She must know it to-night, for the marriage shall take place to-morrow, or, at farthest, the next day. Let her have to-night for grief—for I do not say she will not weep—to-morrow her mind will be made up, and the affair can proceed with decency."

"Will you tell her, Father Walter?" said Monsieur de Liancourt.

"Nay," exclaimed the marchioness, "why give him that trouble? I will do it in a moment."

"No, Jacqueline, you shall not go," cried the count. "You are too harsh and fierce to bear such tidings. Go, father, go! It is an office of Christian charity."

"She is more likely to believe it from my lips than yours, madam," said Father Walter, "and therefore I will undertake the task; but I must be quick, for I have my watch to commence in the chapel."

"Let us hear how she bears it," said the Count de Liancourt. "I grieve for the poor girl."

"Pshaw!" cried Jacqueline de Chazeul; and the priest quitted the hall, leaving the marchioness evidently uneasy.

A chamber had now been assigned to Rose d'Albret higher in the building than that which

she had formerly tenanted, and next to the room of Father Walter himself. It opened first into an antechamber somewhat smaller than the other, and thence upon a large landing-place, separated from the stairs by a balustrade. The anteroom, as before, was occupied by the maid Blanchette, who, well warned and tutored, was kept as a spy upon all her mistress's actions; and, on entering this little suite of apartments, the girl was the first person whom Father Walter encountered.

She was sitting at a table, knitting, with a sullen brow and pouting lips; and, notwithstanding deep habitual reverence for the priest, she seemed scarcely willing to answer him civilly when he inquired if he could speak with her mistress.

"I cannot tell," replied the girl, rising for a moment, and resuming her seat; "I really do not know what she is doing; she does not want my services, she says; she would rather be alone."

"Go and see, daughter!" said the priest. "Doubtless Mademoiselle d'Albret is grieved, and perhaps angry; but that does not exempt you from respect and obedience towards her in *all things*, where other duties do not require you to oppose her wishes."

"Indeed, father," answered the girl, sullenly, "I cannot undertake all this. Here I am told not to quit her anteroom from the moment she enters her chamber till the moment she leaves it, which is making me no better than a prisoner; and then I am to be rated, and frowned upon by the lady, as if I had behaved very ill to her. I don't see why I should bear all this."

"Because you are ordered to do so," said the priest, somewhat sternly; but he added the next moment, "It will not be of long duration, however. Now go and tell her I am here, seeking to speak with her on a matter of deep moment."

"Before Blanchette could obey, however, the door of the antechamber opened, and Madame de Chazeul entered, saying, "I have come to tell her myself, good father. I can then better judge of her frame of mind; and, as the count tells me, you have to keep vigil by the body of my poor old brother Michael, which I did not understand before, I will not keep you."

"Nay," replied the priest, "I have time, and will never shrink from doing my duty. This poor child will need consolation, and it must be my task to give it to her, as far as my poor voice can do so."

The marchioness was evidently not well pleased with this reply; and, though she masked her embarrassment as well as she could, yet a certain air of anxiety and uneasiness did not escape the calm but penetrating eye of Walter de la Tremblade. "She doubts me," he thought. "She is one of those who have no confidence in any one. What must her own heart be like!"

As he thus pondered, Blanchette returned and bade him enter, which he did, making way, however, for Madame de Chazeul to pass in first.

Rose had been weeping, but her eyes were now dry, and the usual mild and gentle expression was upon her countenance, till her eye lighted upon Madame de Chazeul, and then she turned away her head, with a look of shuddering horror, which the marchioness did not fail to mark, though with less anger than might, perhaps, have been expected. It was her wish to overawe and to command, both at present and in future, and the age of wishing to be loved had long passed by with her. Rose, however, soon added to the offence; for, turning towards Walter de la Tremblade, she said, "The girl merely mentioned your name, father, and I was willing and even glad to receive you; but the conversation which has already taken place between this lady and myself, was not of such a character as to make her society very desirable to me."

"You must have it, nevertheless, pretty minion," replied Madame de Chazeul. "I know you are as ungrateful, as you are self-willed; but I came to break to you a piece of news which has just arrived, and which, as you must hear it sooner or later, we have thought fit to communicate at once."

"The sooner it is communicated, the better," answered Rose; "I beseech you to make no delay, for I am anxious to retire to rest."

Madame de Chazeul turned towards the priest with a sign for him to proceed, and Father Walter, taking up the tale, addressed Rose in a gentle and a kindly tone, saying, "I fear, my poor daughter, what we have to communicate may grieve you more than you expect, and I would therefore have you prepare your mind by thinking of how God tries all men in this world with various deep afflictions, making them sometimes his chastisements for errors past, sometimes warnings against future faults, often depriving us of those things most dear which might prove snares to us, often frustrating our most anxious desires, which, if we knew all, might in their gratification produce misery instead of joy."

Rose listened attentively, anxious to hear what was to come next; but Madame de Chazeul waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "You are not in the pulpit, my good father. Do you not see she is quite prepared for anything you have to say! The truth is this, Mademoiselle d'Albret: a messenger has just arrived from Chartres, bringing orders for the men who accompanied you to return immediately, and with that order they conveyed intelligence that a duel has been fought between Monsieur de Nemours and your late lover De Montigni, in which the latter has met with the chastisement which his presumption deserved, and has been killed on the spot."

Rose started up and clasped her hands, while her face grew pale as ashes, and for a moment she seemed about to faint. The next instant, however, she passed her hand across her brow, gazed for a moment anxiously upon the ground, and then suddenly raised her head with a smile full of scorn, while the blood came back into her cheek and lip, exclaiming, "It is false! I know that it is false!"

"The poor creature is mad," said Madame de Chazeul. "You know it to be false, when we know it to be true! You must have wonderfully clever information. The man is in the chateau at this moment who brought the tidings from Chartres."

"Let me see him!" said Rose d'Albret.

Madame de Chazeul paused, and saw that by

mentioning the messenger she had committed a mistake; for it was her object to represent the death of De Montigni as certain, and she was aware that her son had run on to that inference much more rapidly than the man's own account might justify."

"No," she replied, "you shall not see him. I pledge my word that the information is true. Here is Father Walter ready to do the same. Monsieur de Liancourt will tell you the like story. If you insult us by doubting our word, it does not become us to take any trouble to convince you."

"Madam, I have been deceived in more than one thing already," replied Rose, bending her head gravely; and, consequently, I do not lend my mind easily to everything that is told me. Father Walter, I beseech you, by your duty to God, by your sacred calling, as you shall answer for it hereafter, to let me know, has this information truly arrived, and is it certain?"

"That it has arrived is beyond doubt," answered the priest, "but in regard to the certainty or the particulars, not having spoken with the messenger myself, I cannot say anything."

Rose waved her hand. "Enough," she said, "enough; I will beseech you now to leave me. Nay, I can endure no more to night."

Madame Chazeul was going to add something, but the priest laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Nay, madam, let us not press upon her hardly. Give her till to-morrow to think over it;" and he led the marchioness away, leaving poor Rose to her meditations.

CHAPTER XXII.

The moment the priest and the marchioness de Chazeul were gone, Rose d'Albret cast herself down into a chair, and covered her eyes with her hands. She would fain have shut out every sight and sound, in order that she might bend the whole energies of her mind to the contemplation of that one question, Were the dreadful tidings she had heard true or false? But the agitating beating of her heart, the whirling confusion of her brain, prevented her for a long time from fixing her thoughts firmly upon all the different arguments for believing or disbelieving the tale that had been told her. All was wild, and vague, and indistinct. Apprehension, at first, was far more powerful than hope; and, though reason pointed out many improbabilities even in that part of the intelligence which, as the reader knows, was absolutely true, yet she still dreaded the worst, even while she resolved, if possible, to believe that all was false.

"Was it likely," she asked herself, "that so proud a prince as the Duke of Nemours should risk his life in single combat against his own prisoner? Was it probable that he, who had shown himself so haughty towards De Montigni as scarcely to return him an answer, should place himself in such a position as to be compelled to meet him in the field? Was it not likely, most likely, that such a tale should be invented by those who had already deceived her on other points, in order to lead her the more *easily* to the objects they desired? Was it not *clear that it was so, from* their refusal to produce the messenger? Was not, in short, anything asserted by Jacqueline de Chazeul more likely to be false than true?"

Thus argued Hope; but on the other side, Fear, though in fewer words, spoke with a more powerful voice. "The priest had asserted that the report had undoubtedly arrived. Would he venture to do so, after the solemn abjuration she addressed to him, if he were not himself convinced that what he said was true? Then, too, the pains he had taken to prepare her mind for the tidings showed care and consideration for her; and if the language he had used in so doing were but the preface to a falsehood, it must be blasphemous trifling indeed. She suffered memory to run back over all the events lately passed; she considered his conduct; she asked herself if he had ever been guilty of deliberate falsehood? The answer was, No. He had suffered others to do so, but he had not done it himself. Without telling the exact truth, he had not uttered actual untruth. With that species of art, which has acquired the name of a body of men famous for employing it in all their dealings, he had made truth serve the purposes of falsehood; and, by a Jesuitical juggle, had countenanced things that he knew to be untrue, without leaving those he deceived any means of convicting him of a lie. But now he had boldly and straightforwardly said that the intelligence had certainly arrived. There was no evading that, she thought; it must either be true or false. She recollected, too, the fierce anger which De Montigni had displayed when first made prisoner by Nemours, and the words and glances which had passed between them in regard to herself. Might not such a scene, she inquired, have been renewed, when her lover found that she had been actually sent back without even being permitted another interview with him? Might he not have used such language as would compel a prince of fiery courage like Nemours to wave the privileges of his rank, and meet him as had been reported. Nemours was known to be daring, chivalrous, and of a character to carry the point of honour to excess; and if they met, was not the result reported to her likely to take place?"

Thus argued Fear; and between his voice and that of Hope, her mind was left in that painful uncertainty, which is more wearing and agitating to the human frame than even grief itself. She was still busy with these thoughts, when the door opened and the maid looked in; but Rose waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "Leave me, leave me; I do not want you. You can go to bed."

The very sight of Blanchette, however, brought back to her mind all the arts that had been practised upon her before, and made her once more hope that this sad intelligence might be part of a similar plan. "I will retire to bed," she thought; "in the darkness and stillness of the night I can think over these things more quietly than now. The sight of that girl is hateful to me. I will shut her out;" but when she looked round, she found that the lock of the door between her room and the antechamber had been removed.

"Ha!" she said, "am I to have no privacy? This is hard indeed;" and, sitting down, she wept, feeling that she was left alone to struggle

with all the arts and machinations of a number, among whom she had no friend. Rising again after a moment, she wiped away the tears, murmuring to herself, "But they shall not conquer me. Even if he whom I love be gone, and have left me in this cold-hearted world alone, I can die and follow him; but I will never be the wife of that base and hateful man, let whatever be the result that may." Thus saying, she undressed without assistance, and retired to bed. But for poor Rose d'Albret it was no couch of repose. The thorns of the pillow—busy care, and sharp apprehension, and bitter grief—banished all sleep from her eyes, and hour after hour she lay turning in her mind the same heavy thoughts which had burdened her since the visit of the priest and Madame de Chazeul.

Daylight returned at length, and, raising herself upon her arm, she gazed round as the faint gray stream of early morning poured through the window, and showed the various objects in the room. Then came a warmer tint as the sun actually rose, and with it some of the thoughts which usually accompany the rising day. How beautiful is the revival of Nature from her dark slumber in the arms of Night! what an image of the dawning of eternal life to to the emancipated spirit after the shadow of the grave! How good, how great, how wise is the Almighty Author of all, who plants in the seasons, and in the elements, in the changes of the world, and in all the revolutions of Nature, the signs and symbols of his beneficence and his power, with promises of love, and blessing, and protection! There was consolation even in the pale beams of morning; but then came back the sad thought, the bitter, unanswerable question, to the mind of Rose d'Albret, "Do the eyes of Louis de Montigni see, like mine, the return of dawning day, or are they closed forever in the tomb?" And, rising from her bed, she knelt, and prayed, and wept, till the increasing sounds in the house told her that her oppressors were once more waking into active life, and that she must prepare her mind to suffer and resist.

Oh, how most painful of all the many grievous tasks of life is that of resistance! and yet it is the unceasing lot of humanity; for this is all a battle field, and at every point—within and without, against ourselves and others, against circumstances, temptations, cares, griefs, fears, pleasures, successes, triumphs, vanity, hope, expectation, pride, disappointment, opposition, regret, and despair; against man and fiends—it is all resistance; and he who would ultimately win the garland of victory, must be armed and awake at every moment of existence. From the moment when the foot of Adam first trod the garden, until the *now* in which we stand against the foe, the conflict has gone on, and happy are they who do resist.

Yet 'tis a weary and a terrible task, especially for those who buckle on their armour for the first time; and poor Rose d'Albret felt her heart sink as she prepared herself for it. But still, the thought of him she loved, and her repugnance to the man who would have injured him, nerved her for the effort; and again and again she repeated, "They shall never move me! My voice must speak the falsehood, my own hand must sign my folly, my own heart must prove the traitor, ere they can conquer."

Her knowledge, too, of those with whom she had to deal, was not a little serviceable in guarding her against all arts. That knowledge had come slowly, not by study or inquiry, but sinking in daily into her mind, as act after act, and word after word, developed the characters of the persons who now surrounded her.

"If they have doubts of De Montigni's fate," she argued, "they will urge me to this abhorred marriage with Chazeul at once and immediately; they will give me no time; they may even try threats, and violence, and force. If they have no doubt, they will be less importunate; they will allow me to deliberate—to mourn. But, good Heaven, if they try force, what shall I do? It matters not, I will die first. But by their course I shall know whether the tale be true or false; and if from their urgency I judge that it is false, I shall gain strength from hope, and courage even from their cruelty. Poor Helen de la Tremblade! they cannot make me as thou art—they cannot add self-reproach to all I suffer but by my own fault. Would that I had not promised never to tell her tale till she herself thought fit. I might, perhaps, find a friend, if I could do so, in the only one who could well befriend me. She knew not how much her story might serve me now, and I little thought that I should long to tell it for my own safety rather than for her comfort. But hark! there are people speaking near! I will be dressed and prepared to meet them when they come hither. Blanchette," she continued aloud, "Blanchette!"

The girl made her call several times, and then appeared with a dull and sullen countenance; and Rose, proceeding with her toilet, exchanged but few words with one whom she had never either loved or esteemed, and now despised.

When she was fully dressed she advanced towards the door, saying, "I will go out upon the ramparts. Put the room in order against my return."

But the girl planted herself in the way, and replied, "You cannot, mademoiselle. There are strict orders that you remain here, till the count or the marchioness come for you."

There was a low, suppressed laugh—a laugh of triumph in her power—mingled with the girl's words, which was hard to bear; and Rose felt at first inclined to resist, and then to weep; but she gave way to neither temptation; and, after gazing at her for a minute, merely replied, "What! I am a prisoner, then; and my own maid the jailer! It is well; but it will prove fruitless. Give me a book; I will read."

The girl inquired what book, and gave her mistress the pain—and she well knew it was a pain—to speak more than once before she chose to comprehend.

At length, however, a book was brought; and poor Rose d'Albret, placing herself near the window, strove to read with an unconcerned air. But it was in vain she did so; the letters swam before her eyes; her mind wandered to other things; her eye ran over the lines without gathering their sense; and, ere she had mastered more than two or three sentences, there was a step in the anteroom, a knock at the door, and before she could say "Come in," Madame de Chazeul entered, followed by Mon-

sieur de Liancourt. The conflict, she saw, was about to begin, and with an anxious gasp for breath and a haggard eye, she gazed upon them as they approached, unable to speak, though she strove to do so.

"Be calm, Rose, be calm," said Monsieur de Liancourt, placing a seat for his sister, and taking one himself. "I have come to you thus early in the morning, because Madame de Chazeul and Father Walter informed me last night that you entertained suspicions as to the reality of the sad intelligence which we received last night, and I wish to assure you with my own lips that there is no doubt—that I entertain no doubt of the fact."

Rose wept, but could not reply; and, after a brief pause, the count proceeded: "Of course I feel deeply grieved that such a fate should have overtaken my nephew; but I cannot help, at the same time, remembering that he has not lately acted as became him, nor shown towards me that respect and gratitude which I trust I deserved at his hands."

"Oh, sir," cried Rose, waving her hand mournfully, "touch not the memory of the dead—of one who was willing to show you every reverence, although, perhaps, he might feel that he had been wronged and deceived. To you," she continued, seeing the count's lips quiver, "to you he attributed it not, but to the counsels of others; and you would have found no one more affectionate, no one more willing to testify, in every way, his regard and respect."

"Well, well," cried Madame de Chazeul, "there is no use of disputing about such things. That is all past. The question before us is of the present. You had something to say on that score, brother, I think?"

"Why, simply this," replied the count, "that as my nephew Chazeul is now, without dispute, my heir, he is also, without dispute, the person indicated by the contract between myself and Monsieur de Marennes—as your husband, Rose!" he added, in a slow, emphatic tone.

Rose gazed down and was silent, for her heart beat so violently that she had no power to reply. Had she calculated her whole conduct, however, to obtain an insight into the views of her two companions, nothing could have served her better than that silence, for Madame de Chazeul observed, after a momentary pause, "I am happy to see you make no objection, for no longer delay can be admitted—indeed, it is impossible—for the presence of Chazeul is instantly required by the Duke of Mayenne, and you must go with him as his wife."

"Make no objection!" said Rose.

But Madame de Chazeul cut her short, saying, "Ay, and it is well that you do not, for it could have no effect if you did. Everything is determined and prepared. The contract, as before drawn up, waits for your signature, and the marriage must take place at once."

"He is not dead," murmured Rose to herself, with a sudden look of joy passing over her countenance, which those who saw it could in no degree comprehend; and the next moment, turning to Monsieur de Liancourt, she said, "Sir, I will ask if this be decent and proper, in the very first day of mourning for your nephew, *for him to* whom my heart was given, and my hand promised, to propose that I should wed another?"

"Urgent circumstances, Rose," answered the count, "must justify what would not otherwise be right. The necessity for Chazeul's immediate departure compels us to this course, and I must insist that you make no opposition."

"If Monsieur de Chazeul must depart," said Rose, "let him; he can return at some future period, when a widowed heart may have somewhat recovered from the wound it has received. But it shall not be said that Rose d'Albret gave her hand to another before her tears were dry for him to whom her faith was plighted."

"This is all vain folly," cried Madame de Chazeul; "my son will find means to dry your tears, if that be all."

"He can but make them flow more bitterly," replied Rose d'Albret. "Was ever such a monstrous and cruel thin proposed! Oh, sir," she continued, turning to the count, "will you—a man of honour and a gentleman, a man of feeling and of a kindly heart—will you countenance the attempt to force me, the very day after I have heard of poor Louis de Montigni's bloody death, to wed a man for whom I never entertained aught but indifference!"

"Well, Rose, well," said the count, rising, "I will give you another day; that is all that I can allow; for my word is pledged that, before noon to-morrow, you shall be Chazeul's wife. Nay, say no more, for I will hear no more. Make up your mind to it in the mean while, for on this point I am firm, and your conduct in secretly quitting my roof for the purpose of thwarting all my designs and wishes for your benefit well justifies me in compelling your immediate obedience."

Thus saying, he turned and left the room; but Madame de Chazeul remained gazing upon her poor victim with a bitter and almost contemptuous look, which might well teach Rose to apprehend no very happy life if wedded to her son.

"What is the meaning of all this, girl?" exclaimed the marchioness, as soon as the door had closed upon Monsieur de Liancourt; "you are plotting some stratagem—your delays have some end in view."

"None, madam," answered Rose d'Albret. "The only object that I can have in life is to avoid a union with a man I despise and abhor."

"Despise and abhor!" exclaimed Jacqueline de Chazeul, in a mocking tone; "pray, may I ask how it happens that such passions have found their way into your gentle breast?"

"His own deeds, which have come to my ears in spite of your precautions, madam," replied Rose, "have planted those feelings there, never to be rooted out."

"What deeds?" demanded the marchioness, sternly.

"Unhappily, I have promised never to name them," answered Rose; "but you know to what I allude right well, and you cannot doubt with what eyes I must look upon your son."

"You must be his wife, notwithstanding," said Madame de Chazeul.

But Rose could bear no more. "Never!" she exclaimed; "never! Come what may, I will never be his wife. You may drag me to the altar, but not even by silence will I seem to

give consent. I will refuse the vow, I will cast away the ring, I will call God to witness that I am not his wife. This hand shall never sign the contract till it moulders in the grave; and if death be the consequence, I will not do one act that can make me his;" and, overpowered by her own vehemence, as well as by the many emotions in her bosom, she burst into a bitter flood of tears.

Madame de Chazeul gazed at her for a moment, while her whole face worked with passion which she could not find words to express; and then shaking her hand at her, she exclaimed, in a low, bitter tone, "You shall!" and quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When the Marchioness de Chazeul retired from Rose's chamber, she did not seek the society of her brother; neither did she at first send for her son, nor inquire for the priest. But, as she passed through the antechamber, she beckoned to the maid Blanchette, who had quitted the room when she and the count had entered it, and, with a sign to follow, led the way to her own apartments. When there, she seated herself before the mirror, and remained for several minutes in deep thought. She was as we have depicted her, rancorous and vindictive, but, at the same time, ambitious and greedy. Nor was she less pertinacious and resolute than crafty and clear-sighted. No difficulties repelled her, no obstacles were in her eyes insurmountable, no means unjustifiable to attain her ends. Of true religion she had none, though not a little bigotry, strange as such a combination may appear; and, as was the case with many besides herself in that day, she would often scoff at even Almighty power, and set at nought Heaven's vengeance, yet as often give herself up to penance and austerities with all the devotion of a saint. But penance never reached the point of interrupting her in the course she chose to pursue. She would mortify her appetites, but not abandon her designs; and, though her formal observance of the injunctions of her church might show some sort of superstitious dread, the only fear that seemed to affect her in her dealings with the world was the fear of failure.

It was that apprehension that now assailed her; but as was always the case with her, all that it produced was fresh efforts to attain her ends, greater exertions to overcome the obstacles that opposed her. The high and firm resolution displayed by Rose d'Albret would have been nothing in her eyes, had she possessed the sole command over her brother's unhappy ward. Her declarations she would have laughed to scorn, and her remonstrances she would not have listened to. For years she had looked upon Rose as a creature that was but to be made subservient to her purposes, the seal to the deed that was to transfer the estates of Liancourt and Marennes to the house of Chazeul, and she regarded even an expression of reluctance as a daring offence. But she feared the effect of Rose's firmness on her brother; she knew him to be weak and irresolute, easily swayed by persons of a firmer mind than his own, violent and hasty by starts, but alarmed and intimidated by resistance; and she doubted much, if Rose maintained her resolution steadily, refused to go to the altar, or to sign the contract, that Monsieur de Liancourt would use force to compel her, or pass over her resistance and declare the marriage complete, contrary to her protest. There was no scheme, however dark and criminal, that she would not have followed to remove the resistance of her brother's ward; there were no means that she would not have employed, as she herself expressed it, to render a marriage with Chazeul necessary to her honour. But she feared that she might be frustrated if she attempted too daring a project, though that which had presented itself at one time to her mind had been shortly before carried through but too successfully in another noble house in France, where the most atrocious violence had been employed to effect an object very similar to her own.

But though fond of strong and decided measures, Madame de Chazeul was always willing to employ cunning and tortuous means, and she saw no method of ensuring success but by pursuing the plan which she had hinted to her son; and now, as she sat there revolving all the circumstances in her mind, she applied herself to fit so neatly the various parts of her scheme together, that no flaw might mar it in the execution. Blanchette in the mean time stood before her, now bending her eyes upon the ground in assumed modesty and diffidence, now raising them with a furtive glance to the countenance of the marchioness, and striving, but vainly, to read on that dark and puzzled page that which was passing in the still darker and more intricate heart.

At length Madame de Chazeul spoke, in a tone quiet and calm as if no angry passion was a guest in her bosom, saying, "How did Mademoiselle d'Albret pass the night, Blanchette? She seems weary and disturbed this morning."

"I do not know, madam," replied Blanchette. "She sent me away from her quite crossly, and I saw her no more till this morning. Then she was cross enough, madam," continued the girl, "especially when I told her she was not to leave the room till some one came for her."

"And who told you to do that!" exclaimed the marchioness, with a look of surprise; "who told you to do that, I say!"

"Why you, madam, ordered me to watch her closely every moment," answered Blanchette, "and so did the count; and how was I to watch her if she were to go out, wandering all about the chateau?"

"You are insolent, girl!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "and is this the way, by your impertinent domineering, that you turn the mind of Mademoiselle d'Albret against her friends? You should have watched her as if you were not watching; you should have given information to my brother or myself if she went out, and not have presumed to make yourself her turnkey. Who are you, that you should dare dictate to a lady like that, whether she should go forth or not!"

The maid replied not, but coloured highly and bit her lip, looking down upon the ground with apparently no very placable endurance of

the reprimand, which probably she felt the more, as she was fully conscious of having exceeded her orders, at the very time she did so, for the purpose of gratifying her own spiteful nature.

"Well," continued Madame de Chazeul, recovering herself speedily, and remembering that the girl's services might still be needful, "I dare say you did not err intentionally, but remember to do so no more. You may watch Mademoiselle d'Albret closely while she is in her chamber, and, if she goes out of it, either give information instantly to Monsieur de Liancourt, or come to me. It seems," she added, in an indifferent tone, "that the only person she is inclined to see is Monsieur de Chazeul. I shall therefore trouble her no more. When he comes, of course admit him, as the marriage is to take place to-morrow, but no one else—except, indeed, Father Walter de la Tremblade," she continued, after an instant's thought; "Monsieur de Chazeul, of course, whenever he comes, but no one else; and remember, Blanchette, have everything prepared to set out to-morrow about midday, both for your mistress and yourself, for you must all sleep at Chartres to-morrow night, and the next day on to Paris."

There is a dull and heavy-looking sort of personage among the various classes of human beings, by whom the wit and clear-sightedness of the shrewd and cunning in human character are more frequently set completely at defiance than even by the politic and the artful. The air of cold, indifferent stupidity, which is natural to it, in itself generates an idea of a slow and unexcitable spirit, and an obtuse and inactive mind, incapable of strong feelings, except of a very animal kind, which not unfrequently deceives the most penetrating. The surface looks so much as if there were nothing below, that we rarely take the trouble of ascertaining the depth and strength of the currents that may be running underneath.

Of this character was the maid Blanchette. She gave no indication of being offended at the censure of the Marchioness de Chazeul except by the momentary heightening of her colour; and the lady fancied that she had effaced all trace of her harsh words by holding out the idea of her accompanying Rose to Paris. But it was not so. Blanchette was always displeased with censure, even when, as a humble dependant, she had no claim but for services that could be performed by a dozen others as well as by herself; but when she had grown a person of importance in her own eyes by being intrusted with a charge that no one but herself could perform, she felt injured and indignant at the slightest blame, and that of Madame de Chazeul had been neither very gentle in manner nor very temperate in words. She only dropped a profound courtesy, then, without making any reply, while the marchioness spoke, as if her little wit were busily engaged with other matters, and she was prepared to receive and obey all orders communicated to her without doubt or hesitation. But such a line of conduct was far from her intention; deep and angry passion was at the bottom of her heart; and she determined, if fortune prospered with her, to find some means of retaliating, in act, if not in seeming, *the bitter words* of the marchioness, without spoiling her own prospects of advancement. She listened, then, to the end without saying a word, but merely courtesying from time to time, till at length, as the lady finished, she replied, "I will see to it all, madam! Everything shall be quite ready."

"Ay, see that it be," replied Madame de Chazeul. "And now, Blanchette, send Monsieur de Chazeul to me, if you can find him."

The maid retired, and the marchioness remained turning in her mind the next step to be taken. "Yes," she said, "we may trust the priest—but not too far. Rose will tell him nothing, thanks to her promise. I wonder how she learned anything to tell. Some letter from Helen, doubtless; or else that girl has made herself some friends in the camp of the Bearnoise—perhaps has got some new paramour. I was a fool to deal so harshly with her. What was it to me if she chose to play the harlot with the boy? My fear of her spoiling this marriage drove me too far. Yes, we can trust the priest. I have had the castle gates too strictly watched for any one to have brought him tidings without my knowing it. We must trust him, that is the worst; though I do think he would go on, even if he knew all. But his chamber is too near not to make him a sharer of our plans. These priests are but spies upon us in our own chateaux. I wonder that we tolerate them. Yet they are useful too, when they choose to be serviceable. His zeal for the League will keep him faithful."

Such were some of the half-muttered, half-silent thoughts of Jacqueline de Chazeul, as she sat waiting for her son; but he kept her not long in expectation, for he was anxious to hear the result of her interview with Rose d'Albret; and, as soon as he did appear, the marchioness greeted him with a gay look, asking, "Well, Chazeul, have you seen your uncle?"

"No!" he replied, "he has not come to the hall. What are your news? What says the little prisoner?"

"Of that afterward," answered the marchioness. "First, the marriage is to be to-morrow before noon: for that, your uncle's word is pledged, and we must see that he keeps it; for, if this obstinate girl should still resist, he may be shaken. Now tell me, Chazeul, when did her looks first begin to grow cold towards you?"

"They were never very warm," said Chazeul, "but they have been chilly enough for the last ten days."

"Then it is so!" rejoined his mother, as if speaking to herself; "that chilliness makes me think that she may love you rather more than less."

"Come, good mother, no riddles," exclaimed Chazeul; "we have no time for solving them; nor am I an Œdipus. What is it that you mean?"

"I mean that jealousy has a share in this affair," answered the marchioness. "She has learned your folly with Helen de la Tremblade. Helen has written to her, or told her; for she saw her about that time."

"I do not believe it," replied Chazeul; "I do not believe it in the least;" and, putting his hand to his brow, he thought for a moment, murmuring, "No, no, she would never—"

"But she has, foolish boy," cried Madame

de Chazeul. "I know she has, from what this wrong-headed girl said just now. Now mark me well, Chazeul! if you will be guided by me in everything, you will succeed, wed Rose d'Albret, and be one of the richest men in France—ay, second to none in wealth and power, except the princes of the blood. But if you will not, you will lose her, and with her, not only her estates, but all the wealth that has accumulated since first she came here as a child."

"Oh, my good mother, I am quite willing to follow your course of policy," replied her son. "No one like a woman for managing a woman. But let me hear first what she said. Does she believe that De Montigni is dead?"

"Yes she does," replied the marchioness. "Your uncle convinced her of that."

"Then she is mine according to the contract," said Chazeul. "What did she say to that?"

"Why, at first she seemed seeking to gain time," answered his mother, "but afterward, when your uncle was gone, she vowed vehemently that she would never wed you. I think not the worse of your case for that, as that is a vow which many a woman makes and breaks; but haste is the thing in this case, and her spirit must be broken down ere noon to-morrow, else we may have news which will overthrow all that we have done. De Montigni may not be dead after all—he may be wounded—he may recover. Then what are we to do? No, we must lose no time."

"Well, well, but your plan," said Chazeul. 'It seems that my little sins are to be wiped out, the lady's good favour gained, her unruly spirit broken in and rendered tractable, all within four-and-twenty hours."

"And it can be done," answered Madame de Chazeul. "First, then, we must make it seem to the eyes of all men that you are recovering her good graces. You must appear together You must hold conferences with her, and seem in her secrets and in her intimacy."

"'Tis telling me to pull down the moon," cried Chazeul, "or carry away the gates of the castle on my back like Samson. How am I to do all this, if she refuse me audience, withhold her presence, stay in her chamber, and frown or weep whenever we meet?"

"Will it cost you so much to feign a little?" asked his mother.

"Perhaps not," replied Chazeul; "but what then? Put me on the track, and I will follow it with any one; but I see not what it is I am to feign."

"Several things," replied the marchioness. "First, kindly tenderness towards her, sorrow for her sorrow, sympathy with her distress, anxiety for its alleviation. You may pretend even to enter into her views of delay, affect not to wish to press her, promise to speak to Monsieur de Liancourt on the subject and with me, and hold out the hope of gaining our consent to your joining the army for a time, and not returning till some months have passed."

"But if she be so enraged against me," said Chazeul, "and if she have discovered what you say she has, will she listen to all this?"

"Ay, but that must be one of the first things you soften down," replied the marchioness; "an obstacle you must remove at once. You must be a repentant sinner, Chazeul; make vague confession of many faults; long to atone for them, if circumstances would permit it; and if you can get a tear into your eye, so much the better."

"I understand, I understand," said Chazeul, laughing. "The tear I fear I could not manage, but all the rest, I will undertake. I see my way clearly now, but not whither it leads, my dear mother. What is to result from all this? When I have persuaded her that I am penitent, and the most humble creature of her will—when I have shown myself whispering in her ear, or walking in tender melancholy with her, side by side, on the ramparts, what is to be done next?"

"Why, what I said before," replied the marchioness. "Visit her chamber in the night; leave something there to mark that you have been present. I will have people to witness that you go in and come forth. The girl Blanchette must be taught to swear that it was with her mistress's consent and wish. I will indoctrinate her well. Then, to-morrow, early in the morning, I will visit our fair culprit full of reproaches, tell her all the reports that have reached me of her light wantonness—if needful, bring forth the witnesses, and show that, for your honour, for hers, and for your uncle's, the marriage must take place without delay. We shall have no more resistance then, Chazeul; and if we have, the tale, thus proved, will fix my brother in his purpose of compelling her to yield; for we must keep our plan as secret as death from Liancourt; and, if he sees you much together during the day—if you can contrive to work a sudden change in her demeanour [illegible] you, he will be easily deceived."

[illegible] mused, and then added, "I will set [illegible] instantly. But I do wish that I had [illegible] excuse for going to her now—some- [illegible] would make my coming acceptable. [illegible] not in the hall, and may not, perhaps, [illegible] room."

"Go to her, go to her!" cried the marchioness. "She is not in the hall, and will not be, unless you bring her forth It happens luckily that Blanchette, mistaking the order she received, made herself a jailer over her this morning, and kept the bird in the cage. You can go and open the prison doors. Tell her how grieved you are to hear that such cruelty has been exercised towards her; declare you will never suffer it; cast all the blame on me and your uncle; make us as stern and savage as you will, and show her she is free by leading her forth. You can enlarge upon the matter as you will; and having now the cue, your own wit and knowledge of woman must teach you to play your part to a nicety. For me," she continued, "I must first go sprinkle my old brother Michael's body with holy water. I can do no less for him, after all the sweet words he has given me through life; and then I will talk with the priest, and make him share our plans as much as is needful."

"Is it not dangerous?" asked Chazeul. "I dread that man more than any other. Calm, and staid, and thoughtful as he is on the outside, if ever I saw human being full of strong passion and eager fire within, it is he; and if he hears aught of this affair with Helen, he will die or frustrate our design."

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"He shall not hear it till all is accomplished," replied the marchioness. "I will take care of that. There is not a letter nor a note, be it from some sick farmer's pretty wife, requiring consolation from a kind confessor, that is not brought to me before it reaches his hands. It has cost me more golden crowns, Chazeul, since I came into this chateau, to secure good friends in the barbican, than would keep a prince's household half a year. However, he must know our plans in part, for fear he should discover them without being told. His consent once given binds him to our course; so leave that to me, and go you upon your errand."

Without pausing to thank his mother for all her care, Chazeul hastened away towards the apartments of Rose d'Albret. At the door of the antechamber, however, he paused for a moment to consider his proceedings, and then entered with a quick step, demanding, in a loud and hurried tone, as soon as he saw Blanchette, "Can I speak with your mistress?"

"Oh yes, sir," cried the girl, with a low courtesy and a sweet smile; "you are to be admitted always."

Opening the door, she looked in; and, seeing Rose gaze sadly from the window, she threw it wider, exclaiming, without inquiry as to whether the lady would receive her visiter or not, "Monsieur de Chazeul, mademoiselle."

Rose turned a quick and indignant look towards the door, and bowing her head, demanded, "What is your pleasure, sir? This visit was neither expected nor desired."

"I know it was not, Rose," he replied, assuming a mild and tender tone, in which his voice sounded somewhat like that of De Montigni, awakening memories in Rose's bosom not the most favourable to himself; "but I have just heard something that would not suffer me to remain indifferent. Shut the door, Blanchette," he added, turning to the girl and speaking in a sterner manner.

"I learn from my mother, with shame and anger, Mademoiselle d'Albret," he proceeded, sadly, "that they are keeping you here as a sort of prisoner, and I will not suffer such a thing for a moment; for, though it is not my doing, it is on my account. Ill judging friends have done me harm enough with you already. They shall do so no more. I will now act upon my own account, and try what the generosity and kindness which I would always have striven to display, if I had been permitted, will do with a heart which I am sure is not to be ruled by harshness."

Rose was surprised, but still not deceived; for she contrasted instantly the new tone assumed towards her with all that had gone before. She recollected, too, Helen de la Tremblade, and what she had heard from her; and the natural conclusion was, that this was fraud. "I thank you, sir," she said, "and I trust your actions will make good your words. But what am I to conclude from that which you say regarding my captivity here; for I am, indeed, no better than a captive?"

"That is at an end," answered Chazeul. "I told my mother instantly that I would not submit to it; and if it were persisted in, I would *quit the castle*, to the ruin of all her wishes, of *my own fortunes—ay, and my dearest hopes.*"

"Hopes, sir!" said Rose; "hopes? Well, I must not be ungrateful, and I thank you for this act at least. Am I to consider myself at liberty, then, to quit my chamber? Am I to be no longer jailered by my own maid?"

"You are free as air," replied Chazeul. "Come this moment if you will, and try; and let me see the man that dares prevent you. But, ere we go," he continued, with the same soft tone in which he had first spoken, "forgive me for commenting, one moment, on a word you used just now, or, rather, on the manner in which that word was spoken. It was, hopes! You seem to think that I did not really hope to win you, or, perhaps, mean that those hopes were more of your wealth than your person?"

"How can I think otherwise!" asked Rose, fixing her beautiful eyes upon him. "Is there nothing in your heart, Monsieur de Chazeul, which tells you that it is so?"

"No, on my life," he answered; "but I know what it is you mean, and will admit that you have had good cause to judge as you do. I *am* ambitious, Rose d'Albret, and wealth with me is an object, as the means of ambition. But there may be other feelings in my heart besides, and there are."

"I doubt it not," replied the lady; "but what I doubt is, sir, that those feelings have ever been mine. Perhaps I doubt, moreover," she added, slowly, and with emphasis, "that Monsieur de Chazeul may not be inclined to sacrifice the gentle and the better feelings and affections of his heart at the shrine of that devouring god—ambition."

"It is that I meant," replied Chazeul; "of that I wish to speak. I know you think that I do not love you, that I have not loved you, that I have loved others, that—"

"Nay, nay," cried Rose, waving her hand, "do not enter upon such things, sir. I cannot, must not hear them."

"You shall hear nothing that can offend you," replied Chazeul, calmly. "But, in simple justice, you must listen to a word or two in my own defence, as you have undoubtedly listened to accusations against me. I do not say that you will exculpate me, even if I could tell you all exactly as it occurred, which I cannot, which I ought not to do. You would find me faulty, very faulty still. I acknowledge it. I do not, even to myself, acquit myself: I have done wrong, much that is wrong; and many a time, when you have seen me grave and thoughtful, it has been when I was meditating how I might make atonement. Yes," he added, seeing a doubtful expression come over Rose's face; "and many a time, when I have seemed most light and gay, idle and heartless, it has been but as a cloak to cover from myself and others the bitterness within."

"But how easy," said Rose, "how easy to make atonement! how easy to do justice!"

"Not so easy as you imagine," answered Chazeul; "for, in truth, it was impossible. I am not attempting, remember always, to exculpate myself: far from it. I acknowledge myself guilty; but some extenuation may be found in many circumstances; in education at a libertine court, in the habits and customs of the day, in the conduct of others, in temptations that I will not give to your ear. Yet I have

loved you, and loved you truly; but I see the very mention of it offends you, and therefore I I will say no more upon this head. I have set free my heart, and it is enough. Judge of me as you will—harshly if you be so disposed; but still I must have the advantage of my confession in your opinion, and that is something gained."

Chazeul dissembled well: there was a candour, a straightforwardness in his tone, which, notwithstanding all that Rose had seen and known, could not but create a doubt of that insincerity which she had always hitherto attributed to him. She could not help blaming, condemning, disliking him, but still her feelings were softened towards him. There seemed to shine out some good among the evil; there was something to redeem all that was wrong—something to qualify the darker points of his character. One reason, perhaps, why women so often learn to love men whose whole conduct they reprobate, is that, from glimpses of higher qualities, they are brought, by the easy process of regret, to pity those who give themselves up to unbridled passion as its slaves rather than its votaries. Not that Rose d'Albret could ever have loved him. There was an innate repugnance between her nature and his, which might slumber while no external circumstances called them into active opposition, but which, when once roused, was sure to burst forth into abhorrence on her side. She could be indifferent to him, she could hate him, as their relative position brought them nearer or more remotely in contact; but she could feel nothing like love. Yet he was the first, the only one who, since her return to the chateau, had spoken with even gentleness towards her; and in moments of danger and distress, there is something that teaches the weaker part of the human race to cling in some degree to anything that offers them support.

Nevertheless, she could not banish the doubts and suspicions which she had such good cause to entertain; and she replied almost coldly, "My opinion of you, Monsieur de Chazeul, must depend entirely upon your own conduct towards me and others. You will acknowledge, doubtless, that the demeanour of all within these walls towards me since my return has not been such as to conciliate any kindly feeling on my part."

"It has been harsh and cruel," answered Chazeul, at once; "it has been harsh to us both. No choice has been left either to you or me."

Rose gazed on him in surprise, but he continued, "Do not misunderstand me, Rose. As far as all the affections of the heart go, my choice, my hopes, have long been fixed on one object alone. The choice I spoke of, as what I would myself have desired, was between pressing you in an unseemly manner on subjects repugnant to your whole feelings at this moment, and leaving you to recover from past griefs ere you are urged to enter into new ties. It is not necessary to relate to you all that has taken place between me and others. I seek not to cast blame on any one; but believe me, if your heart has been outraged, your best affections set at naught, it has not been with my will. Time will clear your eyes of many clouds, and I would fain let time have its effect. You will find that I have not been so much to blame as you have been led to believe; that matters have been represented to you as certain that were very doubtful; and that I have suffered some wrong—at least, a bitter disappointment. I seek not to cast a reproach upon the memory of him who is gone; for, doubtless, he believed all that he said; but he should have inquired farther ere he attempted to take from me that which I value more than any treasure of the earth. Yet I would not myself now press you to a hasty decision for the world. I know time will be my friend. If you be forced to give me your hand at once, as they have determined you shall be, you will only hate me. Give me time; and, if to win your love be hopeless, I will at least win your esteem."

"Oh, sir! if such be your sentiments," cried Rose, "why do you not join your voice to mine to stop this hasty and indecent proceeding! Why do you not use your influence to avert that terrible moment which we both dread!"

"Because it is vain," replied the hypocrite; "my influence I have employed, but to no purpose. When my uncle offers me your hand according to the contract, I must take it or refuse it. Can I, Rose, can I, feeling as I do towards you, choose the latter alternative! I have already urged him not to force us to such a choice. I will do it again and again, if you but wish it. I will entreat, beseech him, to pause, to wait but till my return from the army. But he has so firmly determined to place our union beyond all doubt before I go, that I fear it will be useless. Some vague doubt, some superstitious fear, of what may take place from delay, seems to possess him; and my mother, I regret to say, encourages him to persevere in his resolution. Yet I will make every effort with both. Only but confide in me, Rose. Want of clear and straightforward confidence between us has caused too much mischief already. Had you but told me your feelings towards me, had you but informed me of your old affection to another, I might have been grieved, I might have been angry, I might have given way to bursts of rage, it is true, but still thought would have calmed all down, and much, much that is painful would have been avoided. But of that no more. Nay, do not weep; I came to console, and not to grieve you. Come, take the fresh air on the ramparts before the trumpet sounds; and tell me what you would have me do, and I will do it. I would fain see you use your liberty, for it has pained me to the heart to know the indignity that has been offered you. As we walk, you can speak freely to me; and if by any means I can work your peace, no effort of mine shall be wanting."

His smooth and deceitful words were confirmed by the manner in which he spoke them. He assumed the air of eager sincerity and truth with wonderful skill, and it was impossible that Rose should not be, in some degree, shaken in her opinion of him. But, nevertheless, she was not altogether deceived. Although she did not see the object to be gained by this sudden change, yet it was too rapid not to startle and surprise her; and there were also, in the whole piece of acting which he now performed, those

slight defects, which, good as it was, would have immediately betrayed to an experienced eye that it was art, not nature, and which, even to Rose herself, all unacquainted as she was with the ways of the world, suggested doubts and suspicions. She saw that he turned quickly from many of the most important points he spoke of, after briefly touching upon them, and had always an excuse ready for not going deeply into any subject which might have most embarrassed him. It was now that he would not shock her delicacy; now that he did not wish to cast blame on others; now that he did not seek to exculpate or justify himself. In one or two instances these evasions might have been admitted, but they were too frequent; and he also insinuated far more than he said, and more than he might have been able to prove.

It was not exactly that Rose d'Albret marked all these particulars distinctly, but that she received from the whole, joined with her previous knowledge of his character, an indefinite impression of doubt, a fear that he might be trying to deceive her for some purpose which she did not comprehend. Still, as I have said, her opinion of his baseness was in some degree shaken; she thought that, perhaps, he might have better qualities which had been crushed under the weight of evil education and bad example, and which might have led him, had they been cultivated and developed, to higher objects and a nobler course. He was, too, as has before been remarked, the only one who seemed inclined to treat her gently and kindly; and she shrunk from the thought of repelling the first sympathy she had met with since her return.

It was with such mingled feelings, then, that she replied, "I am most grateful for your kindness, Monsieur de Chazeul; but I must not deceive myself. You must clearly understand that my mind is fixed and resolute in the determination which I expressed to your mother."

"I know not what that is," replied Chazeul, "for I am not acquainted yet with all that has taken place this morning; but," he continued, "you must not suppose that I came here to entrap you into any engagements from which you must naturally shrink. Indeed, my sole object, when I reached your door, was to relieve you from that painful oppression under which you had been placed. I have been led farther than I intended; but I could not make up my mind to neglect the opportunity of removing at least part of the prejudices which have been created against me in some degree by my own foolish conduct, in some degree, perhaps, by the representations of others. However, as I said, I came here to entrap you to nothing; and, whatever confidence you may think proper to place in me, whatever you may require, or I may do to promote your wishes, or to free you from persecution, such as that which is now mistakenly carried on in my favour, compromises you to nothing, binds you to nothing. Let it be understood between us, that everything, on either side, remains unchanged—I loving you, though perhaps hopeless of return—you retaining every feeling and resolution which time, circumstances, and my future conduct may not change."

Rose shook her head gravely and mournfully, but Chazeul went on with a slight alteration of tone, saying, "Come, Mademoiselle d'Albret, take a turn upon the ramparts, and let us talk no more of such things. The free air and the sight of the country round will do you good? and as you get a little more calm, we may consult together as to what is to be done to obviate those proceedings which we both wish to defer, at least."

Rose did not reply, but suffered him to lead her forth, though not without some reluctance. The maid Blanchette, who was in the anteroom, gazed at them as they passed with a look of some surprise; but she said nothing, and they went out unobstructed.

Through the rest of the day Chazeul maintained the same conduct, and kept up the same tone, frequently discussing with Rose d'Albret the means which were to be taken to shake the determination of the Count de Liancourt and Madame de Chazeul. Three times he went to speak with them alone, upon the pretence of inducing them to change their resolutions, and returned with a gloomy and dissatisfied air, saying, "I can obtain no answer but that to-morrow, before noon, our fate must be decided."

What was really the matter of his conversation with his mother and the count? Very different from that which he represented it. With his mother he laughed merrily over the artifices which he practised. "Ah! give me a woman," he cried, "for seeing into a woman's heart. I have all along mistaken this girl's character. From her light indifference and coquettish gayety. I had thought to deal with her in the same way; but now I find that she is all sentiment and tenderness, forsooth. If I had before possessed a clew to the little labyrinth of her heart, I should easily have found my way in."

To the Count de Liancourt he maintained a different tone; pointed out the apparent terms of confidence which existed between Rose and himself; represented her reluctance as, in the main, affected, and merely assumed out of respect for what she considered propriety; insinuated that she would be rather pleased than not to be the apparent victim of compulsion, in a matter where her own inclinations and her respect for appearances were at variance; and he took care to confirm the impression thus produced by drawing from Rose replies in a low voice to whispered questions which he affected to wish withheld from the ear of the count. Thus passed by several hours at different times of the day; but during the rest, Rose remained in her chamber, plunged in deep reveries, and puzzled and doubtful reflections, seeking some light in the maze that surrounded her, often looking to the future with a shudder of dread, and often contemplating the past with bitter tears, but still hearing a voice that whispered, "De Montigni is not dead."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Poor Rose d'Albret was like an inexperienced youth, playing for a high stake against a numerous party of unprincipled gamblers. While

Chazeul was affecting to be her own partner in the game, his mother, as his confederate, was employing all her art against her. During the whole of that day the marchioness was busy in every part of the chateau, preparing all means for the attainment of her object. Now she was dealing with her weak brother, now with the servants, now with the priest; and it was with no cold and lifeless calculation that she acted, but even with more interest than the mere promotion of her son's views could have inspired. She was in her element; she loved the exercise of her cunning; she took a delight in the act; it gave her excitement, in which to her was life, for all her days had been passed from very early years either in the fine workings of intrigue, or in stormy passions and the struggles of the mind. Such things were to her as the strong spirit to the drunkard, or the dice to the gamester, and she could not live without them. We shall only trace her course, however, as far as this day is concerned, through one or two of her proceedings, for that will be enough to show how she conducted the whole. As soon as her son had left her in the morning, she proceeded to the chapel of the castle, and there, according to the expression of the day, gave holy water to the body of her brother. It may be asked if the sight of the coffin and the pall produced no effect upon her mind; if the salutary thoughts of death, and the evidence of how all vast schemes and laborious efforts must terminate—of the great consummation of earthly ambition—did not create doubt and hesitation, awaken remorse, or excite repentance! Not in the least! Those were strange and awful times, when the daily scenes of blood and death, and the constant spectacle of vice and crime, seemed to have hardened most hearts against all the great moral lessons which mortal fate affords to the living and the light. They did not—perhaps they would not—feel; and the most phrensied licentiousness, the most guilty schemes, the most black and terrible crimes, had often for witnesses the dead, for pretexts religion, for a banner the cross.

What she went to perform was but a ceremony; and as such she treated it, without one thought but "We must get the body buried before the marriage to-morrow. No need to tell her anything about it."

She was turning to leave the chapel when the priest entered, and approached her with a slow and solemn step. "Ah! good father" cried the marchioness, as soon as he saw him, "I have been looking for you. I wished to speak with you about the conduct of this obstinate girl. She still holds out pertinaciously, and something must be done to overcome her headstrong opposition. We have thought of—"

"Not here," replied the priest, interrupting her, "not here! This is a solemn and a holy place, unfit for worldly discussions. Let us go somewhere else, where we can talk over the affair more decently. The lower hall was vacant as I passed through."

"Well, well," cried the marchioness with a smile, not altogether free from scorn, "there as well as here."

"Better!" said the priest leading the way back to the chateau itself. When they had reached the lower hall, as a large stone paved chamber on the ground floor was called, Father Walter was the first to resume the subject saying, "I thought you would fail in persuading her. Monsieur de Liancourt must use all his authority."

"You know him, father!" answered Madame de Chazeul. "It is upon such occasions that he always fails his friends. Bold till the moment of action comes, he is as timid as a hare when it is most necessary to show firmness."

"Not when he can be made angry," replied the priest, "or when he can be convinced that his own dignity is at a stake."

"But on this point neither of those cases can occur," said the marchioness. "She will weep and entreat, and then both his dignity and his weakness will take her part. There is but one way before us," she added, in a low and confidential tone, "and that is, to convince her that her own fame and reputation require her marriage with Chazeul."

"That may be difficult," answered Father Walter thoughtfully "but yet with time it may be done. We may surround her with nets from which it is barely possible for her to escape; and continual importunity does much with women, as you, lady—"

"Time! time!" cried Madame de Chazeul impatiently; "but we have no time. That is the very thing that is wanting. The marriage must take place to-morrow, before noon. That is decided. It shall be, if I live!"

"Nay, but why such haste!" asked the priest. With no farther obstacle but a young lady's reluctance, it were well worth while to give up a few days to the task of vanquishing that."

The marchioness gazed at him for a moment with a glance half angry, half doubtful, and then repeated his words, "No obstacle! Hark ye, Walter de la Tremblade," and she whispered in his ear, "De Montigni is alive and well!"

Father Walter heard the tidings with a calm sarcastic smile, answering, "I thought so, my daughter. But were it not better to have owned this to me at once? Such want of trust in those on whose prudence you can rely, has marred many a fair project, and will mar many another. De Montigni lives! Then you must be quick, indeed! Not that I bear the young man an ill will; not that I would injure him in any thing; but if we can by any means prevent it, he must not carry to the heretic party he has espoused such estates as would centre in his person by his marriage with this lady. Now, madam, what is your plan? for you have one already contrived, I see."

The marchioness laughed. "Did you ever know me without a plan!" she asked; "but my present scheme is somewhat difficult to explain. However, do you not think, good father, that things might be so contrived as to render, in a marvellous short time, a wedding with my son Chazeul a very good and expedient thing in the eyes of Rose d'Albret herself!"

"What do you mean!" exclaimed the priest, after a moment or two of consideration. "You would use no violence! You would not—surely you would not do her a bitter wrong!"

"Oh no!" cried the marchioness; "but simply by means and contrivances, which I well know how to manage, make her believe that her fair fame is lost if she do not marry Chazeul. Luckily, he has a goodly reputation as a bold and successful lover, and so the matter will have every appearance of truth."

"But can you ever clear a fame once clouded?" asked the priest; "can you remove the black plague-spot from the fair name which you have stained? Alas! lady, in this world, every idle tongue, every vain, licentious man, every rancorous woman, can blast the reputation of the good and bright, even by a light word; but where is the power that can restore it? Foul suspicion still whispers the disproved lie in the ear of the credulous multitude, and human malice receives it with delight, and propagates the scandal with busy pertinacity. Will you thus destroy the good name of your son's wife?"

"Only to make her his wife!" replied Madame de Chazeul; "only to herself;" and she proceeded to detail her plan—not sincerely, indeed, not fully, for she was one of those who can deal in complete sincerity with no one; but the priest knew her well, and gathered that which she did not tell from that which she did. His brow was doubtful and gloomy, however, and he asked, "And yet no violence?"

"None, none!" cried Madame de Chazeul.

"Well!" he said, after another long pause, "perhaps it is the only way to obtain her acquiescence. Yet I love not such plans, and am glad that I myself am to play no part in the affair."

"But should you hear or see Chazeul," asked the marchioness, "you will take no notice!"

"I shall neither hear nor see him," replied the priest, "for I keep vigil in the chapel by your brother's corpse, according to my promise, until matins."

"That is fortunate!" cried Madame de Chazeul; and then she added, lest he should put his own interpretation on her exclamation, "I mean that you will be thus freed from all personal knowledge of the business."

"True!" he answered, "true! and I would fain know as little of it as possible. I must now go and say mass, lady. The count, I trust, will be present; though, to speak truth, this house is more like a Huguenot dwelling than that of a zealous Catholic, so sadly are the ordinances of religion neglected. But in the course of the morning I will find a moment to speak with him, and strive to confirm him in his resolutions."

"Do, do, good father!" replied the marchioness, and left him, not altogether satisfied with herself for having given him any insight into the scheme of which she was now full.

Blanchette was the next person she practised on; but to her she afforded no intimation of her intentions, leaving her son himself to deal with the maid. But she prepared the way for him by many an artful hint of the necessity of Blanchette's pleasing him in everything, both before and after his marriage with her mistress, giving her to understand that her fortunes depended entirely upon his favour, and that, if that were maintained, they were secure.

Blanchette listened, and promised to be most obedient; but she clearly saw that there was some ulterior object to be explained at an after period; and she waited impatiently throughout the day to learn what it was, hoping to find in it a source of profit to herself. Towards night, her friend, the confidential servant of Chazeul, called her to his master's chamber, and she remained with him in close conference for more than half an hour. When she came out, notwithstanding the obtuseness of her mind and the air of still greater dulness which she somewhat affected, it was evident that the girl was a good deal agitated and even alarmed. She went back with a hasty step to the room in which she slept, stopped for a moment in the middle of the floor, then turned and went out again, and knocked at the door of the priest's room, which, as we have before shown, was adjacent to that of her mistress. There was no answer; and, hurrying down, she asked some of the servants whom she met below if they could tell her where Monsieur de la Tremblade was to be found.

One replied that he was in his own chamber; but another exclaimed before Blanchette could tell the first that he was mistaken, "No, no, Ma'mselle Blanchette, he is in the chapel;" and the girl hurried thither at once. Crossing herself with holy water from the béniter at the door, and making due genuflections as she advanced, Blanchette approached the altar gazing with a look of distaste, and even fear, at the bier of the old commander as she passed.

The priest was just concluding some one of the many services of the Roman Catholic Church, and the girl waited till the last words died away upon his lips, and then with lowly reverence drew nigh.

"What is it, Blanchette?" said Monsieur de la Tremblade; "you seem alarmed and in haste."

"I want to know what I am to do, father," said Blanchette, in a low tone. "I am sure I do not know whether I ought to consent to what Monsieur de Chazeul wishes or not."

"Hush," said the priest. "Come into the confessional;" and placing himself within the old oak skreen, he bent down his head, while Blanchette, kneeling on the other side of the partition, poured through the aperture her tale into his ear.

The priest listened without surprise as she told him that Monsieur de Chazeul had required that admission should be given him to her mistress's chamber at an hour after midnight. "He assured me," the girl said, "that it is with Mademoiselle, d'Albret's consent, but that she did not like to mention it to me; and he added that I was not to speak of it to her."

"That was not right, for I believe it is not true," replied the priest. "But what you have to do is to ask Madame de Chazeul, and follow her directions."

"Oh, if I am to do that," cried the girl, "she bade me already do everything that Monsieur de Chazeul told me; but I thought it right to come and ask you, father, that I might be quite sure of what I was about."

The priest paused and hesitated; but, after several minutes thought, he replied, "I know not the circumstances, my daughter. Doubtless Monsieur de Chazeul has no evil intentions."

And thus saying he rose and quitted the confessional, leaving Blanchette to draw her own deductions, and follow her own course.

The girl paused and pondered thoughtfully for several moments; then shrugging her shoulders, she murmured, with a low laugh. "Well, if he sees no harm in it, what business is it of mine?" and, with this comforting reflection, she returned slowly to the chateau.

CHAPTER XXV.

It was near midnight; it was all quiet in the chateau; sleep seemed to have fallen upon all eyes but those of the sentries upon the walls; the wind sighed among the towers and pinnacles: the old oak panelling creaked; and every now and then the screech-owl whirled with its shrill scream past the windows; but those were the only sounds that disturbed the deep silence of night, while the priest, in the chapel, watched the body of the dead man, according to his promise. The building itself was dark and gloomy; the tapers on the altar cast their rays but a little distance beyond the coffin; and the light faded away gradually into the deep obscurity of the other parts of the chapel, while the large cluster pillars, and the rich, sculptured groins of the arches, caught the beams faintly as they darted towards the vaulted roof, or strove to penetrate the aisles. It was a solemn scene, and might well fill the breast with thoughts high and grave. There lay the dead: the dust ready for the earth, the spirit returned to God who gave it. There stood the altar, raised for the worship of that God, and bearing aloft in the full light the symbol of that salvation which was purchased by the blood of His Son. Death, immortality, and redemption were prominent and clear before the eye, while all around was obscurity, like the misty darkness of mortal fate, which wraps us in this strange world wherein we live.

Father Walter had watched through the preceding night, and had felt less than he did at present; he had done it as a duty, as the mere fulfilment of a promise. He was familiar with the deathbed, the coffin, and grave; and, as usual, they had lost much of their impressiveness. But now for some reason—perhaps that his own heart was not well at ease—he felt sensations of awe and gloom creep over him. He knelt and murmured prayers before the altar; he went through some of the ceremonial observances of his religion; but they now gave him no relief. The words fell cold and meaningless from his lips; the sign of the cross, the genuflexion, and the counted beads, seemed for the first time all dull forms, having no reference to the heart.

Then he came forward and gazed upon the coffin; and memory recalled many an event connected with him who now lay so still within. He had known him for many years: he recollected him in his youth, and in his prime, and memory ran back over the long chain of linked hours, pausing here and there upon the brighter spots, till the natural affections of the heart—which not even the cold philosophy of a religion which bars its priesthood from all the more kindly associations of human life can ever totally extinguish—were reawakened by the thoughts, and some of the fresh and generous impulses of earlier years rose up, and brought a tear into his eye.

Again he knelt down and prayed; but it seemed that, in the act of prayer, a voice from the cross above the altar reached his heart mournfully and reproachfully. He thought it asked him if, in the counsels he was giving, if in the deeds he was sanctioning, he was a true follower of the guileless and holy Saviour—of the pure, the true, the meek, who showed God to be truth and love, and falsehood, deceit, and wrong to be the offspring of the arch enemy. He covered his face with his hands as if the All-seeing eye were more especially upon him; and then starting up, he murmured, "I wish I had taken no part in this." With a quick and agitated step he paced the nave of the chapel, and, as he did so, half-spoken words betrayed the troublous anxiety of his soul.

"I wish I had not done it," he said. "Who can tell what may be the result? They are not to be trusted—neither mother nor son—dark, dark and deceitful! Even to me they cannot be sincere. De Montigni is an angel of light compared to them. Would to heaven he had not embraced the party of the heretic! And this poor girl, why should she be tortured so? Can I not stop it even now? He is to go thither at one o'clock. What may be the result? No, no, he will never dare!" and with agitated pace again he trod and retrod the whole length of the chapel; and then, after pausing and gazing once more upon the coffin, he suddenly turned, and opening the great door, issued out into the court. Entering the house, he crossed the stone hall, passed through the corridor beyond, and approached the foot of the staircase which led to his own apartments and those of Mademoiselle d'Albret. But there he paused; and, laying his hand upon his brow, mused for several minutes.

"No," he said at length, "no, not now. I will return at the very time; and yet I must not stop him," he added, after a moment's pause. "It seems the only chance for ensuring his vast property to the side of the Holy Catholic League. That should be the first question; and yet—" he paused again, and with a slow step, stopping more than once to consider, he found his way back to the hall, into which the moonlight was streaming through the open door. On the steps he stood for several minutes, gazing up towards the sky, where the faint twinkling stars looked out, like angels' eyes watching the slumber of the world. He thought they might be so, or, at least, that eyes as clear and bright, though hidden from his view, might be even then hanging over him, and all whom that place contained, and he exclaimed, "Oh, may they protect as well as watch!" and, with a slow step, and his looks bent upon the ground, he advanced once more to the door of the chapel.

One side of the building rested against the outer wall which surrounded the chateau, and the sentries passed it on their round above. Thus, when the priest approached, he heard a step like that of an armed man, but he did not look up at the sound, though it was not un-

pleasant to his ear; for the feelings that were in his heart, and the thoughts which were hurrying through his brain, rendered the proximity of some human being in the dead hours of the night rather a relief to him than otherwise.

Passing on, however, at a very tardy pace, he entered the chapel, and when he had reached the first column of the six which, on either side, supported the roof—whether there was some noise which roused him from his revery, or whether there was one of those vague and undefined impressions on his mind which we sometimes receive without knowing how, that he was no longer alone in that dark and gloomy place—he suddenly paused and raised his eyes, when, between the coffin and the altar, in the full light of the tapers which stood upon the latter, he beheld a human figure, standing with the head bent down, and the hands clasped together. It was that of a woman, young and apparently beautiful, dressed in black garments, but with the head bare, and the glossy hair reflecting the beams from the altar, so that for an instant, to the dazzled eyes of the priest, there seemed a sort of glory round her brow.

He started, and his heart beat quick as, for an instant, he gazed in silent wonder; but his heart beat quicker still when, recovering from his surprise, he recognised the beautiful form and features of Helen de la Tremblade, his niece.

She had been to him as a child from her earliest years. On her had centred all the affections which he yet permitted to have any power over him; and as they were few, and confined but to one object, they were strong and vehement in proportion. So vehement, indeed, were they, that at times they alarmed him. He fancied it almost sinful, vowed forever to the service of his God, so to love any mere mortal creature. Often did he deny himself the delight of seeing her for weeks and months together; and sometimes, when he did see her, he would put a harsh restraint upon his tenderness, and seem cold and stern, though at other times it would master him completely, and he would give way to all the deep affection of his heart.

He gazed on her, then, as she stood there, with surprise and alarm. He had been told that she was ill; and her face, as he looked upon it, was deadly pale. She moved not, though she must have heard his step; not a limb seemed agitated. He could not even see her bosom heave with the breath of life. A cold thrill came over him as, with feelings common to every one in that day, he asked himself, "Can it be her spirit? Helen," he said, "Helen!"

A convulsive sob was the only reply; but that was enough; and, advancing with a rapid step, he passed the bier and stood before her.

With her eyes still bent down upon the ground, with her hands still clasped together, Helen sunk down upon her knees at his feet. The old man stretched forth his arms to raise her, but she exclaimed vehemently, "Do not touch me! Do not touch me! I am unworthy that a hand so pure and holy should be laid upon me!"

Walter de la Tremblade recoiled for a moment, and gazed upon her with a look of mute and stern inquiry; but then, moved and softened by all the agitating feelings of that night, the full flood of tenderness and affection swept every other emotion away, and casting his arms round her, he pressed her to his bosom, crying, "Whatever be thy faults, thou art my dead brother's child, thou art my own nursling lamb, and wo to any one who has injured thee!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

As nature, in the colours with which her beautifying hand has adorned the creation, for the glory of God and the delight of his creatures, has far excelled in richness, and brightness, and variety of hues all that the art of man can produce, merely leaving to his vain efforts the task of falsely imitating her, so does she, in the real course of events, far exceed in the marvellous and extraordinary anything that imagination can conceive. The boundless spring of human passions and prejudices; the endless variety of human character; the infinite combinations which man and circumstances may afford, are every day offering more wonderful and striking scenes than the boldest poet would venture to display. There is not a house in the land but has its tragedy to tell; there is not a chamber that has not been stained by bitter and passionate tears; there is hardly one human heart that has not within itself its own tale of romance. But as it is the object of this history but to depict events very ordinary in the days to which it relates—and as it is, indeed, the object of its author in all his works, to keep to calm and quiet probabilites, in order, if possible, to cure his fellow countrymen of that longing for over excitement, that moral gin-drinking which has become a vice among us, and teach them that there may be both pleasure and health in less stimulating beverages, he is anxious to explain every event as it took place, and to leave nothing to the charge of the marvellous.

The reader has already inquired, how happened it that Helen de la Tremblade, after taking the firm resolution of doing that which, though bitterly painful to her own feelings, she considered a duty to those who had shown her kindness and tenderness in her moment of distress, did not present herself before her uncle on the first night of his solitary watching by the corpse of the old commander De Liancourt; and, had I been reading the work instead of writing it, I should have asked the same question too. The answer is very simple, but it requires some detail.

On the day following the battle of Ivry, hasty preparations were made for conveying the body of the dead leader to Marzay. All those sad and solemn preparations required by custom in consigning mortal dust to the earth from which it came—the coffin, the bier, and the shroud, were to be made ready; and, whatever diligence was employed, it was known that all this could not be complete before evening. The soldiers who had followed the old leader to the field determined to take their turns in carrying him back to his last home; and Helen, as has been said, resolved to accompany them; but still, during the day, she showed some signs, as it seemed

to Estoc, of irresolution and doubt, and the good old warrior determined to speak a word to her, for the purpose of removing her hesitation. She had not quitted for more than a few brief moments the chamber of the dead man, and the attachment which she displayed to even the inanimate remains of his dead friend deeply touched the heart of one who, for years, had evinced towards the good old knight that strong and pertinacious love, so often found in the one-affectioned dog, so rarely in many-motived man. Even had he not promised, he would still have been a father to the poor girl, on account of her devotion to one who had been a father to him; and, as he entered the chamber where she sat, he strove to smooth his somewhat rough tone, in order to speak to her tenderly.

"Come, young lady," he said, "you had better really go into the hall and take some refreshment. We must all die, old and young; and, as the gamblers say, every year that goes makes the odds stronger against us; so there is no use sitting here, pining by yourself; and I hope we shall be able to march in a couple of hours."

"So soon?" asked Helen.

"Ay," answered Estoc; "the sooner it is all over, the better, my dear. I know it is painful to you to fulfil your promise, but I don't think you will shrink from it."

"Oh! it is not that," cried Helen de la Tremblade; "my mind is made up; and if it kill me, I will do it. But I did not want to go just yet, for the first person who was kind to me, and took compassion upon me, promised to come or send after the battle was over. He will think me ungrateful if I go, without waiting to see him; and yet who can tell whether he be dead or alive! I am sure he is not a man to shrink from any danger, but rather to seek it; for the kindest-hearted are always the bravest."

"That's very true," exclaimed Estoc. "I have marked that through a struggle of fifty-four years with this good world. But what is his name, young lady? We have had accounts this morning of all the great men killed and the wounded, so I can tell you if he be among them."

"Oh, he is a man of no great rank," answered Helen. "A very poor French gentleman, he told me: his name is Chasseron."

"Oh, he is quite safe and well," answered Estoc, with a smile; "I know him a little, too. But Monsieur de Chasseron is a very busy man, and has many things upon his hands just now. He is at Mantes with the king, or at Rosni, some say. I wish to heaven I could see him myself," he continued, "for I think if he heard that Monsieur de Montigni and Mademoiselle Rose had been taken by the enemy, he might give us some help."

"Can I not go to him at Mantes?" cried Helen; "I would tell him all, and be back very soon."

Estoc paused, and thought. "Not before we set out," he replied. "It's a long way to Mantes, my dear. If you do, you must join us by the way. But how am I to get you thither, and back again?"

"Oh, I am a poor friendless creature," cried Helen de la Tremblade; "it matters not what becomes of me. I do not think any one would injure me but that cruel woman, and she is far away."

"No, you are not friendless," exclaimed Estoc, warmly, "and never shall be while I live. No, I cannot let you go alone; but I can send two of my old fellows with you, who will take care that no one does you wrong. Perhaps there may be some bands, too, going down, and if I could find any stout old leader whom I know, he would take care of you. I will go up to the village and see; for it would be a great thing, indeed, if you could let Monsieur de Chasseron know all that has happened. He might help us—he might help us, though I don't know if he has the power."

"I am sure he will if he can," cried Helen, "for he has a kind and generous heart, as I have good cause to say."

"Well, I will go, I will go," replied Estoc. "At all events you shall have two men to go with you. Old Jaunaye and Longeau, they shall be the men. They are of the good old stuff, out of which we used to make soldiers in my young days; none of the coxcombs that we have at present. But you get ready to go, and I will be back in half an hour. My horse is saddled at the door."

Thus saying, he departed, and in less time than he had mentioned, returned, with an eager air, exclaiming, "Quick, quick, Mademoiselle Helen; here is the band of the old Count de Ligones just marching this moment, and you can easily come up with them. I saw him and told him, and he says he will take care of you. But you shall have Jaunaye and the Longeau to bring you across to us to-morrow. You can easily catch us up, either at Tremblaye or Châteauneuf, for we must needs go slow. The men are ready."

"And so am I," answered Helen; "but how am I to find Monsieur de Chasseron in all the bustle and confusion of court?"

"True," said Estoc, thoughtfully; "you may have some trouble. I will tell you what," he continued; "here, write down upon a piece of paper the gentleman's name, and send it into Monsieur de Biron. He is an old friend of Chasseron's, I think, and will bring him to you."

Pen and ink were soon procured, the name written down, and Helen de la Tremblade, covering herself with the thick veil which Rose d'Albret had left behind—for she herself had been driven forth all unprepared—went out, and with the assistance of Estoc, mounted a pillion behind one of the men. After riding for about three miles, they overtook the band of the Count de Ligones, an old soldier of near seventy years of age. He was hearty and gay, however, and would fain have entertained his fair companion for the rest of the way with many a jest and many a tale; but Helen, as the reader may suppose, remained grave and sad, answering his questions by a monosyllable, and listening to his jokes without reply.

"You seem very silent, mademoiselle," said the old gentleman, at length; "I am afraid some misfortune has happened to you."

"I have lost a kind and generous friend in this last battle," cried Helen de la Tremblade, "and have no heart to speak."

"Ah! poor thing," said the old man, "you are not a soldier, to bear these things lightly. We learn to weep for a friend one half, and to laugh the next. When a man he will send

by the tenure of a straw, he soon gets to look upon the loss of it by others as a matter of little moment. Yet here I am, have reached seventy years of age, and have been in twelve stricken battles, with at least a skirmish every week for this last thirty years, and never got but one scratch upon the face: yet I have seen many a blooming boy swept away in his very first fight."

Thus he continued talking on during the whole way, till they reached the woods which at that time skirted the banks of the Seine, and, giving his men orders to halt at one of the neighbouring villages, he rode on with Helen and her two companions, followed by a small party of his own attendants, towards the chateau of Rosni, in which they found that the king had taken up his abode.

It was the bustle of a camp rather than that of a court that Helen now found. Tents were pitched in the meadows; baggage-wagons encumbered the ground; bodies of soldiers were moving here and there, and parties of armed men, with their steel caps laid aside, were seen supping on the damp ground under the trees, by the light of the fires which they kindled to keep off the exhalations of the night, now drawing in around them. The great doors of the chateau were wide open, the hall filled with people; and though the Count de Ligones acted as her spokesman, and inquired of several whom they met if they could tell where Monsieur de Chasseron was to be found, whether in the chateau or in the village, she could get no satisfactory answer of any kind; and, indeed, so busy did every one seem with his own thoughts or his own business, that very often no reply was returned at all.

As every one seemed at liberty to come and go, however, the old count, more accustomed to such scenes than she, led her up the great staircase into the corridor at the top; but, as they were turning to the right, more at a venture than by choice, a guard placed himself before them, saying, "You cannot pass, sir, without an order. These are the king's apartments."

"Call a valet or an equerry," said Monsieur de Ligones.

The man obeyed; and, in a moment after, out came a tall, good-looking man, in military attire, who exclaimed at once, "Ah! Ligones, is that you? You are to quarter your men at the farther end of the village. There are two houses marked for you; but, good faith, you must make them sleep as close as pigs in a sty. We only give them house-room at all because we know that there is not a man under seventy among them, and so take care of their old bones."

"Thanks, Aubigné, thanks," replied the count; "but I want to see the king, and—"

"You cannot see him just now," answered Aubigné, "for he has got D'O and other vermin with him, and has for once lost his patience. I heard him swearing like a Reiter, with all the language of Babylon come back upon him in full force. I believe he will frighten them into disgorging something; but whether or not sufficient to carry us to Paris, I doubt. However, Do you will wait half an hour, the fit of blasphemy and finance will have left him. May I ask Wal. are your commands, madam? If your ment, as be with the king, I must report it, for he is always much more accessible to ladies than to gentlemen."

"No, sir," said Helen, "I have not the honour of knowing his majesty; but I would fain speak for a moment with Monsieur de Chasseron."

"He is not here, that I know of," replied Aubigné. "I have not seen him for some time."

"If you would give that paper to Marshal Biron," answered the young lady, "and ask him to condescend to put down where Monsieur de Chasseron is to be found, you would greatly oblige me."

"That I will do with pleasure," replied the equerry. "Let this lady and gentleman pass," he continued, speaking to the guard; and then adding, "I will keep you in the passage for a moment," he left them, entering a room at the very farther end of the corridor. Within that was another chamber, the door of which Aubigné opened gently, and then stretching in his hand to a gentleman who sat nearest the end of a long table, surrounded by a number of persons, he gave him the paper he had received, saying, "Will you have the goodness to hand that up to Monsieur de Biron, and ask him to put down for a young lady who waits without where that gentleman is to be found? You may tell the king, if you like," he added, in a whisper, "that she is prodigiously handsome."

He paused a moment while the paper passed from hand to hand. Some who received it smiled; some passed it on in silence; but Henri Quatre, who sat at the head of the table, remarked what was taking place, and exclaimed, "What is that? What have you got there? Pardie, send it up."

The command was immediately obeyed; and, at the same moment, Henry, nodding his head to Aubigné a little gravely, as if to reprove him for the curiosity he seemed to evince, said, "You may go, companion."

The equerry retreated and closed the door, without, however, quitting the adjacent room; and Helen and Monsieur de Ligones remained standing in the corridor for nearly a quarter of an hour, while numerous attendants and officers passed them every minute. At the end of that time Aubigné again appeared, and, after informing the count that he could now speak with the king if he would go into the room at the end of the passage, he turned to Helen, saying, "Follow me, mademoiselle. Monsieur de Chasseron is expected very soon, and you can wait for him."

Helen thanked the old count warmly for his courteous protection on the road, and then prepared to accompany Aubigné; but Monsieur de Ligones whispered with kind intentions in her ear, "I will tell your two men to wait for you in the hall; and, as soon as your conference is over, you had better ride away to Rolleboise or Bonnières, for this is not the best place for a young creature like you. There are too many men here, and too few women."

The blood came up into the poor girl's face; but she understood that the old nobleman's meaning was good, and replying, "I will!" she followed her conductor to a small cabinet but scantily furnished, where Aubigné left her, and closed the door.

Seating herself by the table, Helen remained

in anxious meditation for more than half an hour, at the end of which time a number of steps were heard in the corridor, and a tall, stout man opened the door and looked in. He withdrew again immediately, and some ten minutes more passed without anything occurring to disturb her reverie. Then, however, the door again opened, and, to her infinite satisfaction, the figure of Chasseron himself, in his worn doublet and heavy boots, appeared, turning round his head as he entered, and saying to some one without, "Wait here! I will return directly."

Helen sprang up to meet him with that look of gladness and confidence which is hard to resist, and, taking her hand, he exclaimed, with a good-humoured smile, "Ah! my little protégée! Now I warrant you thought the gray-beard had forgotten you; but such was not the case, and you must have passed one of my men on the road. I have been so busy I could not send before. But every one who cares for poor King Henry must be busy now; for no sooner does he gain one advantage, than his own people help the enemy to deprive him of the fruits of it. Well, what news from St. André? Were the people with whom I left you kind?"

"Oh! most kind," answered Helen de la Tremblade; "Mademoiselle d'Albret is an old and generous friend—better, alas! than I deserve; but it is for her sake that I have come hither, not my own."

"Ha! How is that?" asked Chasseron; "has anything happened? Are they not married? Pardie, I thought they would lose no time. Yet I saw the young baron in the field. He may have been wounded? He is not in the list of killed."

He spoke so rapidly that Helen had not time to answer anything he said before something new was uttered. When he paused, however, she replied, "No! oh no! He is not killed, but he is a prisoner, which is, or may be, worse."

"Parbleu! that is unfortunate!" cried her companion. "He was one of those, I suppose, who ventured too rashly forward in the town of Ivry. Yet I saw him not there; and I was not far behind myself."

"It was not there he was taken," answered Helen; and, as briefly as possible—for she saw that Chasseron, though wishing to show her every kindness, was in haste—she recapitulated all that had occurred on the banks of the Eure since she had been placed in the farmhouse.

The stout soldier shut his teeth, which were as white as snow, upon his grizzled mustache, and then murmured, "They are unlucky folks! Poor things! To Chartres, did you say? Ventre Saint Gris! something must be done for them. Well, well, that may be set to rights."

These words seemed more the outpourings of what was passing in his own mind than addressed to his fair companion; but, the moment after, he turned to her, saying, "I have some small influence here; and I will not fail to use it for Monsieur de Montigni. He once came to my aid, fair lady, when life or death hung upon the event of a moment. He has since served the king to the best of his ability, and the king should show himself grateful. Doubtless he will, and he shall not fail to know the facts. Then it will not be impossible to exchange, against Monsieur de Montigni, some prisoner in his hands."

"But they fear the Duke of Nemours will send back Mademoiselle d'Albret to Marzay," said Helen; "and then—and then—"

"What then?" asked Chasseron, quickly. "Oh! I see," he continued; "they will force her into a wedding with Nicholas de Chazeul; as dishonest a rogue as ever used the pretence of religion to cover base designs. He shall not have her! Pardie, he shall not have her, if I have any say in the matter."

Helen turned pale and trembled, but she replied not; and her companion added, after a moment's thought, "Well! that shall be cared for too, as far as I am able. What was it you said about our good old friend the commander? Dead, did you say? Why, he fell not on the field!"

"No," answered Helen, in a subdued tone, "he died last night of his wounds."

"God have his soul in guard!" cried the stout soldier. "He was a good old man! But now, my poor young lady, to tell truth, though I am right glad to see you, yet your coming puzzles me not a little. I know not what to do with you here. They say pity is akin to love, but—" He saw that Helen's cheek turned pale, and he added quickly, "Nay, do not fear; there's honour among thieves; and I am not one to take advantage of misfortune. What I would say is simply that I know not how or where to lodge you here in honesty or safety; then, too, where the king goes I must go; and—"

"Nay, sir," replied Helen, "do not embarrass yourself for me or my fate. Deeply grateful am I for kindness to one who, when you found me, was outcast, hopeless, and unfriended; but I am now no longer without protection and support. Good Monsieur Estoc, whom I think you know, sent me hither to tell you all that had occurred, hoping that your influence with the king, or his ministers, might enable you to aid Monsieur de Montigni and Mademoiselle d'Albret; but Monsieur Estoc will protect me. He has promised to do so, and I am sure he will perform it."

"Ay, good faith, that he will!" answered Chasseron; "and it is better that he should than that I should. As to influence, Heaven knows, the king, good man, can rarely be got to do what he ought; and, with his ministers, I have none, alas! But what I can do, I will; and, in the mean time, tell old Estoc that you have seen Chasseron, and mayhap he will be with him, with a score of lances, for a day's sport. Let him give me speedy news of what is going on. I am here for a day or two, it seems, and cannot get away, for my movements depend on greater men than myself. But to return to your own business: What do you do next?"

"To-morrow I am to join Monsieur Estoc," replied Helen, "and go with him to Marzay. They think," she added, in a hesitating tone, "that I may be of service there to Mademoiselle d'Albret. To-night I propose to go, with the two men who came with me, to Rolleboise or Bonnières."

"Right! right!" replied Chasseron; "yet they are full of our people. Well, I will send

some one with you to secure you protection. And now," he continued, in a lower and gentler tone, "when I first found you, I think you were but poorly supplied with that to which we are all, both great and small, obliged to bow our heads, though it be an idol: I mean money. I am, it is true, very poor; but—"

Helen waved her hand, bending her eyes to the ground, and colouring deeply. Why she did so, the reader must ask of his own heart; but, as her companion spoke, the words he had just before used, that "pity is akin to love," rung in her ears again.

"I have enough," she said, "more than enough, thanks to the generosity of poor Monsieur de Liancourt. Accept, sir, my deepest, my most heartfelt thanks. Had it not been for you, I should not have been, at this hour, alive; and now I will keep you no longer, for I know you are in haste."

"Yet stay a moment," said Chasseron. "I must send some one with you. He shall be here directly. Now farewell."

He gazed on her for a moment—seemed to hesitate, and then, taking her hand in his, raised it to his lips, kissed it, not warmly, though tenderly, and, repeating the word "Farewell," turned to the door. When his fingers were upon the latch, however, he looked round, saying, "Wait till somebody comes from me: he shall not be long;" and then, opening the door, he left her once more alone.

Ere ten minutes were over, Helen was joined by an elderly man in a riding dress, who, bowing low, said, "I have come from Monsieur de Chasseron, mademoiselle, and am to accompany you to Rolleboise."

Helen expressed her readiness to set out, and, following her new guide through the corridor and down the stairs, found the two old soldiers who had accompanied her waiting with some impatience and anxiety in the hall. The whole party were soon on horseback; and, riding slowly through the darkness, with the bright Seine glistening on their right, reached Rolleboise in about three quarters of an hour. The little inn, however, which at that time stood wedged in between the high banks and the river, was filled to the doors; but at Bonnières, about two miles farther, they found all quiet and tranquil, and the accommodation which they wanted was easily procured. Helen retired to rest at once; and, rising early the next morning to pursue her way, found the man who had guided her from Rosni waiting to see her depart.

Nothing more occurred on her journey worthy of the reader's attention, and I shall only, therefore, notice that at Châteauneuf she found that Estoc and the funeral procession of the old commander had already passed on towards Marzay. She was here obliged again to pause for the night, and did not reach the village of Marzay, which lay at the distance of about half a league from the chateau, till sunset on the following day. She found Estoc waiting her arrival, full of anxiety on many accounts; for some communication had naturally established itself between the people of the chateau and their old companions, and many of the events which have been recorded in the preceding pages had become known to the old soldier.

The news she brought him of her interview with Chasseron seemed to interest him much. Its first effect, however, was to throw him into a fit of meditation, and he made little or no comment but by the words "He can do it if he will; and yet I love not this rumour of the boy's death. He is hot and quick; and there may be truth in it, though I think it is but one of their lies, after all."

"Whose death?" cried Helen de la Trenblade, turning as pale as death; "not Monsieur de Montigni's?"

"Ay, so they have spread abroad the report," replied Estoc; "but 'tis a falsehood, I believe, to drive poor Rose to do what they want. I trust in Heaven she will not believe it."

"And if she does," exclaimed Helen, "she will sooner die than take the fate they offer her. Oh, no! it is one of that terrible woman's frauds. But Rose will never consent."

"I trust not," answered Estoc, in a doubtful tone. "But a report has reached me that they intend to force this marriage upon her to-morrow morning, and our best hope of preventing it lies with you, Mademoiselle Helen." "I will go directly," said Helen, in a tone wonderfully calm. "I am ready now."

"No, no," replied the old soldier, "not so, my dear; you must wait till all the world's asleep but your uncle. He watches all night in the chapel. You too have need of rest and refreshment; and an hour before midnight we will set out."

Helen took some food, and then lay down in the cottage, where a chamber had been prepared for her; but sleep visited not her eyelids; and her own thoughts were more wearisome than any corporeal exertion could have been.

CHAPTER XXVII.

We left Louis de Montigni on horseback, in a field near Chartres, ready to exchange the deadly shot with one well practised in the use of every weapon; and though we have given some indications of his fate, we must, nevertheless, now return to tell how that morning passed. The Duke of Nemours was, as the reader is well aware, one of the most distinguished members of the League, an enemy of the king, and armed against the life of the young nobleman who now faced him. The customs of the day, too, rendered the death of an opponent in such a combat honourable rather than discreditable to the surviver. But, notwithstanding all this, De Montigni had, from the first, felt great reluctance even to attempt to take the life of his antagonist, and in the terms of duel which he had fixed, he had limited the number of shots, not with any view to his own personal safety, for he was one of those who do not easily apply the thought of danger to their own heart, but in order not to be compelled to injure the duke.

As soon as Nemours saw that he had placed himself and had wheeled his horse, he raised his hat and bowed, and then replacing it on his head, took the large pistol with which he was armed in his right hand, his reins in the left, and striking his spurs into the horse's flank, galloped forward to meet his adversary. He

had no hesitation on his part, he had no remorse; but De Montigni was equally calm and cool, for his mind was also made up as to what he should do; and, keeping a wary eye upon the duke, he likewise rode on, though at a slower pace. Nearer and more near they came to each other, with the muzzles of their pistols raised, till, at the distance of about twenty paces, Nemours levelled his weapon straight at his opponent's head. The next moment De Montigni followed his example, but reserved his fire.

The duke, in truth, did not intend to discharge his pistol at so great a distance; but just at that spot there was a narrow cut in the field, made for the purposes of irrigation, and, seeing that he must leap it, and thereby shake his hand, Nemours pulled the trigger at once. At that very moment, however, the horse, seeing the little ditch, was rising to the leap, and the duke's aim was consequently unsteady.

It was more just than might have been expected, indeed, for the ball grazed De Montigni's cheek, and passed through his hat, which was somewhat cast back from his brow. His face was covered with blood in an instant, and he felt himself wounded; but the injury was too slight to move him in any degree, and, without checking his speed, he rode on upon the duke with his pistol evelled, producing, it must be acknowledged, no very pleasant sensations in his antagonist's bosom. When within three yards, he slightly turned his hand to the right, and fired.

The ball flew at a considerable distance from Nemours; and the two horses, carried on by their speed, passed each other before they could be reined up. As they went by, however, the duke exclaimed, "Ah! that is not fair, Monsieur de Montigni."

The young nobleman pulled in the bridle as soon as possible, and returned, inquiring. "What is not fair, my lord?"

"Come, come," said Nemours, as they met, "own you did not fire at me."

"Nay, my lord," replied De Montigni, with a slight smile, "you have no right to blame me for my bungling. I fired my pistol—that is enough; though I will own I am glad to see you uninjured."

"Well, Monsieur de Montigni," rejoined the duke, "all I know is, that if my horse had not risen to the leap before there was any need, you would now be lying on that grass; and I am very sure that I saw you turn your pistol to the right, or I might have been lying there instead. Confess the fact: is it not so?"

"You must excuse me, sir," replied De Montigni, gravely. "I fired to the best of my judgment; but, whatever be your feelings towards me, I am well satisfied that France will not have to reproach me with the death of one of her most gallant princes, nor the king for having deprived him of one who, I trust, will one day be one of his most faithful subjects. But I must stop this blood, for it is staining all my collar. Had your shot been but two inches to the right, there would have been no need of surgeons."

"I am glad it was not," said Nemours, frankly; and, both having dismounted, De Montigni took some of the water from the little cut in the meadow, and washed away the gore from his face.

"Stay, stay," cried the duke, producing some lint. "I have always some of this about me when I go to the field, and it will soon stanch the blood."

With his own hands he aided to dress the wound which he had made, and they were still thus employed when a man, dressed in peaceful attire, as it was considered in that day—though his apparel consisted of a stout buff coat, a slouched hat, wide crimson breeches, a pair of enormous jack-boots, a sword and dagger—rode up, mounted on a strong gray charger. Over his shoulders, suspended by a leathern strap, hung a trumpet ornamented with a banner of the arms of France; and drawing in his rein at the distance of about twenty yards from the two gentlemen, as he was passing on towards the high road, he exclaimed, "Ha, ha, messieurs, it is a pity, I think, that I was not here some ten minutes earlier. I could have sounded the charge."

"We have done very well without you, my good friend," replied the duke; "but you seem a trumpet from Henry of Bourbon. What is your errand?"

"That I shall tell to those whom I am sent to," answered the trumpeter.

"Pray who may they be?" demanded Nemours.

"Monsieur de la Bourdasière, and his Highness the Duke of Nemours," answered the trumpeter. "I shall find them both in Chartres, I suppose?"

"You won't find his highness of Nemours," said the duke, laughing, "unless [illegible] I come, my friend. But go on; [illegible] low you."

"If you are the duke," replied [illegible], "I may as well give you my [illegible] you can con it over and make u[illegible] by the way, for I must get back with [illegible]"

Thus saying, he dismounted fro[illegible] horse, and led it forward by the bridle towards the duke, drawing forth a letter, at the same time, from a pouch under his left arm. Nemours took it, cut the silk between the two seals with his dagger, and read the contents.

"This is strange enough, De Montigni," he said. "This epistle is all about you, except, indeed, a few words which your king has been pleased to add regarding the advantages which I might obtain by returning, as he terms it, to my allegiance."

"What is his majesty pleased to say concerning me?" asked De Montigni. "I should scarcely think he knew that I was a prisoner."

"Oh, good faith," exclaimed Nemours, "you are a man of much greater consequence than you imagine. Here, he offers in exchange for your humble self our good friend the Marquis de Megnelai, requiring, however, at the same time, the liberty of the fair lady we sent off this morning for Marzay."

"I will beseech you, my lord," replied De Montigni, gravely, "not to speak upon that subject, for it is a matter that I cannot easily forgive."

"On my life," cried Nemours, holding out his hand to him frankly, "I am sorry for it, De Montigni; but if it were to be done over again, I

should be obliged to do it, for I had pledged my word, and that cannot be broken. I had letters from your cousin Chazeul the day before the battle, and assured him in return, that if Mademoiselle d'Albret fell into my hands, she should be restored to her guardian; otherwise I would not have done it; and now believe me, I love you all the better for having fought with you. Thus, as before, you are at full liberty to go whithersoever you will; and I leave it to you and the king to settle, whether you will take the exchange of Megnelai, or pay ransom as before agreed. I would prefer the former, as the marquis must not say that I have neglected any opportunity to set him free; but perhaps the king may not think fit to agree, as the lady cannot be restored according to his demand."

"I should prefer paying my own ransom," replied De Montigni. "The king's goodness is very great, and I can only attribute it to the services of my good uncle the commander; but still I would not take advantage of it, if it can be avoided."

"That as you please," replied Nemours; "but the best thing for you now to do is to return with me to Chartres, and then accompany this good trumpeter back to the Bearnois's headquarters. We shall not have to detain him long."

De Montigni paused thoughtfully for a moment; but, before he could reply, the king's trumpeter interposed, saying, "I have nothing to take me on to Chartres, Monsieur de Nemours. I was commanded, if I did not find you in the place, to give the letter to Monsieur de la Bourdasière, and tell him to open it; but I have no letter absolutely for him; and if you have settled matters with monsieur here, I do not see why I should not turn my bridle and ride back."

"Well, then, God speed you both!" cried Nemours. "Offer my humble duty to the King of Navarre; tell him I will write myself in the course of the day, but that, in the mean time, I only regret my conscience will not let me serve a monarch who has placed himself out of the pale of the Church, for a braver man or a better general does not live."

Thus saying, he put his foot in the stirrup and sprang upon his horse's back. Then turning to the young nobleman, he continued, "Come, shake hands, Monsieur de Montigni. We will part friends, though we met enemies; and if you would take my advice, you would lose no time in being under the walls of Marzay with a strong hand, for there is no knowing what Maître Chazeul may do. He is playing a fine game with my good kinsman Mayenne. We see it well enough; for, unless he had been looking for his own advantage more than for the good of the League, he would have been upon the field of Ivry with all his forces, instead of sending forty men under his bailli, which was but a mockery; and so we should not object to see him humbled a little."

"I will take your advice, my lord," replied De Montigni; "but, to say truth, I am somewhat puzzled as to my movements. I have not been bred up among all these scenes of strife, as you have, and know not how or where to raise a body of men in a few hours, though I hear it *is done in France daily.*"

Nemours laughed. "Gold, gold! Monsieur de Montigni," he replied. "Sides have been so frequently changed, and fortune, the fickle goddess, has spun her wheel round so often, that half France knows not what the other side is fighting for; and thus, I believe, there are at least a hundred thousand men in this good country who might be enlisted by beat of drum for any cause under heaven, so that it bore upon its banner the significant emblem of a crown piece. Every village is full of them, and you have nothing to do but to stuff your pockets with testons, ride into the market-place, and shout, 'Who will serve De Montigni?' and you will have a score at least after your heels in half an hour, even if your first command should be that they all turn Turk!"

He spoke somewhat bitterly; but, though the young nobleman himself was in no very gay mood, he could not help smiling at the picture —too true a one—of the state of France.

"I will try what can be done," he replied; and, mounting his own horse, he rode off with the trumpeter in one direction, while Nemours pursued his way back to Chartres.

At the gate of that city, a number of the gentlemen who had come thither in attendance upon his own person, and several of the officers of the garrison, were looking anxiously for his return; and, well aware of the object for which he had gone forth, had horses ready saddled to seek him in case he did not soon make his appearance.

"Well, my lord duke—well, sir?" cried half a dozen voices as he rode in among them, "you have killed him, I suppose?"

Nemours made no reply; but La Bourdasière, who was at their head, pointed to the stains upon the duke's hand and sleeve, and, with as much quiet satisfaction as if they were talking of a boar-hunt, exclaimed, "Ay, ay, he has had enough; that is clear. Your arm is all over blood."

Nemours bent down his head to the governor, saying in a low voice, "He is wounded, but not killed. However, the less we talk about it the better, La Bourdasière, for he had my life in his hands, and did not take it. If all that faction would but act as Henry of Navarre and Louis de Montigni, we should soon have France turning heretic for their sake. But, hark you! I have met with a trumpet from the king, demanding this lad's exchange for De Megnelai. There are a few words in the end of the letter which make me suspect that Henry will not march on at once to Paris, but that we may have him upon our hands here before many days be over. You must call in all your parties as fast as possible, and send a messenger at once to Marzay after the people who have gone with De Mottraye. Tell them to make no halt, but to return immediately."

"I have got tidings of the same kind too," replied La Bourdasière, "and I only waited your return to send, for I knew not if you had any message for Monsieur de Chazeul."

"No," answered the the duke, thoughtfully, "no: he is not to be depended on; but despatch your man as quickly as possible."

This whispered conversation, the blood upon Nemours's hand and sleeve, and the fact of his having returned alone from the field, was quite

sufficient to give rise to the rumour of De Montigni's death, which soon became current in Chartres. The truth was known, indeed, before nightfall; but, long ere the report was corrected, the messenger was on his way to Marzay, bearing the tidings as he had first heard them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

De Montigni rode on thoughtfully for a few minutes, not a little embarrassed how to act. To go to the king seemed absolutely necessary; and yet he could not but feel that every step he took was carrying him farther and farther from the spot where he wished to be. To present himself at Marzay without attendants or friends, he knew well, from all the tales that had reached his ears of the dark proceedings which took place from time to time in the bosom of the noblest families of France, might be a most dangerous experiment. Not that he believed Monsieur de Liancourt would suffer him to receive injury if he could help it; but he doubted that the count would be able to prevent the schemes of others from taking effect; and he dreaded a long imprisonment at that particular moment almost as much as loss of life. Yet every hour's delay ere he made some effort once more to free Rose d'Albret, or, at least, to assert his claim to her hand, was tedious and terrible to him. Turning at length to the trumpeter, who rode on silently by his side, he inquired, "Well, my friend, where did you leave the king?"

"At a place called Rosni, I think," replied the man, "not far from the town of Mantes."

"You think!" said De Montigni; "are you not sure where you left him?"

"One cannot be sure of anything in this world," replied the trumpeter, dryly; "but that was not what I meant. I intended to say, I think the place is called Rosni, for I am a stranger in this part of the world. France is a big country, monsieur; and I come from a good distance on the other side of Libourne, so I may well be forgiven for not having got all these names by heart."

"What rumour did you hear of the king's movements?" asked De Montigni.

"The last noise I heard of his movements," answered the man, "was a great deal of blowing of horns."

"And, pray, on what occasion was that?" demanded De Montigni.

"On the occasion of the king going out to hunt," was the reply. "His majesty having chased Mayenne, thought fit to run after a braver beast, though it could scarcely run faster than the other."

"But was there no mention of going to Paris?" said the young nobleman.

"Why, good faith, everybody was talking of it, and nobody doing it," replied his dry companion; "but, if you must needs know all, sir, men whispered in one another's ears that the king's pockets were empty, and that his financiers kept them so on purpose."

"For what object?" demanded De Montigni.

"To put the money in their own pockets which they kept out of his," answered his companion. "Try the thing with your own farmers, sir, and you will find the same happen. You will get no money till you go to fetch it, that you may be sure of."

"I hope I shall," answered De Montigni, "for I have much need of it just now."

"Ah, poor young gentleman," replied the trumpeter, "I am sorry for you; for those who want money, and don't choose to go and fetch it, will soon have to ride in hoby boots. However, why should a subject be better off than a king? I have seen our Henry, before now, with a hole in the elbow of his pourpoint; and many a time he has been glad to dine off pumpkin soup and a lump of black bread."

"Poor fare, assuredly, for a monarch," said De Montigni, musing; "and yet the want of money may produce worse disasters than that, my friend, especially where time is almost life."

"Assuredly, sir," answered the trumpeter; "but perseverance comes to the aid of all. I thought I never should have got to Chartres this morning; for there are all sorts of bands roving the country, who have no more respect for a trumpet or a flag of truce than they have for an old cheese or a maid's modesty."

De Montigni remained silent for several minutes; but at length he said, "I wish I could meet with one of those bands you speak of."

"By my faith and honour, sir," replied his companion, with a laugh, "you may meet with one of them sooner than you would find pleasant. They are as easy to be found as cowslips in the spring, but not quite so fragrant."

"They might answer my purpose, however," said the young baron. "I suppose they would take service with any one who would pay them?"

"Ay, that they would," rejoined the trumpeter; "though you might find some honour among them too, notwithstanding all that Monsieur de Nemours said just now. Your furious Leaguer—unless he were a gentleman—would not sell himself to the king for any money; and your stiff Protestant would not go over to the League for gold and roast meat. But there are plenty of birds between those two flights, who care not a straw on which side they appear, so that they fight, plunder, and get paid."

In such conversation De Montigni and his companion rode on for about an hour and a half, the young nobleman every now and then falling into a fit of thought, and revolving, with doubt and hesitation, the course he had to pursue. Lose Rose d'Albret he was resolved he would not, without using every effort in his power; and yet he feared that, in the lawless state to which France had been reduced by long years of civil contention, she might be driven, if not to wed Chazeul—for that he believed nothing would induce her to do—at least to take those monastic vows which would place as impassable a barrier between them. To his just claims he knew a deaf ear would be turned by those who had her in their hands, and no means seemed feasible to deliver her but force; and yet his heart revolted at the idea of taking arms against him by whom he had been nurtured and protected in his early years, and of attacking the dwelling where all his young and happy days had been passed. Yet "desperate evils," he thought, "require a desperate remedy, and that

which is refused to justice must be obtained by force." His mind then again reverted to the means; and at length he settled upon the plan of endeavouring to join the band of the Commander de Liancourt, of whose death, it must be remembered, he was ignorant. He knew that his uncle had been upon the way to join the king; and though he had not seen him in the fight of Ivry, the old soldier might well have been there, he thought; for, in the hurry and confusion of the field, and the disguise which the arms then worn afforded, two brothers might stand within a few yards of each other without the slightest recognition taking place. As he thus meditated, he turned to his companion, and inquired if he had been at the field of Ivry.

"To be sure I was," replied the man, "and blew till I thought I should have burst my cheeks. The first thing that made Mayenne's standard begin to flap backward and forward was the wind of my trumpet."

"Did you chance to hear of or see the old Commander de Liancourt?" asked the young nobleman; "and if you did, can you tell me what has become of him?"

"See him I did not," said the man, "for he was boxed up in his arms like a crab in his shell. But when he came up behind the Cornette Blanche, I asked who he was, and they told me. As to what became of him, I do not know, for I lost him in the battle."

"Did you hear anything, then, of one Monsieur de Chasseron?" asked De Montigni.

"No," replied the man; "was he there? I knew his brother very well, if that will do; he who was killed at Contras."

"No, that will not do," said De Montigni. "It was of a gentleman who was with the king the night before this last battle, I spoke."

"I did not see him," answered the trumpeter; and there the conversation dropped; but scarcely had five minutes passed before three horsemen were seen riding towards them at a quick pace. "Now," cried the trumpeter, "you may have a chance of beginning your band. Here come some folks who seem as if they were seeking employment."

"I think I have a chance, indeed," replied the young nobleman with a smile, as he recognised one of his own servants at the head of the party. "If I mistake not, these men will join us at a word."

The next moment the horsemen rode up, and great was their joy to see the young baron again; for, besides the man who had been long with him in Italy, were two of those who had accompanied him and Rose d'Albret in their flight from Marzay. He now learned that, having heard of his capture by the Duke of Nemours, and that he had been carried a prisoner to Chartres, they were riding with all speed towards that city, in order to offer him their services during his captivity.

But, though De Montigni was certainly rejoiced at their coming, his satisfaction was sadly clouded by the intelligence they brought of his good uncle's death. Many a question did he ask, and many a long detail did they give, of the scene which closed the preceding night at the farmhouse on the banks of the Eure; and among other facts which were now communicated to him, was the intention of Estoc, as soon as he could make his preparations, to carry the body of his dead leader to the chapel at Marzay.

"He must wait some time before he can set out," added the servant, "and, if we make haste, we may join him on the way; for I am sure, sir, you would like to be present at the good old knight's funeral."

"Undoubtedly," replied De Montigni; "on every account I should wish to be there. Do you know what road Estoc will take?"

"I cannot tell, sir," replied the man, "but I should think he would not be able to march from St. André before to-morrow morning."

"Then let us direct our course thither with all speed," said De Montigni. "Which road ought we to take?"

"We could not do better than follow the one we are upon," answered the man who had served him as a guide towards Dreux. "A high road is always better than a by-one, when we have nothing to fear; and the country between this and Nogent Le Roy is quite clear of the enemy."

"By my faith, I do not know that," replied the trumpeter. "I know I was obliged to go round two miles to get out of the way of a party all decked out with crosses of Lorraine."

"Nonsense, nonsense," cried the servant; "if we did meet twenty or thirty of them, they would run at the very sight of us. Every village that we passed was mounting the white scarf; and a flood of loyalty has overflowed the land, which threatens to wash the League out of France."

Without farther debate, De Montigni led the way on upon the road they were travelling, anxious, if possible, to reach Annet that night. But mortal man is destined to meet with impediments in whatever course he may pursue, and many were those which delayed the young nobleman in his progress. The roads were heavy; his horse, and the horses of his followers, wearied by marching during several preceding days; and it was found necessary to halt for an hour at Nogent in order to refresh them.

It was a beautiful evening in the spring, however, when they once more resumed their way; and the interval of their halt was not ill employed by De Montigni in writing a letter to the king, expressing his gratitude for the monarch's condescension and kindness, informing him of the motives which led him to Marzay, and promising to rejoin him, accompanied by all the force he could muster, with as little delay as possible. This epistle he placed in the hands of the trumpeter, who was to quit them when they turned towards Annet; but, in the mean time, the good man rode on by the young gentleman's side, entertaining him, or at least striving to do so, by his quaint observations on all the circumstances of the time.

Thus proceeding, they had advanced to a spot three or four miles from Nogent, where they paused to consider of their farther course on the brow of a little eminence, from which two cross roads were seen branching to the right and left. Although, as the servant had stated, they had found the whole country rapidly resuming its loyalty, as a consequence of the king's success, yet they had learned at Nogent that the town of Dreux still held out stoutly for

the League, and that to attempt the passage under its walls might be dangerous.

The hill on which they stood commanded a wide view over the undulating plain below, and clothing the side of the descent was a thick low wood, already beginning to grow red with the first promise of the spring. About a mile in advance rose the tower of an old chateau, even then partially decayed, and of which nothing is now to be found but one ruined wall rising on the top of a tree-covered mound, which the reader, if he ever travels from Versailles to Dreux, towards the hour of sunset, may see on his left hand, with the light streaming in a long bright ray through the solitary window which time has spared. When I saw it, all the building and the wood below were in deep shadow, except where that solitary beam fell, lighting up one particular track like some sweet memory in the shady expanse of past-by years.

A little way down the road, when the young Royalist and his followers reached the brow of the hill, from behind a clump of trees which projected somewhat farther than the rest, rose a thin column of pale bluish smoke, and the trumpeter, touching De Montigni's arm, pointed it out to him, saying, "Now, sir, if you wish to increase your band, here's the opportunity. I will wager my trumpet against a cowherd's horn that under those trees there is a party of good gentlemen boiling their pot, and not knowing how to fill it to-morrow."

"The more I can gain, the better," replied De Montigni; "but I have little time to spare. How many men had Monsieur Estoc with him?" he continued, turning to his servant.

"Fifteen or twenty, I think," replied the man. "I did not count them, but there could not well be less."

"We must have more," said De Montigni; "many more, if it be possible to find them. Let us try what we can do here;" and, somewhat rashly and inconsiderately, he rode down the hill without farther examination. At the first sound of his horse's feet, the figure of a man, armed in cuirass and steel cap, came out from behind the trees, as if on the watch; and the young nobleman could see him turn round and speak to some persons behind; and when De Montigni had reached the spot itself, he found four others seated round a fire, apparently engaged in the very peaceable occupation of eating their soup out of a large earthen pot which stood among the ashes. The two parties were equal in number, and the strangers showed no hostile colours, nor, indeed, any alarm, so that De Montigni imagined there could be no risk in pausing for a few moments to talk with them.

"Well, my men," he said, "you seem to be out of employ."

"No, monsieur," replied one of them, "I think we are very well employed. I wish we were sure of such good occupation to-morrow;" and he laughed as he carried a spoonful of soup to his mouth.

"Perhaps I may be able to furnish it to you," rejoined De Montigni, "if you are willing to take service with me."

The man gazed at him for a moment, and then ran his eye over the young gentleman's companions, pausing for a little at the figure of the trumpeter, and the royal arms which hung upon his instrument of music.

"We are no way scrupulous, sir," he said; "all that we require is good pay down on the day, and a gallant leader not too particular."

"Good pay you shall have," replied De Montigni, "and that exactly discharged. But I must have obedience to my commands, and no grumbling at plenty of work."

"I see no reason why it should not be a bargain," rejoined the other; "I suppose you are raising a band, sir?"

"I am," answered De Montigni; "or, rather, I am seeking to add to a band already raised, but somewhat scanty."

"How many have you got, and how many do you want?" was the next question.

"I have about twenty at command," said the young nobleman, "and wish to treble that number at the least."

"For whose service?" demanded another of the soldiers, rising, in which action he was followed by the rest.

De Montigni paused for a moment ere he replied, and then said, "For my own in the first place, and then for the king's. But I should think to you, my men, it would not make much difference on whose side you fought, so that you exercise your calling."

"Perhaps not," answered the other; and, turning to his companions, they all spoke together in a low tone for a minute or two. The one who had taken the principal part in the conversation then advanced closer to De Montigni, inquiring what pay he would give them if they agreed to do as he wished. But his eye was upon their movements, for there had been something in the tone in which the last few questions had been asked which seemed to him suspicious; and now perceiving that the other four sauntered leisurely towards a tree, against which their short lances or pikes had been resting, he turned towards his followers, exclaiming aloud, "Your hands upon your pistols!"

"Why, what are you afraid of?" asked the soldier, in a scoffing tone; but, at the same instant, De Montigni's servant shouted, "There are horses upon the hill, sir! Ride on, ride on!"

The young nobleman turned his rein; but the soldier who was before him made a sudden spring towards him, and endeavoured to seize his bridle, while the four others cast themselves across the road with their pikes levelled.

The young gentleman, however, was quicker than his antagonist. His sword was out of the sheath in an instant, and before the man, crying "Yield to the Holy League," could grasp his bridle, he dealt him a blow upon the steel cap that made him stagger. A second brought him to his knee, and a third would most likely have despatched him; but there was no time to be lost; a considerable body of cavalry were coming down at a quick pace; and, heading his men, De Montigni charged the pikemen on the road, who wavered a little at the sight of the maltreatment their comrade had received. Had they stood firm, they might have detained their opponents till the horse from above had joined them; but a pistol-shot from one of the young baron's followers stretched the foremost on the ground, and the others gave way at once.

"Quick, sir, quick!" cried the man who had

guided De Montigni from Marzay. "They have green scarfs! We must gallop for our lives!" and, setting spurs to their horses, the whole party rode down the hill at full speed.

It was now a complete flight and pursuit; for the cavalry from above hurried on their horses with voice and spur, and the royal trumpeter put his instrument to his mouth, and blew a long loud blast, but without ever pausing in his headlong speed. On, on the Royalist party went, riding for life and liberty; but the others came quicker still behind them; and near the foot of the hill, the trumpeter's horse made a false step, stumbled, and rolled over with his rider.

"Spur, sir, spur!" cried the guide, seeing his leader inclined to pause. "This way, this way! We shall distance them among the narrow roads. They are too many to follow fast."

But De Montigni's horse was still fatigued; and the bad state of the by-ways to the right, into which they now struck, made the beast labour and stumble continually. As the man had supposed, a number of the pursuers were quickly left behind; but still some ten or twelve followed, and it soon became evident to the young baron's party that they must ere long be overtaken.

"We had better turn and fight it out," said De Montigni; "my horse is failing. They cannot force us in this lane."

"No, no, sir!" cried the guide, "let us on to the old chateau, at least. If we find the gate open, we can make it good against them, and they dare not stay long before it. 'Tis close at hand!"

"On, then!" cried De Montigni; and, touching his charger with the spur once more, they were soon at the foot of the little rise, not more than a hundred yards in length, which led to the building.

Seeing their intention, the pursuers took to their firearms, and a pistol-ball or two whizzed among them. One struck the guide upon the shoulder; but he was covered with a good buff coat, and the distance was too great for the shot to have any serious effect. The gates stood wide open; the courtyard was covered with grass; the windows closed; and, in a few minutes, the whole of the fugitives were in the court.

De Montigni sprang to the ground and endeavoured to close the gates; but a pile of rubbish had accumulated against them, and only one valve would swing upon its hinges. Those who followed were within fifty yards when one of the men, who had ridden on up to the house, exclaimed, "Here, sir, here, this door is open;" and, casting loose his rein, the young nobleman sprang across the court, up the steps, and into the vacant and desolate hall just as the enemy poured in through the gates. Two of De Montigni's men led their horses up and into the building, but the third was so closely pursued that he was obliged to abandon his beast, and the heavy door was only just closed when the Leaguers were on the steps.

"Quick! run round and see that every door and window is fast!" exclaimed the young baron to his little party: "on that depends our *safety*;" and he himself, setting the example, *hurried from room to room* and from passage to passage, while those without seemed to hold a consultation together; and some hammered violently against the woodwork with the butt-end of their large pistols, and strove to force the staples by their united strength. Two doors at the back were found open, but were soon secured; and though some of the windows were not closed, and, indeed, were without either their glass or frames, yet they were too high from the ground to be reached from without without the aid of ladders.

In about five minutes De Montigni and his men were once more assembled in the hall, and their little council was soon held.

"They will never venture to stay long," cried one.

"And they cannot force us here without axes or hammers," exclaimed another.

"We must not let them try," answered De Montigni; "who has got powder and ball? My pistol is unloaded."

"I have," said one, "but it is a scanty stock;" and he approached his horse, which stood panting with a drooping head and heavy eye in the midst of the hall.

"I have a good supply," cried the servant: "thanks to Monsieur Estoc. He said I might want it;" and, taking his master's pistol, he charged it with powder and ball.

"Now follow to the windows above," said De Montigni; "you, Ralph, and you, Martin. Let the other stay here, and watch through that keyhole."

Thus saying, he led the way up the stairs, which entered, at the other end of the hall, to the rooms above the doorway, the windows of which were wide open and without any defence. The sill, however, was itself breast-high; and creeping, with his loaded pistol in his hand, towards the casement which he had calculated was immediately above the steps, De Montigni looked out into the court. A greater number of the Leaguers had by this time come up, and the open space contained at least twenty men. In the centre of the court was a group of five or six, surrounding the poor trumpeter, who was remonstrating loudly against the stopping of a flag of truce, but apparently in vain; for they had stripped him of the pouch he carried under his arm, and one of them was busily reading the very letter to the king, which De Montigni had written at Nogent. Closer to the chateau were several others; and one, wearing a gay green scarf, was standing behind a man, who, bending down his head, was looking through the large keyhole of the door. The young nobleman beckoned to his men, who had remained a step or two behind, to come quietly up; and as they advanced, bending low to avoid being seen, he whispered to them to follow his example, and then singling out the Leaguer of the green scarf, he levelled his pistol and fired. The man instantly fell back, and rolled down the steps into the court, and the two servants discharging their weapons at the same time, cast the group in the centre into marvellous confusion, severely wounding two of those who composed it.

De Montigni instantly retreated from the room to charge again; but, as soon as he had reached the passage beyond, the man who had accompanied him from Marzay whispered in his ear, "Do you know who they are? Pardie,

that was a good shot of yours, sir! you knocked over the Bailli de Chazeul. We shall have to fight for our lives, however, if they know who you are, for doubtless orders have been sent to bring you in, dead or alive."

"The Bailli de Chazeul!" repeated de Montigni in surprise. "Ay, I remember Monsieur de Nemours mentioned he had been sent to Mayenne's force. But we must act, not talk. I should be sorry to believe my cousin would give any commands contrary to the rights of blood; but if he have done so, the more need of gallant defence; and here we can surely maintain ourselves till help arrives."

"Oh, yes!" answered the man in a confident tone; "they can neither force nor starve us while we have these good doors for our defence, and two horses to eat."

Without farther consultation, De Montigni returned to the window with the same precautions as before; but he found that the whole party of Leaguers had retired to the other side of the court, and were gathered together round the wounded men. The air was now growing gray with twilight; and even if he could have seen to take a just aim, the distance was too great to afford a chance of doing any damage to the enemy. The eyes of several of those below were turned towards the windows; and, catching a glance of a man's head raised somewhat above the stonework, one of them exclaimed, "There! there!" loud enough for the sound to reach his ears. The next thing he expected was a volley; but the moment after, a man advanced waving a white handkerchief, and crying, "Truce! truce!"

De Montigni was silent till the Leaguer, coming nearer, demanded, "Is the Baron de Montigni among you? nay, we know he is!"

"Well," answered the young nobleman, raising his head, "what if he be?"

"Then let him surrender to the Holy Catholic League," replied the man, "and take quarter."

"If you be really of the Roman Catholic League," replied the young nobleman, "you have naught to do but to retire; for Monsieur de Montigni is furnished with a pass from the Duke of Nemours. But if you be plunderers and marauders, as I strongly suspect, keep your distance, for you cannot force us here, and the attempt will cost you dear, as you must have learned by this time."

The man retired a step or two, and after consulting for a minute with those behind, he again came forward, saying, "If you have got a pass, Monsieur de Montigni, come down and show it."

"Will any three among you, being gentlemen, be hostages that the pass shall be respected?" demanded De Montigni; "otherwise I open not the doors."

"Mark you, Monsieur le Baron," cried another, who seemed to be of a superior rank, advancing from behind, and speaking in an angry tone, "you had better surrender, for we are resolved to have you; and though we have not tools to night, we will watch you well, and force your gates to-morrow morning. We will give you till daybreak to consider; but if you yield not with the first ray of the sun, we will pile up the door with fagots and burn you out."

"Long ere to-morrow morning our friends will be here," replied De Montigni, "and you will be caught in your own trap. So do as you list, gentlemen; but think not to deceive us, for we will keep good watch too."

"We know better, we know better," answered the last speaker. "The Bearnois is at Mantes, his forces dispersing, and he himself going on to Meulan. So we shall rest quiet enough, and to-morrow will see you our prisoner, or roasted like an egg in the ashes. You have wounded one of our best men, I fear, to death, and you shall not escape us; but if you surrender to night you shall have good quarter."

"That I will never," cried De Montigni; "and if one of you be wounded to death, many another shall fall before you place the fagots that you talk of; and so no more, for if you come nearer I will fire."

The spokesman of the Leaguers, retiring slowly, seemed to consult for a few minutes with the rest, and then carrying away two in their arms, while another walked, supported by one of his companions, the whole body retreated from the court; but by the remaining light they might be seen to halt just beyond the walls; while one small party was observed to detach itself to the right, and a second to the left, as if to guard the other sides of the building. A single horseman, too, rode off in the direction of the hill from which they had come down in pursuit, and it was evident that their present intention was to keep their word of remaining before the chateau all night

CHAPTER XXIX.

When Helen de la Tremblade first entered the chapel by a private door, which led from a small room called the sacristy, through the walls into the country beyond, and of which Estoc possessed a key, she found the building vacant. There stood the coffin covered with its pall; there burned the lights upon the altar; and a little further on the pale flame of a votive lamp, dedicated by some of the deceased lords of Liancourt to their patron saint, flickered before a little shrine, and cast a faint gleam into the right hand aisle.

Helen's heart beat, and her temples throbbed. Her breath came thick and hard, and with difficulty her trembling limbs bore her forward. She was resolute, however; her mind was made up and prepared, and her whole spirit nerved for the terrible task—the most terrible that human being can perform—of confessing to one who has built up a fabric of love and confidence upon our virtue and our honour, a tale of sin and shame; and slowly, feebly, and unsteadily, but with strong determination, she tottered forward till she reached the open space between the coffin and the altar. Just as she did so, she heard a step approaching the chapel across the court. She knew it was that of him whom she sought, and her heart sunk at the sound. Clasping her hands together, and bending her head, she murmured prayer upon prayer for strength, for forgiveness; while the step came nearer and more near, entered the chapel,

advanced up the nave, suddenly paused, and remained suspended for more than a minute.

"He sees me," thought Helen. "Oh God! how shall I meet him?"

She dared not raise her head; her hands remained clasped in the same position; her limbs lost all power; and she seemed for the moment turned into stone.

At length she heard a voice. "Helen!" it cried, "Helen!" and then came the priest's step rapidly moving towards her. The rustle of his garments told her he was near, for she dared not look up, and she sank upon her knees at his feet. Then were poured forth the rapid words of shame and contrition which we have mentioned, and then came a terrible pause, at the end of which she felt his arms around her, and heard the words of still enduring love and tenderness with which he spoke. A wild and agonized sob burst from her bosom, and then the overloaded heart relieved itself by tears.

The old man soothed and consoled his niece. He dried her eyes, he pressed her to his bosom, he told her to be comforted, he promised her forgiveness of all. He held out to her the high and merciful hopes vouched by the word of God for every sinner that repents, and, in the end, he succeeded in tranquillizing her first emotions.

But Helen remembered the tale she had to tell. She recollected that every minute might be precious; and when, seeing her more calm, he desired her to tell him all, she did so as rapidly and clearly as the natural feelings of her heart would admit. The narrative was mingled with the tears and blushes of burning shame, and bitter remorse, and agonizing self-condemnation, even while she related with simple truth the arts which had been used to mislead, and the promises which had been held out but to destroy. She attempted not to palliate, for no tongue could be more full of blame than hers was of herself; but yet her whole tale was in itself a palliation of her fault; and when she came to the end, all that remained in the bosom of the priest was anger and indignation towards the woman who had so neglected innocence committed to her charge, and towards the man who had so basely taken advantage of that neglect to deceive a confiding heart, and stain a pure and innocent spirit.

"The villain!" he cried; "the base, deceitful villain. But even he is less culpable than that dark demon his mother. If ever there was a fiend in human flesh, 'tis she! She burned the letters, then? She took from you the only proofs of his treachery and his falsehood?"

"She did," said Helen. "She called me every odious name, which, perhaps, I but too well deserved; and, in the midst of all her servants, drove me forth, to perish, for aught she knew, unfriended and alone."

"She shall have her punishment," replied Walter de la Tremblade, in a stern, resolute tone; "ay, here as well as hereafter. All the letters, did you say? all?"

"All, I think," said Helen. "Nay," she added, "there may be one, which I placed in the book of Hours you gave me, and it may have escaped her notice, though doubtless she has caused search to be made since I was driven away. Yet, as the book is clasped, it might not be observed."

"What were its contents?" demanded the priest, eagerly, with his keen eye fixed upon her face, so that its light seemed to dazzle and confuse her.

Helen lifted her hand to her head, and for a moment gazed into vacancy with the effort to remember. "Yes," she said at length, "Yes, it was the last but one he wrote me. He promised to love me ever, he said he would see me soon again, he called me his wife."

"He did! he did!" cried the priest, with a look of triumph. "That letter must be obtained, Helen!"

"But how?" demanded the poor girl, with a mournful shake of the head; "even if it still exists, they will not let me enter those doors again."

"No," answered Walter de la Tremblade, "no, you never shall. But still that letter must be obtained, if it be in being. Ay, and it shall be, too, and that before to-morrow morning What is the hour! Near one—I had forgot, I had forgot. We have no time to lose! That accursed plot is on the eve of execution. It must be frustrated;" and, pressing his hand hard upon his brow, he fixed his eyes upon the pavement in deep meditation. "Yes," he said at length, "that will do! Listen to me, Helen. They have laid a scheme to drive Rose d'Albret, who always loved you, into the arms of him who has betrayed you. They have persuaded her that Louis de Montigni is dead; and they think, by blasting her reputation, to leave her no choice but marriage with Chazeul."

"Oh, horrible!" cried Helen. "How base! how shameless!"

"It is worthy of its framer," replied the priest. "The maid is bribed or frightened to give him this night—yes, within a few minutes from this time—to give him admission to her chamber."

"Oh! let me fly and tell her," cried Helen, vehemently. "She must be saved, she must be saved. I will go to her, I will go to her! I will stay with her. I will stab him first with my own hand!"

"Be calm, be calm," replied the priest; "there is no need of that. We can frustrate him as easily, and more innocently. There is a door from my chamber into hers. It is unlocked, or can be speedily opened. By it you can go to her and tell her all. Let her know that De Montigni is living; that the rumour of his death was but a fraud. Tell her how they are practising against her peace. Bid her be firm and constant, and she shall have aid when least she expects it. Stay with her if you will—or, rather, bring her forth into my chamber There she can pass the night in security, and return with the first dawn of morning. And now let us hasten away. Helen, for this must be done, my child, before the clock strikes one. I have to watch here; but to prevent this deed is a higher duty, and I may well be spared for a few minutes: and God's blessing be upon your endeavours."

Thus saying he led her from the chapel through the old hall and the corridor beyond, and then up the stairs, feeling his way by the hand-rope that ran along the wall. All was

dark and silent; not a sound stirred in the house; and nothing but a faint ray of the moonlight, which shot across from a window half way up the staircase, gave them any light in their course.

Opening the door of his own chamber as quietly as possible, the priest led Helen, in and then striking a light, he showed her the door which led to the apartments of Rose d'Albret. It was locked, but the key was in the inside, and easily turned; and, ere they opened it, Walter de la Tremblade once more embraced his niece, saying, "I must find another time to comfort thee, my poor child; but the best comfort will be vengeance on those who have wronged thee. Now go, and make no noise. Speak to her in a whisper. Bid her rise at once and follow thee, if she regards her safety and her honour. Then lock both these doors, and rest in peace for this night. I will be with you early in the morning, but I have much to do ere then."

Thus saying, he kissed her brow and left her; and Helen, opening the door, but leaving the light upon the table, crept softly into the room of Mademoiselle d'Albret. Poor Rose, wearied and exhausted with all that she had lately gone through, had at length fallen into slumber. The curtains of her bed were thrown back, and there she lay, like a beautiful statue on a tomb, her face pale with grief and weariness, the bright eyes closed, the long black lashes resting on her cheek, and one fair hand crossing her heaving bosom in all the languid relaxation of sleep. The light streamed faintly in upon her from the neighbouring chamber, and seemed to produce some effect upon her slumbers; for a faint smile passed over her lip as Helen stood for an instant to gaze at her, and she murmured the word "Louis."

"She has happy dreams," said Helen to herself, "yet I must disturb them;" and she laid her hand gently upon that of her friend.

Rose started up with a look of wild surprise, but Helen laid her finger on her lips as a sign to be silent, and then whispered, "Rise instantly, dearest Rose, and come with me into the next room. Be quick, if you would save your honour and your peace! You know not what they machinate against you."

Rose gazed at her for a moment in surprise, as if scarcely comprehending what she meant; but then a sudden look of terror came over her, and, rising without a word, she took some thin clothing, and followed whither her companion led.

Helen drew the curtains close round the bed, and then guided the lady to the priest's chamber While passing the door, they heard a murmur as of low voices speaking in the anteroom, and Helen then turning the key in the lock as silently as possible, pointed to an ebony crucifix, with a small ivory figure of the dying Saviour nailed upon it, which stood upon the table, rising above a skull. She led Rose d'Albret towards it, and kneeling down together, they prayed.

When they rose, Mademoiselle d'Albret would fain have asked explanations, but Helen whispered to be silent; and, making her lie down in the priest's bed, she knelt by her side, drew the curtain round to deaden the sound of her voice, and then, in a low murmur, related all she had to tell. The first news that she gave were the joyful tidings that De Montigni still lived; and Rose clasped her hands gladly, giving thanks to God. But at Helen's farther intelligence, horror and consternation took possession of her. "Oh, heaven!" she said, "what will become of me if they have recourse to such means as this? Where shall I find safety?"

"Fear not, fear not," replied Helen: "my uncle will devise means to deliver you."

"Oh, let me fly, Helen," said Rose. "The door by which you came into the chapel may give me freedom."

Helen shook her head: "Not to-night," she said "You might meet him in the passages. As soon as he discovers you have left your room, there will be search and inquiry. We must trust to him who brought me hither: but Walter de Tremblade is not a man to be frustrated by any one. Leave it to him: he will deliver you."

No sound as yet had reached them from the neighbouring chamber, although they had now quitted it nearly an hour; but the door was thick and heavy, and deeply sunk in the wall. The next moment, however, they heard voices speaking at the top of the stairs, and some one said aloud, "Good-night, Monsieur de Chazeul!"

Those simple words were followed by a meaning laugh; then some other sounds not so distinct, and then all was silent again.

"You were right, dear Helen," said Rose d'Albert. "We should have been stopped had I attempted to fly. But where will this end? where will this end?" and turning her eyes to the pillow, she wept bitterly.

Helen tried to comfort her, though she herself needed consolation as much; for who can tell what were all the varied sensations, each painful, yet each different from the rest, which thronged her bosom on that sad night? She felt—oh how bitterly!—that she had loved a villain, deeper, blacker, more degraded than all his treachery to her could have taught her to believe; and there is no agony so horrible as when the cup of affection is first mingled with contempt and abhorrence. She was not only neglected and cast off for another—that she could have borne, and wept or withered away in silence—but she found him for whom she had sacrificed all using still baser arts than those he he had employed against herself for sordid objects, and without even the excuse of passion. She felt grief, too, for Rose d'Albert, for her who had been so tender and so kind towards herself; and dread lest, after all, the machinations of those who had the poor girl in their toils should prove successful, came like a cold dark cloud over the dreary prospect of the future.

All these emotions were added to her own shame, and remorse, and terrible disappointment; and although Rose insisted that she should lie down beside her, yet neither closed an eye, and the rest of the night passed in long, though not uninterrupted conversation. Often they listened for sounds, often they paused to meditate over all the painful circumstances that surrounded them; but still they turned to discuss, with faint and sinking hearts, either the

gloomy past, or the dark, impenetrable time to come, which offered their eyes no tangible hope to rest upon, but in fresh sorrow, resistance, and endurance.

With the first ray of light Rose d'Albert returned to her own chamber, determined to follow to the least particular the advice of the priest: but Helen remained in her uncle's room, in expectation of his return. Minute after minute fled, however without his coming. She heard Rose call her maid, and voices speaking; she heard the sounds of busy life spread through the chateau; she heard distant tones of a hunting horn swell up from the woody country beyond—but still her uncle did not appear; and Helen, in terror at the thought of new calamity, watched for him in vain.

CHAPTER XXX.

We must now return to Walter de la Tremblade, who closed the door of the room where he had left his niece, and paused one moment to think. "It must be risked," he said: "the boy owes me much—he will not dare to doubt me;" and, without further consideration, he again descended the stairs. At the bottom he heard a step and saw a light glimmering through the door at the far end of the hall. "It is that base villain!" he thought, as he concealed himself behind one of the square masses of masonry that supported the roof above. "He goes upon his dark errand, like the silent, withering frost of autumn, blighting all the flowers it falls upon. Ah, monster!" he muttered between his teeth, as he saw the marquis pass not ten steps from him: and well was it for Chazeul, well for himself, that there was no dagger under that priest's robe.

Covered with a dressing-gown of embroidered silk, and bearing a lamp in his hand, with a stealthy step and an eye looking eagerly forward, as if agitated with the very scheme in which he was taking part, Chazeul crossed the hall and approached the staircase. There was a slight rustle of the priest's gown, and the other paused suddenly and listened. All was still again; and he murmured, "It was the wind!" the next instant the clock struck one, and with a smile the marquis mounted the stairs.

The moment he was gone, Walter de la Tremblade came forth again, and with a quick step went on, through the stone hall, across the court, and entered the chapel. There, with haste and agitation, he lighted a lamp that stood in the sacristy, returned, shading the flame with his hand, and, traversing the hall in another direction; passed through a low arch and along a narrow passage, which led him to the foot of a small staircase. Then, taking two steps at a time, he mounted rapidly to the highest story of the chateau, where two or three rooms were seen on either hand. Through the key hole of one streamed a light, and voices were heard talking.

"Ay, there wait her witnesses," murmured the priest: and, proceeding, he turned into a passage on the left, and listened at a door. All *was still;* and setting down the lamp, he raised the latch and entered. It was a low, ill-furnished room, where slept the page and one of the servants of the marchioness of Chazeul, in beds not large enough to hold more than a single person. At the first pallet the priest stopped, and, shading his eyes with his hand, as if to concentrate the little light that found its way in at the door, which he had left open, he gazed upon the countenance of the sleeping man. Then, going on, he touched the page gently with his hand. The boy slept soundly, however, and the priest had to stir him once more before he woke. Then whispering "Hush!" he added, "Get up, Philip. There is business for you to do."

"Ah! what is it, father?" said the boy, rubbing his eyes, still heavy with sleep: "is anything the matter?"

"Do not speak so loud," replied Father Walter; "there is no need to wake any one else. The marchioness has chosen you to ride for something that both she and I may have occasion to see, and you must mount and away to Chazeul immediately, so as to be back before nine to-morrow, when the burial of the old Commander de Liancourt is to take place. Are you awake enough to understand me?"

"Oh yes, yes," answered the page, yawning, "I understand quite well. I wish she had chosen another hour. At home we can never count upon half a night's sleep: she is as restless as the wind; and it is to be the same thing here it seems. But what am I to bring?"

"A certain precious book of Hours," replied the priest, "which has been long in the family of La Tremblade. You will find it in the room which my niece, Mademoiselle de la Tremblade, *used to occupy*." He paused upon the words, to show the boy that he was aware of Helen's absence from the chateau of Chazeul, and then continued, "You will know the book, if you should find others there, by its being covered with crimson velvet, with silver clasps and studs. Bring it at once to me, and let no one else see it."

"But will that old tiger of a gouvernante let me have it?" asked the page: "she will not let one of us set foot in any room beyond the hall."

"Then make her fetch it," said the priest. "Tell her your mistress wants it; and let her refuse if she dare. Now be quick. Cast on your things, and join me in the chapel. I will order a horse to be saddled in the mean time. But make no noise. It is needless to wake any one; and the marchioness would have your going secret."

The page entertained no suspicion; and while Walter de la Tremblade hurried to the stable, woke a horseboy, and made him saddle a horse in haste, he dressed himself as quickly as his drowsy state would admit, and then, finding his way out of the room—not without stumbling over the foot of his comrade's bed, and wondering he had not woke him—he groped along the passage till he came to the room whence the light was shining through the keyhole.

"Ay!" he thought, "those lads are still up, playing with the dice, I warrant. I should like to look in and give them a surprise; but I cannot wait for that;" and he passed on, descended the stairs, and crossed the court to the chapel.

No sooner had he quitted the room where he

had lain, however, than his companion, who had seemed so sound asleep, raised himself upon his arm in bed, and asked himself, "What is all this, I wonder! 'Tis mighty secret! The book to be brought to him! Why not to her, if she wishes to see it? I should not be surprised if this were some trick of the priest's own. If all the house were not asleep, I would go tell my lady. Perhaps she has not gone to rest yet, for she sits up mighty late all by herself, and no one knows what she is doing. I had better go! and yet she may not like to be disturbed, especially if she be dealing with the Devil, as the peasants in the village say. Hark! there are people up and about! I will go and tell her, if she be waking. She can but say I am over zealous; and if it should prove all a trick of the priest's, I may get a broad piece for my news."

These meditations, though short and connected here, were somewhat slow and disjointed as they really presented themselves to the man's mind, so that the page who had been sent to Chazeul was in the saddle and away before they had come to a conclusion and his comrade had begun to dress himself. When he had managed to get on the greater part of his apparel, however, he approached the door, and, like the lad who had gone before, made some mental remarks upon the light which streamed from the room tenanted by his fellow-servants, and which was now much more visible, as the door by this time stood open, and the rays poured full out into the passage. He looked in as he went by, and, seeing the chamber vacant, took the lamp that stood upon the table to light him on his way.

The apartments of Madame de Chazeul were quite at the other side of the house, so that he was long in reaching them; for, in the mansions of those days, the architects had displayed all their skill in distributing the cubic space contained in any given building into as many stairs and passages as possible, so that its tenants, unless they restrained themselves to one especial part, might never want exercise in arriving at the rest.

The anteroom door was at length reached; and, tapping gently, for fear of startling the inmates, the man was surprised to find his summons answered instantly by one of the marchioness's maids fully dressed, but pale in the face with drowsiness, and heavy about the eyes

"Can I speak a moment with madame?" asked the servant, in a low voice.

"Oh yes, Pierre," replied the woman. "She expects some of you. I thought you would never come."

The man began to fancy he had made a mistake, and that Madame de Chazeul had really sent the priest to the page, so that he would now willingly have retreated; but, the maid continued, "Come in! come in!" and another, who was sitting at a frame embroidering, rose and went to the inner room to tell the marchioness that "Pierre was come."

"Pierre!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "what has he to do with it? Bring him in, however. This must be some other affair. What now, Pierre?" she asked, fixing her keen, vulture-like eyes upon him as he was brought forward, and signing her maids to close the door: "what seek you here so late?"

"Why, so please you, madam," replied the servant, "I was not sure that all was right, and thought it better to tell you what was going on, because you once told me—"

The marchioness waved her hand impatiently, exclaiming, "What is it? what is it? Cease your prefaces! What brought you hither?"

"Why, madam, Father Walter, the priest," answered the servant, "stole up just now to the room where the boy Philip and I are lodged. Not a word did he say to me, but he woke Philip; and when I roused up at the sound of voices, for I was but in a dog's sleep, I heard him give the page a message from you, madam."

"From me?" cried the marchioness, her eye glowing like a coal with anger and eagerness. "Well, what was the message?"

"That he was to ride instantly back to the chateau, madam," replied the man, who easily divined from his mistress's face that all was not right, "and to bring hither, before nine to-morrow, a book of Hours from the room Mademoiselle Helen used to occupy."

"Did he say that?" demanded the marchioness, vehemently. "Did he use those exact words—'that she used to occupy?'"

"Yes, madam, just that," answered Pierre. "I marked that shrewdly, for he said those words very slowly: and what made me think it altogether strange was, that though he said you wanted to see the book, he told Philip to bring it direct to him."

"Ha!" cried Madame de Chazeul. "So! Is it so? Well. You have done right, Pierre, and shall be rewarded. Come hither at daybreak to-morrow; and now go sleep."

The man retired; and the moment he was gone, Madame de Chazeul started up, and with a vehement gesture of the hand, exclaimed, "He knows it all! She has found means to write! Ah, how subtle is he! Who would have thought, from that calm, peaceful face he bore to-night, that such rage, and hatred, and thirst of revenge were in his bosom as must be there even now? We shall have plots on foot—some scheme to stop the marriage. What can be in this book? Here, girl! Call Martin from the foot of the other staircase; bid him run to the stable and bring the boy Philip hither—by force, if he come not quietly. Away! lose not a minute, lest he be gone!"

The girl departed, and the marchioness went on with her own thoughts. "What can be in the book? There is something beneath this! Or has that fool Pierre deceived himself, and, knowing the girl is not there, put words into the man's mouth? Yet why send at this hour secretly? why falsely use my name to sanction the order? No, no, he knows it all, and must be cared for. There is but one way—secure him till the marriage is over—let my brother know naught of it—and then justify the deed by the result."

She sat down, and leaned her brow upon her hands, closing her eyes, till the door again opened, and the maid re-entered, accompanied by another of her men. "Well," she exclaimed, as soon as she saw him, "where is Philip?"

"He has been gone this half hour, madam, the stableboys declare," was the man's reply.

Madame de Chazeul let her hand fall heavily on the table; but suddenly recovering herself, she said, "Keep a watch upon the gates from five to-morrow, till Philip returns. Then bring him at once to me—let him speak with no one; and hark you, Martin, you are a man of execution—Get ye gone, hussy! 'tis not for your ears. Come nearer, Martin!" and she whispered something as he bent down his head.

The man started back with a look of consternation, saying, "No madam, not a priest! I cannot do that!"

"Fool! 'tis but for a few hours," exclaimed the marchioness. "Hark ye—one hundred crowns! You shall keep him under your own ward, and set him free five minutes after noon."

"Well, madam, well!" answered the servant, after a moment's thought; "but you must promise to get me absolution, cost what it may; for it is no light matter laying hands upon one of the Church—and so good a Catholic, too."

"Oh, absolution you shall have!" cried Madame de Chazeul, "from the hands of a bishop, if that will satisfy you; and, if there be any difficulty, you have nothing to do but to kill a heretic, and that will make all even. Do you promise to obey? Mark me, a hundred crowns, and absolution, cost what it may!"

"Well, madam, well," he replied, "I will do it this once, but you must never ask me to meddle with a priest again."

"Pooh!" cried the marchioness, "'tis for his own good. He will get himself into trouble if it be not done; and now away, Martin. See to this other business first, and then lay hold of him. Do it gently, you know, quite gently, but firmly too; and be quick, good Martin, be quick."

The man retired, but he grumbled as he went, and asked himself as he descended the stairs, "Where will this woman end? She will make one damn one's self some day, and she care nothing about it."

In the mean time Walter de la Tremblade had returned to the chapel with a quick step, after seeing the page depart for Chazeul. His thoughts, though commonly so calm and clear, were all in confusion and agitation. The strong passions had obtained the mastery, and for a time they revelled in their conquest. He thought of Helen—of the being on whom the affections of his heart had all centred—of the only one in all the world, the only earthly thing on which he had suffered his heart to rest, with the intense concentrated love which he had withdrawn from all that most men hold dear. He thought of her stained and disgraced, deceived, betrayed, abandoned; and oh! how the gust of passion, like the blast of the hurricane, bent his spirit before it! He thought of her betrayer—of him whom he had striven to raise, and who had all the while been blasting the only flower left blooming for him in the wilderness of life; and the thirst for vengeance took possession of his whole heart. Of her, too, he thought, who, loaded with every kind of iniquity, her married life stained with many a slander, her whole soul foul with sin and wickedness—of her who had used him as a tool for her purposes, and employed him to elevate the treacherous villain who, like a serpent, stung the hand that fondled it. He thought of her driving forth, to perish, the dear unhappy child whom her own criminal neglect had aided to cast into temptation, loading her with contumely and opprobium, exposing her error to the rude eyes of menials, and branding her forever with the name of harlot; and oh! how he triumphed in the thought of overthrowing all that woman's well-laid schemes and cunning contrivances, blasting her hopes and expectations, and mocking her in the bitterness of disappointment!

He paused where Helen had stood between the coffin and the altar. He gazed from the one to the other; and as he did so, each seemed to find a voice mournful, solemn, reproachful. They gradually wrought a change in his feelings; they calmed in some degree, the stormy passion; they awakened higher, grander thoughts. They roused remorse, they called to repentance. As he looked upon the bier of the good old man so lately passed away, it was not alone the image of death, and all the train of sad but chastening impressions, which spring from the contemplation of mortality as from a well overflowing with admonition, that pressed upon his attention, but the memory of that old man's plain, straightforward truth—of the resistance he had offered to the very schemes which he, Walter de la Tremblade, had promoted to his own grief and regret, brought the lesson home to his heart, and showed him the excellence of high, single-minded truth more strongly than the most laboured essay of preacher or of moralist. Then again, when he turned towards the altar, and looked towards the cross of Christ, and remembered the grand simplicity displayed, as an example, by the Saviour of mankind, oh! how poor and vain, how sullied and impure, how dark and criminal, seemed the highest effort of the human intellect when used to mislead and to deceive! Truth, truth, almighty, everlasting truth, seemed before him in all its God-like radiance, and it overwhelmed him with shame and confusion.

We have seen him before stand there and feel sensations somewhat similar, but it was then merely as the glimmering streak of dawn, showing where the day will be, and now it was the risen sun. The chastening hand of grief had swept away the darkness from his mind, and all was terrible light.

As such thoughts rushed upon him—as the eye of Heaven seemed to look into his soul, detecting there vanity, pride, ambition, selfishness, deceit, the higher qualities that were within him bowed down his heart in humiliation at the discovery of so much which he never dreamed of; and, kneeling before the altar, he poured out the anguish of his soul in prayer.

He was still kneeling when he heard steps in the chapel; but he heeded not, and still went on murmuring in a low tone the words of penitence and supplication. The steps came nearer, and then paused; but still, for several minutes, he remained bowed before the cross. When he rose, however, he saw three of the servants of Madame de Chazeul standing close to him, and he asked, "What do you seek, my children?"

They all hesitated; but at length the man Martin, putting out his hand, grasped the priest by the arm, saying, "We have orders, Father Walter, to put you in confinement for a time."

"Ha!" said Father Walter, surprised, but calm. "By whose orders, my son! I did not know that there was either bishop, cardinal, or inquisitor here."

"No, nor is there," answered the man; "but our orders are from our mistress, and we must obey them."

"To the ruin of your own souls," asked Father Walter, "will any of you dare to drag a priest from the altar?"

"We must do as we are bid, good father," replied the man: "the sin is hers, if there be any."

"But the fire will be yours," replied the priest, "and her sin will not deliver you."

"It is no use talking, sir," continued the man; "we have sworn to do it, and so we will. 'Tis but for a few hours; and you may choose where we shall take you to. Shall it be to your own room?"

"No," answered Father Walter, "no; if this act be needful to your mistress, why not keep me here, where I have promised to stay till the hour of matins! I shall be as safe here as anywhere else."

"No, no, that will not do," replied the man; "the chapel will be wanted."

"Well, then, as near as possible," said the priest: "aggravate not your offence, my son, by dragging the servant of God from his temple. I will stay here in the sacristy. At all events, I shall be still within the sacred precincts, and near the body I have promised to watch."

The man hesitated; but Father Walter, assuming a higher tone, exclaimed, "If not, stand back, while I pronounce upon you all the anathema you so well deserve, and deliver you over to perdition with her who sent you."

"Stay, father, stay!" cried another of the men; "we will have none of this, Martin Gournay. If the reverend father chooses the sacristy, we will not have him thwarted. It is bad enough to do it at all. It must not be made worse than it need."

"Bad enough, indeed!" replied the priest; "and Heaven forgive you for listening to the voice of man rather than that of the Church."

"Well, well," said Martin, "I do not care: let it be the sacristy. But I must see that it is all safe;" and, opening the door, he went in, followed by the priest and the other two men."

"Ah, there is a way out!" he cried. "I must have the key of that lock, good father."

"There it hangs," replied Father Walter, with a smile: make it all sure. But remember that there is another key in the hands of the Church, which may lock the door of heaven against you if you do not repent."

The man Martin, however, tried the door which led out through the walls into the country, and, finding it locked, he took the key from a hook above, and ascertained that it fitted. Then putting it into his pocket, he turned to the priest, saying, "I am very sorry to do this, father, but it is not with my will, and I must obey my orders. They shall bring you some food and wine, and there is a lamp. At noon to-morrow you shall be free."

Father Walter bent his head gravely, and the three men withdrew, locking the sacristy door after them, and taking the key. The moment they were gone, he rose from the seat in which he had placed himself, and laughed with a bitter mocking tone.

"The fools!" he cried; "do they think I leave myself so unprovided? I must be quick! Can she have discovered Helen! Impossible—impossible! I heard her lock the door! I must be quick! Yet no! he spoke of sending food and wine. I will let them return. They will come, if it be but to see that their prisoner is safe. Perhaps, too, they may linger in the chapel;" and he resumed his seat; and, taking up a book of prayer, continued to read for several minutes.

"Would they would come," he murmured at length. "Helen said Estoc would return for her at three, and it cannot be far short of that hour."

But the tumultuous feelings which had been lately busy in his bosom had filled the last hour with so many thoughts, that time had lost all power of measuring them, and the clock struck two as the words were on his lips. The next moment, the door leading to the chapel opened suddenly, and the man Martin entered with a salver, bearing some food and wine. His eye instantly glanced to the priest; but the quiet attitude in which he sat, with the book upon his knee, satisfied the servant that all was secure; and, placing the provisions on a table, he was about to retire, when Father Walter stopped him, saying, "Pray, do you know—and, if so, may you tell me—what is the cause of this conduct of Madame de Chazeul? I would be glad to think that, either through some error or at the instigation of some malevolent person she has committed this outrage, and not from mere caprice and wanton passion."

"Oh no, father!" replied the man; "but it seems you sent one of our people to Chazeul for a book in her name. I know not much about it; but I believe Pierre went and told her what he had heard—so one of the girls said."

"A mighty offence!" observed the priest, gravely, "and a reasonable cause for an act which she will repent to the last day of life. Heaven grant she may not regret it even longer:" and, thus saying, he commenced reading the book again.

"Why," rejoined the man, willing to justify his mistress, and, through her, himself, "she feared, I fancy, that you were inclined to meddle with some of her plans, and she is not fond of seeing them marred."

"God will mar them if they be evil," replied the priest, "and no one can mar them if it be His will that they should succeed. But 'tis well, my son, 'tis well: good night!"

"Good-night, father!" answered the servant, and left him, taking the same precaution as before of turning the lock and withdrawing the key, lest any one should open the door from the side of the chapel. Father Walter instantly rose, and put his ear to a small round hole, like the mouth of a tube, at the side of the door. The servant's steps were distinctly heard passing down the nave of the chapel, and then suddenly became faint as they issued forth into the court. The priest listened for a moment longer, but no other sound was heard.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The morning broke clear and fair; a few light clouds indeed hung about the eastern sky, but only sufficient to catch the rays of the rising sun, and gather them together in a more intense glow. But these were soon dispersed, and the sky beamed, within five minutes after the break of dawn, in clear and unclouded beauty. Those clouds, however, were still hanging over the verge of heaven, and not above half the disc of the orb of light showed itself above the horizon, when the Marquis de Chazeul, full dressed, left his own apartments and hurried to those of his mother. As he went, the sound of a hunting horn was borne upon the wind to his ear, and, pausing for a moment, with all that fierce, tenacious jealousy of the rights of the chase which was entertained by the old feudal nobles of France, he muttered, "It must be a bold man, or well accompanied, to hunt so near the chateau de Marzay. This must be seen to;" and, striding on, he entered his mother's anteroom with very little respect for the half-completed toilet of her maids.

The marchioness was still in bed; but, according to the custom of the day, she made no scruple of admitting any one who came in that situation, and her son was speedily at her bedside. "Well, Chazeul," she said, with a shrewd smile, "the thing is done, I find; but tell me all about it. You did not disturb her, I suppose?"

"No," answered Chazeul, "I found everything as still as death, and so I left it. I might have been tempted, indeed, to look in between the curtains, if I had had light enough to see my fair bride as she lay slumbering. I was afraid she might wake, too."

"No great matter if she had," replied Madame de Chazeul. "The priest was not in his chamber, and the girl Blanchette would have been discreet."

"I don't know that," replied Chazeul.

"You don't know what?" demanded the marchioness.

"I don't know that you are right in either the one or the other," answered her son; "for, as I went in, I certainly heard a noise in the next room, as if some one were locking the door, and there was a light, too, came through the keyhole. Then, as to Blanchette, she seemed to be seized with a sudden fit of perverseness. It cost me a full hour and a hundred lies to persuade her to do as she was bid."

"The hour's time was a loss," observed his sweet mother; "as to the lies, that was no great expense. They are money easily coined. But I will teach that girl obedience before I have done with her. The hussy! it was but to enhance the price. The priest in his room!—ay, so he might be. Now I recollect, he was wandering about at that hour. And now, my dearly beloved son, between you and me, your absence for the next two or three hours might be more advantageous than your presence. I have got to communicate your delinquency, you know, to my good brother De Liancourt: in in other words, to tell him—ay, and prove to him, too, that you have been seen creeping in and out of fair Rose's chamber at midnight, and it is ten to one that his first indignation falls *upon you*. That must have time to cool before you make your appearance, and in the mean time there is plenty to be done."

"Oh I can find occupation," replied Chazeul. "There are men hunting in the forest, and I should much like to see who they may be. I will mount and take some half dozen men with me to reconnoitre; and if I do not find them too strong, I will hunt them as fiercely as ever they chased deer."

"Take care of ambuscades," replied the marchioness. "No, no, Chazeul: better leave them alone till after the wedding. We have got other things to do. We must have a priest to bury the dead and marry the living."

"How so?" exclaimed Chazeul, in some surprise; "is not Father Walter here?"

"Ay, he is here," answered the marchioness, "but I suspect the good man is not well enough to appear before noon."

She spoke with a meaning smile, and her son demanded, "What is it you mean, mother of mine? There is something in your eye."

"Nothing but rheum," rejoined the marchioness. "However, if you needs must know, Father Walter has discovered your folly with his niece Helen. That is all."

"Pardie!" exclaimed Chazeul, "what is to be done now?"

"Nothing," answered the marchioness. "I have provided for him. He is sick, you know. He is ill, and unable to leave his chamber till after the wedding. Let that suffice, my son."

"It will suffice for me, my most sagacious mother," replied Chazeul, "but will it suffice for others?"

"As I will manage it," said Madame de Chazeul. "At all events, it was the only step to be taken without making him sick indeed, and that I had no time to consider. But it seems, that last night, after all the world were sleeping but you, and I, and half a dozen others, he thought fit to send my page Philip to Chazeul, to bring a book of Hours belonging to the girl Helen from her room, and in my name, too! What is in it I know not, but I shall soon see. I trust, Chazeul, you have not been fool enough to write anything in the book, but if you have, that fire must prove your friend, and conceal your stupidity. The same element has proved serviceable to you before; for never did a green boy at college put himself more completely in the power of an artful courtezan, than you did, by your pastoral epistles, in the power of Helen de la Tremblade. However, if they can decipher smoke and ashes, they may prove the contract: if not, it is dissolved."

Nicholas de Chazeul winced under the infliction. He was not one to bear easily the charge of folly even from his mother. Vice she might have charged him with at will; sin, crime, he would easily have borne; but weakness, foolishness, were accusations against which all the vanity of his heart took arms; and his cheek grew red, his brow heavy, while he answered, "Perhaps not so stupid as you think, madam. It was necessary to keep the girl quiet. I wrote nothing in any book, however; and perhaps, after all, you may yourself be deceived, and the priest know nothing about it."

Madame de Chazeul shook her head, replying, "Too surely! I have been guilty of a folly as well as you, boy, and gave way to anger when

I should have dealt more patiently. What is done, however, is done, and the only thing that remained was for me to cure one sharp act by another. But let us talk no more of these matters. There lies the priest, and there he must lie till you are married. I will deal with your uncle and sweet Mademoiselle Rose, and you must do your part."

"And, pray, will your sagacity let me know what my part is to be?" asked Chazeul; for be it remarked that he always spoke in a somewhat jesting and irreverent tone to his excellent parent, even while he was most implicitly following her impulses.

"It is an easy one, my son," replied the marchioness. "First, you must go down to the village, and engage the curé to come up hither for the double duty that is to be performed. There is the old man to be buried—that had better take place at nine; and then there is the young man to be married, which must be done before noon. He will, of course, speak of Father Walter, and say it is his office to bury or marry all that die of the line of Liancourt; that he has special rights and privileges in the chapel of Marzay with which none can interfere, and more to the same purpose; but then you must put on a sad and solemn face, and answer that the good father was to have performed both ceremonies, but that this last night, by too much watching, prayer, and fasting by the corpse, he has fallen grievously ill, and has taken to his bed. Doubtless he will wish to see him when he comes up here, between the funeral and the wedding; but Father Walter can get some refreshing sleep about that time, and 'twould be a sin to wake him."

Chazeul laughed. "You are armed at all points, I see," he answered; "but if, after all, Rose should show her refractory spirit at the altar, it will then be matter of regret, and difficulty too, that we have not some one in our interest to go on quietly with the service, without having very fine ears for objections."

"As to the regret," said the marchioness, "that is soon swept away. There was no way of avoiding what has been done. I know Father Walter; and with him, when once his interests are opposed to yours, there is no way of dealing but by force against wit. We are all very clever, Chazeul, and by experience of the world we gain a certain degree of skill, like that of a village quack-salver; but a priest has a regular education in outwitting all the world, and a diploma to do it. There for the difficulty, the curé is a good man, an excellent good man. Let him speak to me, and I will give him such reasons for thinking it best Mademoiselle d'Albret should be your wife, that he will make you one, whether she says 'yes' or 'no,' I warrant."

"Well, all this will occupy but a short space," answered Chazeul; "and, therefore, if I am to be out of my uncle's way till his passion be cooled, pray tell me by your cabalistic art when I may calculate that his vicinity will be safe, for I know not that I can play my part with him as well as I did with our fair Rose yesterday."

"Ay! you did that well," rejoined his mother, with an approving nod; "but you must not be back till near eleven, or if you be, you must keep your chamber, as if afraid to appear. When you do, you must be mighty penitent; hear all his censure with deep humility; express your grief in broken words and sentences, that mean more than they say; never deny your crime, but plead temptation. That will be all easily done when the first storm has blown over, especially when you are there ready to make the best atonement in your power for any wrong you may have done the lady's reputation. What can be expected more? But there is one thing more to be considered. That old marauder, Estoc, was still at the village yesterday. I like it not; I know not what he wants: you must be on your guard! He may have designs we know not of. He certainly aided De Montigni and Rose in their escape. He may think Nicholas de Chazeul a prize worth keeping in his hands—a comfortable hostage for her marriage with the boy he loves so well. Before you venture into the village, send down and see if he be still there, and if he be, have the curé brought up to you: but go not too near."

"Oh, I fear him not!" replied Chazeul; "he would never dare to draw a sword against me, under the very walls of Marzay. No fear, no fear, dear mother. But I will be cautious for the present. The men of Chazeul must soon be back, if all their throats be not cut, as, by my faith, I am tempted to think they must be, by their long stay; and when they return, I will drive the old wolf out of his lair at the lance's point. I have not forgotten him. But the delay of these men puzzles me. They had strict orders to return as soon as a battle was lost or won."

"They may have been driven back with Mayenne across the Seine," replied Madame de Chazeul, "or towards Houdan and Versailles, and are not able to force their way across. Besides, you know the Bailli loves adventures, and is not unfond of plunder. He may have some private enterprise in hand."

Chazeul shut his lips close. "He shall pay for it if he have neglected my commands at a moment of need for any scheme of his own," he said. "But I will go, good mother, and leave you to your devices. Fear not for me; I will take good care;" and, thus saying, he left her to pursue her tortuous plans to their consummation.

He himself was soon upon his horse's back, and down the slope; but, ere he lost sight of the protecting walls of the castle, he sent forward one of the men who followed him to inquire whether Estoc and his party were still in the village, riding slowly on with the rest. The attendant returned in about ten minutes, bringing intelligence that the place was clear.

"Monsieur Estoc," he said, "marched this morning an hour before daylight, having, it seems, received tidings in the night which hurried his departure. The cottager whom I spoke with told me that he believed those tidings were, that some bands were coming up from the side of Chartres."

"The Bailli and our own people, on my life!" replied Chazeul, "or he would not have hurried away so soon. Which way did he go? I will have him pursued if they arrive in time."

"Towards Mortagne," answered the servant; "at least so the man said."

"Did you hear aught of these hunters?" demanded his master.

"They did not pass through the village, sir," was the reply, "but they were seen upon the edge of the wood by some of the people, and seemed somewhat strong in numbers."

"Then we must be strong ourselves before we deal with them," observed his master, and rode on straight to the priest's house in the village. He found the worthy curé at the door of his dwelling—a stout, round faced, well-fed ecclesiastic; and, as so often happens in life, none of the objections or difficulties, against which answers had been prepared, were made. The priest merely expressed his sorrow that Father Walter, his reverend friend, was unwell; and, knowing that both at funerals and marriages much good eating and drinking seldom failed to take place, he agreed to perform both ceremonies with equal pleasure.

Well was it for the Marquis de Chazeul that Estoc was not aware of his visit to the village, for the old soldier was not as far off as he imagined; and had he known that such a prey was near, it might have been long before the walls of Marzay had seen their lord's nephew within them again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Satisfied that the presence of Helen de la Tremblade in the chateau had not been discovered, Father Walter sat in the sacristy without any effort to quit it, although as the reader must have divined from his words, it was in his power so to do, notwithstanding all the precautions of Madame de Chazeul's servants to prevent him. I had wellnigh said that he sat there calmly; for the exterior was so tranquil and still, that it was requisite to look into his heart ere one could fancy that there was anything but repose within. Calm! Oh, no! There, all was agitated and turbulent. The clear precision of his thoughts, indeed, soon gained their ascendancy; and the plan was speedily laid out for meeting the difficulties of the moment, for overcoming the obstacles presented to him, for thwarting the schemes of his adversaries. All confusion of mere idea was speedily swept away: but much was still left behind; and that which did remain was the tumult of conflicting passions, the struggle between strong convictions and habitual feelings.

All that had taken place within the last few hours had worked an extraordinary change in the sensations of Walter de la Tremblade. New perceptions had forced themselves upon him, both in regard to his own heart, and to the conduct and views of others. If I have at all succeeded in conveying to the reader a just view of his character, it must have been already made clear that he was a man in whom strong passions and great powers of mind had been bowed down by the influence of the peculiar religious doctrines of the church to which he belonged—doctrines false and evil, it is true—principles which, in many instances besides his own, prostituted the highest qualities and most brilliant talents to the support of an institution raised upon error, cemented by falsehood, covered over with crime; but still his devotion had *been sincere and strong*. He had believed all that his church told him; he had given up thought and judgment to her; his own passions, desires, and feelings had been fused into her purposes; and, if they ever were individually brought into action, it was in the course which she had fixed for them.

But, as I have said, a change had now come over him; the deep well of the heart's strongest emotions had been opened; the stream had gushed forth in a torrent; and many of the delusions which had encumbered the way of his understanding had been swept away. Many, but not all. The stern attachment to the Church of Rome, and the blind submission to all her dogmas, which had taught him to believe that those who attempted to try her doctrines even by the words of Christ himself were worthy of naught but persecution and punishment, had been brought into contest with his love for her on whom all his tenderest affections had centred—for her whom he had looked upon from infancy as his child; and they had given way. He felt that he had been led wrong; he had learned that ambition and the love of domination were part of the creed of Rome, and that, in obeying her fiery dictates, he had supported with his whole strength the wicked and the base against the good and noble. He had learned it by his own sorrows; and although, perhaps, he had in some degree perceived it before, and had believed that it was only justifiable to do so, for the great object of the defence of the Church, the anguish of his heart now made him comprehend that the dreadful dogma, "the end justifies the means," is always false, and that there is no truth but in the apostle's own words, "thou shalt not do evil that good may come of it."

Many another feeling, many another conclusion, on which we cannot pause, rose in Walter de la Tremblade's heart and mind; and regret, and self-reproach, and the dread of being hurried by the torrent of passions and circumstances into sin and crime, agitated him dreadfully. The truth and fervour of his religious feelings remained the same. Even his attachment to the Church in whose tenets he had been educated was unchanged, although he admitted that man's vices and prejudices had obscured and perverted her real dogmas. By her he was resolved to abide; but he determined, at the same time to remove himself forever from the temptations to evil to which he had been hitherto exposed; and the conclusion to which he came, in the end, was expressed by words which he muttered to himself: "I will take no farther part in this horrible strife; I will but frustrate the wicked arts of this bad woman and her base son, and then, in some far and rigid monastery, wear out the rest of life in prayer."

The time seemed short; for, of all the many terrible struggles that take place within the breast of man, there is none so full of rapid contention as when the first convictions force themselves upon us that all our previous course has been one grand error; and when the acts on which we have prided ourselves, the wisdom that has made us vain, the vigour that has proved weakness, the prudence that we have found folly, the penetration that has been but blindness, the meanness of our ambition, and the darkness of our light, stand revealed in their

nakedness and deformity, under the bright beams of religious truth. He could have gone on thinking thus for hours, and they would have seemed but as a moment. The clock at length struck three; and the bell was still vibrating, when the sound of an opening door was heard, and then a step. The lock close upon his right hand was then turned, and the next instant Estoc stood before him.

"Ah! Monsieur de la Tremblade," said the old soldier, "are you here? Have you seen your niece?"

"I have," answered Walter de la Tremblade, taking his hand and pressing it with strong emotion in his own. "I have, and I know all. Deeply, deeply, my old friend, do I thank you for your fatherly kindness to my poor girl. God will bless you for it: God will reward you, if not here, hereafter. I have no time however, to offer you thanks such as are your due."

"I want no thanks, good father," replied Estoc. "I promised the good man who is dead there," and he pointed to the chapel, "to be a father to her; and as long as old Estoc lives, she shall never want an arm to strike for her, and a home to receive her. Where is she? I hope you have not been harsh with her—"

The priest shook his head with a melancholy smile. "Harsh with *her!*" he said. "No, God forbid. She is with Mademoiselle D'Albret. But now listen to me, Estoc, and let us take counsel together regarding what is to be done. You see me here a prisoner."

"Ha!" cried Estoc, "a prisoner? How is that?"

"I will tell you," answered the priest; "but understand, it is but a prisoner in appearance. They think I am so, but that strong door, though locked and double locked, would melt away at my touch as if it were thin air. But there is much for you to learn; dark deeds are going on within these walls, which must be prevented. First, however, there is an enterprise which you must achieve, connected with my confinement here. From Helen's words, I discovered some two hours ago that there is, in a book of Hours lying in her chamber at Chazeul, the only letter left unburned by that incarnate fiend, Jacqueline de Chazeul. If Helen's account be right, that letter amounts to what they call in the French law a promise—*par paroles de future*, between her and Nicholas de Chazeul—in itself an absolute bar to his marriage with any one else. I instantly roused the page of the marchioness, and sent him off on horseback to bring the book."

"I saw him go," replied Estoc. "He passed me as I lay waiting under the bushes at the bottom of the hill."

"Then he is safe so far," replied the priest. "It seems, however, that the man who lies in the same room, while pretending to be asleep, overheard our words, and conveyed the tidings to his mistress. She sent her men to place me in confinement, and will, beyond all doubt, cause the boy to be brought to her on his return, and burn the paper. You must undertake to stop him by the way, and to obtain that precious document."

"That will be easily done," replied Estoc. "I will set about it instantly."

"But there is more to be considered, much more," rejoined the priest. "The boy must be instructed to carry the book on to his mistress after you have taken possession of the letter you will find among its pages. He must be told to say nothing of his having been stopped, but to give it to her quietly, as if he had but gone and returned; for the only way to deal with that woman is to conceal from her closely your intentions and your power, or she will ever have ready a plan to frustrate you."

"I may tell him," replied Estoc, "but will he obey?"

"I think he will," answered the priest. "I placed him with the marchioness. To me he owes his whole education. He has ever shown himself attached with boyish devotion to my poor Helen; and she tells me that, in the hour of her indignity and shame, he merited a blow from his fierce mistress by showing her an act of kindness. If he be but told that he must do this for the sake of Helen de la Tremblade, I feel sure he will, at every risk."

"Write it down, write it down," said Estoc, dipping a pen in the ink that stood upon the table, and holding it to the priest. "He will believe your word sooner than mine."

Walter de la Tremblade took the pen and wrote: "Philip de Pichean, I beseech you, if you have any regard for him who protected you in childhood and in youth, or for your poor friend Helen de la Tremblade, to give up the book which you are bringing to Monsieur Estoc, whom you have often seen and know well, to let him take from it that which he thinks fit, and then to carry on the volume of Hours to Madame de Chazeul, without telling her that you have been stopped by the way. I beg of you, also, to follow entirely the directions of Monsieur Estoc, if you would merit my regard and save Mademoiselle de la Tremblade from deep grief—perhaps from death."

He signed his name, and gave the paper to Estoc, saying, in a confident tone, "He will do it."

"And how am I to act when I have got this letter?" asked Estoc.

"Ay, that is the question!" replied the priest. "As yet you do not know all these people's intentions, and it is necessary that you should be informed of all, in order that you should be prepared for whatever it may be necessary to do. You are resolute and fearless, I know, and have before now done much with small means and a strong hand. You may be called upon, before many hours are over, to use the sword in defence of right and justice."

"That I am quite ready to do," replied Estoc. "It is but wiles and cunning I fear, for there I am no match for your good marchioness. But let me hear, father, what are her plans and purposes?"

"These," answered Walter de la Tremblade. "Some of them I have already frustrated; but I know that, failing these, she will have recourse to force to effect the marriage of her base son with Mademoiselle D'Albret, for she has built up a scheme for his aggrandizement which nothing will make her abandon but death. Even perhaps his pre-contract with Helen she will attempt to pass over by bold authority;" and he proceeded succinctly to display to the eyes of Estoc the whole plans and purposes of Madame de Chazeul.

"But will Monsieur de Liancourt consent?" exclaimed Estoc. "He is honest at heart—I believe, on my life, he wishes well."

"But he is weak," replied the priest; "weak as the water of the stream, which may be turned by art whithersoever we will; yet when bent in a particular course, and concentrated within a narrow channel, moves mighty machines, and carries all before it. He is now entirely in the hands of this woman. I am no longer near him to guide him and to counteract her, and you will see that he will do her bidding, like a servant or a dog."

"Force against force, then," answered Estoc, "and I think myself well justified in using the means I possess to bring my men in hither. The passage through the wall between the two doors will hold us all, for we are not so many as I could wish; but I will be ready to appear at the first sign."

"How many are you?" asked the priest.

"Seventeen," replied Estoc; "but there are stout men among us, well trained to hard blows."

"There are eight-and-twenty in the chateau," answered Walter de la Tremblade, "and some of them good men at arms too."

"That matters nothing," cried Estoc, "if we can get in unperceived. Surprise doubles numbers. All the garrison could not act upon one point. We should seize the principal avenues to the chapel before they were aware; and the Count and Chazeul once prisoners, they might fret their souls to dust without preventing me from liberating Mademoiselle D'Albret. I could wish, indeed," he added, thoughtfully, "to have had enough to overawe all resistance; for I would rather, if it were possible to avoid it, not stain the consecrated floor of the chapel with Christian blood."

The priest mused for a moment or two, and then replied, "And so would I. But theirs is the villany. Your enterprise is right and just. If they draw the sword to carry out their own iniquitous schemes, theirs is the crime and the sacrilege. I absolve you of all offence in doing aught that may be necessary to prevent the act they meditate."

"It may be better in the hall," said Estoc, in return, after a moment's thought. "The contract must be signed there before the marriage, and there the first scene of violence must take place. True, it is not so easy to reach it or to retreat from it, and we are there more open to attack; but if I can contrive it I will. I must think over the means, however, and I will be early here—as soon as I have got the letter from the boy. If we can lodge ourselves in the passage before it is full daylight, it will be better. The bushes give some shelter, it is true; and they cannot prevent my entrance, so long as I possess the key; but it were better to take them by surprise."

"Far better," replied the priest; "and I calculate that if he make haste, the boy may be back here by five. It was not much past one when he set out. Are you aware," he added, laying his hand upon Estoc's arm, and pointing to a door in the sacristy, behind which the priest's vestments and various ornaments and relics were deposited, "are you aware that through that closet lies a passage in the hollow *of the wall*?"

"Oh yes," replied Estoc; "it is necessary for the defence of the chapel port; but still that would only lead us to the court, and we should have to pass the corps de garde, go through the lower hall, and mount the staircase. However, I will think it all over as I go, and lay my plan. I know the chateau well, and every nook and corner. We shall find means, no doubt. I have taken a stronger place than this with fewer men, and more to oppose us. Ere they should carry out their scheme, I would blow in the gates with petards, and force my way to the hall sword in hand."

"I trust it will not be necessary," answered the priest. "Indeed, I do not believe that there will be aught like bloodshed. Monsieur de Liancourt himself, I should think, would not suffer the sword to be drawn, especially as his heart must tell him that it is in a bad cause."

"Ay, and many of the good fellows here," replied Estoc, "would not take part against us, especially to force poor Rose into a marriage that she hates. Chazeul is little loved by any one, and the marchioness is hated even by her own people. I have heard them speak of her. But now I will waste no more time. Farewell, Monsieur de la Tremblade: I will be back as soon as I have got the paper."

"God give you success," answered the priest; and Estoc, retiring through the door, closed it after him. Then issuing forth into the country, he crept quietly away under cover of some bushes which approached the walls, till upon the verge of the wood he found two of his men waiting for him. With them he returned to the village, called the rest of his little band together, paid the cottagers, whom he roused from their slumbers, for the accommodation he had received, and rode on towards Chazeul, giving out that it was not his intention to return.

After proceeding for five miles on the way, to a spot which the boy was obliged to pass on his road from the one chateau to the other, the old soldier halted his men, and ordered them to feed their horses with some corn which they had brought in their bags. A vigilant watch was kept in the mean time upon the side of the high bare hill, down which came the road from Chazeul, and at the foot of which wandered the Huisne; but one half hour passed after another, and no one appeared. All was still and silent, the stars twinkling out above, and the low wind whispering through the yellow grass that covered the wide extent of sloping land between them and a wood above. The road was scarcely to be traced by the eye, except where its sandy banks, against the deep background of the trees, marked the spot at which it issued forth from the forest; but upon that point Estoc kept his eyes fixed, without seeing any dark object cross the lines till the sky overhead began to assume a reddish hue, and the light spread gradually around. The day at length fully dawned, and the old soldier was giving his men directions to scatter themselves along the edge of the wood, and close round the boy as soon as he appeared, when the figure of some one on horseback suddenly issued forth upon the side of the hill, and came down at a quick pace, apparently not remarking that there was any one below till he was half

way to the bottom of the descent. Then, however, the boy suddenly pulled in his bridle rein, and seemed to hesitate; but the next instant, instead of turning back to the wood, he darted off to the left, with the intention of crossing the Huisne farther up. Estoc, however, detached three of his men along the low ground on the bank to cut him off there, while he rode up to deprive him of his retreat into the wood, and the rest of the party swept over the side of the hill in a semicircle, gradually drawing closer and closer round the poor page, who doubled before them like a hare before the hounds. At length he saw that the attempt to escape was vain, and, pulling in his horse, he stood still till Estoc rode up to him.

"Ah, Monsieur Estoc! is it you?" exclaimed the page, with a glad smile, when he saw who was his captor. "You have given me a terrible fright."

"More than needful, Philip," replied Estoc, "for we do not want to hurt you. But get off your horse, my good boy, and come hither apart with me, for I have something to say to you"

The page did as he was directed; and Estoc, dismounting also, led him a little on one side, demanding, "Have you got it?"

"Got what! rejoined the page, with a shy look of affected unconsciousness."

"Come, come, no more of that Master Philip!" exclaimed Estoc: "I mean the book, as you know well enough."

"Yes, I have got it," answered the boy: "but you must not take it from me indeed, Estoc, for my mistress will be so angry."

"Let me look at it," said Estoc: "you shall have it back again, upon my honour! Have you opened it?"

"No!" cried the page, with a look of surprise; "Is there anything in it?"

"Yes, prayers, to be sure," replied the old soldier, satisfied by the boy's countenance that he spoke the truth. "Come let me look at it; you shall have it back, I tell you."

"The page drew slowly and unwillingly from a pouch under his arm the book with its velvet cover and silver clasps, and placed it in Estoc's hand, saying, "You promise to give it back, mind."

"Ay!" answered the old soldier, "and I always keep promises;" and as he spoke, he unfastened with some difficulty the stiff clasps, which seemed to be tightened in their hold by something swelling out the bulk of the volume.

"Ha, ha! you have done what the old gouvernante could not do," cried the boy.

"What, did she try to open it?" asked Estoc, turning over the pages.

"Ay, that she did, the nasty old wolf," replied the page; "and she kept me for two hours waiting in the hall, because she did not choose either to get up and fetch it, or let me. Ah! what have you got there?"

"What I seek," answered Estoc, giving the boy back the book, and putting a letter which he had taken from between the leaves in his pocket. "Now, Master Philip," he continued, "take the book on to your mistress, and give it to her, without telling her that you have met with any one, or that any one has looked into it."

"She will know that without any telling," answered the boy, in a gloomy tone. "She will find out in a minute, that the paper has been taken out, and perhaps have me hanged for stealing it, as she did Gabriel Houlot for robbing her of her gold bonbonnière, which was under the pillow of the coach all the time."

"Fear not, fear not!" said Estoc: "she does not know that there was anything in it; and it is to prevent her from knowing it that I take the paper."

"But Father Walter knows," rejoined the boy, "and he will tell her."

"No, no, he will not," replied Estoc. "But, to satisfy you, read that, if you can read."

"Oh yes, I can!" said the page proudly; "good Father Walter had me taught to read," and, taking the paper which the priest had written, and which Estoc held out to him, he ran his eye over it rapidly. "Have I any regard for her?" he cried, as he saw the words referring to Helen; "ah, that I have, poor thing! and would shed my blood to serve her, if it would do her any good. The old woman may hang me, if she likes; I will tell her nothing, the tiger!"

"That's a good youth," answered Estoc; "but read it through."

"Well, what am I to do, Monsieur Estoc?" asked the page, as he concluded. "I always promised to obey good Father Walter; and, as he tells me to do what you direct me, I will do it. But what does he mean about saving Mademoiselle Helen from death? Where is she? What has happened to her?"

Estoc paused thoughtfully for a moment, and the idea of telling the page that Helen was in the chateau de Marzay, and directing him to help her crossed his mind. The boy's regard for her, and his willingness to serve her and obey the priest, were too evident to be doubted; but discretion, seldom the quality of youth, was too likely to be wanting. "The priest has means of communicating with Helen, by the passage from the sacristy, he thought; and I suppose, from what he said, that he has another key of the door. But yet he might be stopped. Most likely the marchioness does not know where they have placed him. She is not one to overlook such chances, and a thousand to one she has him removed when she wakes. Then the boy's wit might be of service if he knew all. I will risk something: it cannot do much harm. "Hark ye, Philip!" he said aloud; "can you keep a secret, without either blabbing it behind the door to a soubrette, or carrying it about in your face as plainly as it your tongue told it?"

"That I can," answered the page. "I have learned that in our house. There have been secrets enough there within the last two years, I can tell you."

"Well, then," continued Estoc, "the truth is, that your companion in your room heard good Father Walter tell you to go upon this errand. He went directly and informed your mistress; and she, suspecting there was something in the book which she wished Father Walter not to have, has caused him to be confined—locked up—so that he cannot stir."

"I will let him out," cried the boy, eagerly.

"At all events, be on the watch to serve

him," replied the old soldier. "You may, in the course of this morning, have an opportunity of rendering him a great kindness, if you use your eyes and ears aright, and be ready to do so whenever he asks you."

"That I will!" exclaimed the page; "but pray tell me, Estoc, where is Mademoiselle Helen? What has become of her? I am sure you know more than you say. Oh, madame treated her cruelly—terribly."

"She is well," answered Estoc, in a grave tone, "and so far in safety, that, if undiscovered, all will go right; but if she be once found by her enemies, her life will be held by a poor tenure against that bad woman's malice."

The boy cast down his eyes and thought; then looking up, he cried, "She is in the chateau of Marzay!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the old soldier, "what makes you think that?"

"Why, whom should she fly to but Monsieur de Chazeul?" asked the page.

"Fly to him!" replied Estoc, in a sharp tone. "She would fly from him to the farthest part of the earth. She abhors him—she hates him. Poor silly boy, you are mistaken."

The page looked puzzled. "He loved her once," he said, in a meditative tone, "and she him. Of that I am very sure, for I took the letters."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the other; "then you owe her some gratitude; for she would not tell who brought them, for fear of injuring you, though dear enough it cost her."

"Ah, sweet lady!" cried the boy, "that is so like her. Poor Mademoiselle Helen, I would die for her willingly;" and the tears rose in his young eyes.

"Well, then," said Estoc, "watch for the opportunity of proving how you love her. You may find it soon, also. Look well about you; mark every word, and yet seem unconscious; be ready to obey her in an instant; and, above all, remember that of all beings she has most cause to hate and dread, it is Monsieur de Chazeul. There is no one whom you can trust within the chateau of Marzay except Father Walter, but least of all Nicholas de Chazeul. Her life may depend upon you—upon your prudence, upon your courage, and upon your quickness; and if you be driven forth, as she was, for serving her, come to me, and I will take you into my band, and make a soldier of you. I shall not be far distant."

The boy clapped his hands gladly; but Estoc went on, "No more, my good lad, at present. Go back to the chateau with all speed; say not a word to any one of having seen me; but tell the marchioness how the old woman kept you before she would get the book."

"Stay, stay!" cried the page; "I am not to know that madame did not send me; is it not so?"

"Certainly," replied Estoc; "you are to forget all that I have told you, and only to remember that Father Walter sent you for the book, and that you have brought it. That is all. Now to your horse's back and away."

The boy obeyed at once, remounted, and rode off.

Estoc and his band soon followed, but at the distance of about a mile and a half from Marzay he gave the word to halt, and then turning to his men, he said, "We must take to the wood, my children: then for a short council of war, and after that for action!" Thus speaking, he himself dismounted, and led his horse through the brushwood into the forest, followed by all his companions; but scarcely had he reached the thicket to which his steps were directed, when his ear was greeted by a loud flourish of hunting-horns at no great distance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE is a certain spirit of impatience which not unfrequently carries a particular class of readers on to the end of the third volume of a tale like the present before they have read the beginning; and another spirit—an evil spirit, certainly—which leads a second class to do no more than skim gently but swiftly through the pages, catching glimpses of the story here and there, sufficient to satisfy the mind as to the facts, but to give nothing but indistinct notions of what is called the plot itself, and no insight into the characters of the persons brought upon the stage, no knowledge whatsoever of the work itself in any of its higher qualities. Formerly it was not so. People travelled through a work as through a country, remarking everything that was curious and interesting by the way; the peculiarities of the people that one met with, the beauty of the scenery displayed, the wit that diversified the day, the moral reflections that suggested themselves from the objects passed—somewhat amused, somewhat instructed, somewhat improved. But this is an age of railroad, morally as well as physically, and very little is thought of but the end of the journey and the easiness of the coach. To get over the greatest possible space in the shortest possible time is the end and object of every man, and, with books as with countries, we go through them at a pace of forty miles an hour. Probably, in time, this may work its own cure; and as, ere long, nothing will be known of any land when thoroughly railroaded but the nearest and the farthest points, and a mile on each side of the road, and nothing known of books but the beginning and the end, and what a reviewer has pleased to say of the contents, people may, in time, feel a curiosity to learn more, and take trips on a post-horse or in a jaunting car to see what is in the interior of the country or in the heart of the book. But railroad is the spirit of the age: it is vain to strive against it; and if the truth must be told, an author feels the same influence, and, as he approaches the termination of his tale, is nearly as much inclined to hurry on to the conclusion, to omit facts, to leap over difficulties, and to hasten the catastrophe, as the reader. But this ought not to be; for then, if that time should ever return when books are really read, it might be found out that only half the story had been told, and that there was a great deal unaccounted for.

I must therefore, very unwillingly, pause by the way, and, ere I proceed with all that was going on in the chateau de Marzay and its neighbourhood, go back to the old house of Maroles, where the reader will recollect that we left the

young Baron de Montigni in no very pleasant situation.

Too few in number to keep their assailants at a distance, if with proper implements the enemy made a simultaneous attack upon two or three of the different doors of the chateau, the little party within saw no prospect before them but that of being forced to surrender on the following morning, or dying sword in hand. The latter alternative was certainly not a very pleasant one; but we must recollect that it seems much more terrible in our eyes, who are seldom called upon in these days for such self-sacrifice, than it did to the eyes of men accustomed daily to witness similar acts. De Montigni, however, had still much to live for; the light of hope was still unextinguished before him; the cup of life's joy had been scarcely tasted; and all the bright and warm expectations of youth were leading him forward by the hand. To close the pleasant journey so soon entered not into his thoughts; and yet, perhaps, he would sooner have died than yielded himself to the power of Nicholas de Chazeul and that bad man's mother. Of the former he knew little, for they had not met since his boyhood; but yet De Montigni was as much convinced that Chazeul was faithless, treacherous, and cruel, as if he could have seen all the innermost windings of his heart; and to trust himself a prisoner in his hands, the young nobleman felt would be consigning himself to a fate much worse than an honourable death in arms.

What was to be done was the question; and, in the little council which he held with his attendants, every one gave his opinion and advice according to his character.

"We had better wait where we are," said one of them. "A thousand to one they get frightened or tired before the morning, or that some party of our own people comes up and forces them to decamp."

"We are off the high road," replied De Montigni, with a shake of the head.

"If we could but send tidings to the king," said the man, "he would soon deliver us."

"I wonder if we could not make our escape by the wood behind," joined in the servant who had accompanied the young nobleman from Italy.

"It is worth the trial, at all events," replied De Montigni. "They can but drive us back again, at the worst; and we might contrive to cut our way through."

"If we had not lost the two horses," observed the guide, "it might be done; but as it is, we should soon be caught."

"The wood seems extensive," said De Montigni in return, "and we should have a better chance of escape on foot than on horseback. They can but follow the cart and bridle roads, while we could take the footpaths, and even force a way across the brushwood. It seems to me the only feasible plan, and I will try it. We will leave the horses behind, and an hour or two before daylight the attempt must be made. We may get some sleep in the mean time. Two can lie down upon the floor, while two keep watch, one on each side of the house, for the man whom we saw them send away up the hill may have been despatched for tools to force the doors during the night. Thank heaven, there is a moon, so that we can see their proceedings. But first let us go round and ascertain which door it will be best to use for our escape."

"We shall scarcely have light," replied the servant, "and we are not likely to get lamps or candles here."

"Then, the sooner we go the better," said De Montigni; and, descending to the hall, where they found the other man on watch, they attempted to grope their way about the chateau, but to no purpose; for, as we have before said, all the windows on the lower story were strongly boarded up, so that even the faint light which still lingered in the sky could find no entrance.

A thought seemed suddenly to strike the guide, however. "I have a bit of rope," he said, "at the back of my saddle. I always carry a piece to tie a prisoner with. We can rub a little gunpowder into it, and then set fire to it with a pistol flint."

This plan was adopted, and, though the light obtained was not the most satisfactory, as may be well supposed, it served to guide them through the long passage of the chateau; and by observations from above as well as below, they found a door which apparently led into a little herb garden, surrounded by walls, bordered by the road on one side, and by the forest on the other. The best reconnoissance that they could make, both before and after the moon had risen, did not show them any of the enemy on that side, though a party was to be seen round a fire which they had kindled in front of the chateau, and another upon one of the paths in the rear. They therefore determined to avail themselves of this means of exit; and, while two of the men lay down to rest, propping their heads with the saddles, which they had taken off the horses, De Montigni himself, and the stout soldier who had served him as guide from Marzay, kept watch at the front and back of the house, perambulating the various rooms from window to window. Every now and then they met and conferred for a few moments, though neither had anything to tell. All was still and silent, except, indeed, when the wind wafted the voices from the enemy's watchfire, or when a distant clock was heard to chime the hour.

It was just after nine had struck that De Montigni, meeting his companion at the angle of the building, inquired, "Is that the clock of Houdan that we hear?"

"No, sir," replied the man, "it is Maroles. But do you know I was just thinking that, if we try to escape, we had better do it at once, or at least not very late, for the clock that reaches our ears will reach theirs too, and may put them in mind that there are axes and saws to be procured at Maroles. Then, by dividing their men, they might break in without our being able to prevent them. In such a clear night as this, the moon will give them quite light enough for their work."

"Or to see us make our escape," replied De Montigni.

"Ay, but in less than half an hour," said the man, "she will be round on this side of the house, and then the whole shadow of the chateau will be cast over the garden, and the door that leads to it."

"True, true," answered De Montigni; "but

a doubt has arisen in my mind as to the escape by the garden. Shall we be able to get from it into the wood?"

"There is a door," replied the guide; "I saw the mark of it plainly upon the wall."

"But it may be locked," said De Montigni; "and I think we may conclude it is so by these people having placed no one within."

"Oh dear no, sir," answered the man, who, it must be remembered, was an old soldier. "You do not know how many things are always overlooked, even in a regular siege, where there are all the wits of the army to work. I do believe that, if those who are without a place did but attend to all its points of weakness as well as those within, there is scarce a town in all France that would hold out three days. The mistakes of the besiegers are at least as much in favour of a place as all its defences. But the best plan will be for one of us to go out first and see if the door can be opened, and then the rest to follow. The lock must be in the inside, and it will be easily forced with a dagger."

"That will take time," rejoined De Montigni; "but I fear there is no resource, and so it must be done. We will wake these other two as soon as the garden is in shadow, and then put our plan in execution."

It was somewhat longer than they expected ere the shadow of the chateau was thrown completely over the little garden, and the clock struck eleven as De Montigni and his guide woke their two companions. All that was necessary to carry with them was taken from their saddle-bags; the little store of ammunition which they possessed was distributed equally among them, and, pistol in hand, they approached the door and quietly unlocked it.

The rusty bolts made some noise and resistance ere they would suffer themselves to be withdrawn; but it would seem that this attracted no attention from those without, and the door was opened, showing them the neglected garden, become quite a wilderness of weeds since last it was trodden by the foot of man. It was now altogether in profound shade, however; and, although the walls were not high, and they could see the glare of one of the watch-fires of the enemy flashing upon the branches of the trees, yet, being situated upon the same level as the chateau, the garden was commanded by no spot in the neighbourhood, and consequently they determined to go on to the gate together.

As De Montigni had suspected, the door was locked and the key gone. The bolt, too, was firmly rusted in the staple, so that they could not force it back; and the large nails which fastened the lock were apparently clinched on the other side, and resisted every effort to draw them. Nothing remained, then, but either to scale the wall, to return to the chateau, or, by slow labour, to cut away the woodwork round the staple, and then force it out. The first plan was tried without success, for the wall was higher on the side of the wood than on that of the road, and they consequently set to work to remove the staple. It cost them near an hour to do so, and just as they had succeeded, the sound of a horse's feet in the gallop met their ear. Pausing to listen for a moment or two, the sounds were heard to come nearer and nearer, and then rose up the buzz of several voices speaking.

"Now or never," said De Montigni, pulling back the door, and the next instant he stood under the branches of the wood. The men followed him silently, and, after one glance to the right, where, through the leafless trees, they caught the faint glare of the fire upon the road, they crept silently away to the left, taking the narrowest paths they could find, and looking anxiously round on every side, in expectation of seeing some party of the enemy. Ere they had proceeded far, they heard a loud hollow sound, as of blows struck upon a door, and De Montigni's servant whispered to his master, "We must be quick, sir, we must be quick, for they have got axes, and are breaking in. Our flight will soon be discovered."

De Montigni hurried on at a more rapid pace, and for near an hour nothing indicated that they were pursued. At the end of that time, however, the young nobleman began to suspect that the path they were following led them round, and was conducting them back towards the spot whence they had set out.

"I think so too," replied the guide, to whom he expressed his doubts; "the moon is travelling that way, and yet you see we have not got farther on the left."

"More on the right," said De Montigni, "which would be the case if we were coming nearer to the chateau again. Let us direct our course from her. That must take us to the edge of the wood."

The attempt was more easy than the execution, for the paths were perplexed and intricate, formed apparently for the purposes of the chase, or perhaps by the beasts of the forest themselves, and displayed little consideration of the direct line from one spot to another. Thus, very often, when they had followed one road, which led for some way in the direction that they wished to pursue, it suddenly turned off to the right or left, flanked by thick and tangled underwood, without any fresh path presenting itself to enable them to pursue their course. In this devious way they wandered on through the forest labyrinth, till at length the sound of loud voices shouting, and horses galloping at no great distance showed them that their escape was discovered, and that they were pursued. At this moment they were in a narrow tangled path, up which it was impossible for a horse to force its way, and the guide putting his hand upon De Montigni's arm, whispered, "Halt here, sir, and let them pass us."

The advice was good, and De Montigni followed it. In a few moments the sounds were lost again, and with cautious steps they resumed their course towards the edge of the wood. The moon had now, however, gone down behind the neighbouring hill, and, looking up into the sky to see if they could fix on any star, by which to guide themselves, they saw a reddish light spreading overhead, and increasing in intensity every moment.

"Can it be yet dawn?" asked De Montigni.

"Oh no, sir," replied the guide. "I don't know what that can be, unless they have set fire to the chateau to give them light to look for us."

"Just like Chazeul's people," said one of the others; "It is that, depend upon it; but here is the open country."

And so it proved, for they had now reached the further side of the wood, and stretching

out before them lay a wide but gentle slope, descending towards the valley of the Eure, over which the flames of the castle shed a red and fearful light. Some trees, however, advancing from the rest of the forest, which had once been more extensive than it now was, promised them some shelter from the eyes of their pursuers, while the spire of a small church was seen at the distance of about a mile and a half; and weary of wandering in the wood, gliding for some way under its edge, they approached the scattered trees, and began the descent into the valley.

Ere they had proceeded half a mile, however, the blast of a trumpet sounded, and a party consisting of three horsemen was seen riding down towards them. It was now evident that they were discovered, but still the pursuers did not venture to approach too near; and pistol in hand, determined to sell their lives dearly, the little body of fugitives hurried on towards the church, hoping to find some village near, where they might obtain assistance or shelter. Still the trumpet sounded, however, and in a few minutes another party was seen coming rapidly round from the farther side of the wood, to join the cavaliers who were keeping them in sight.

The flames of the castle could now be distinguished, but the fire was evidently decreasing, so that they had still some hope of darkness befriending them once more; but as the east opened upon their sight at the turn of the hill, the gray streaks of dawn were observed depriving them of that chance. The church, too, which was now near at hand, displayed no houses around it, and was little more than a chapel in the open country, erected for the benefit of the neighbouring peasantry. A deep, wide porch, however, or rather gateway, with a stone seat on either side, presented itself as they hurried on, and there De Montigni determined to make a stand, sheltered, as his men must be on three sides from the attack of the enemy.

The party who pursued now amounted to twelve, and were at the distance of somewhat less than two hundred yards; but the rest of the troop were seen riding rapidly down the hill, and the others halted ere they made their attack, to let the whole force come up.

Suddenly the body in the rear, to the surprise of the young baron and his companions, halted, and one man, at furious speed, detached himself from the rest, and galloping down to those below, seemed to make some announcement, which changed the whole course of their operations. Instead of advancing against those whom they had so pertinaciously pursued, every man turned his rein, and, setting spurs to his horse's flank, sped up the hill towards his comrades.

"What can be the meaning of this!" exclaimed De Montigni.

"They see some party of our friends," replied the guide, stepping forward; and De Montigni advancing likewise, and turning his eyes towards the Eure, perceived a confused group of forty or fifty persons on horseback, followed by a number of others on foot, and some twenty couple of dogs. They were advancing at a slow and tranquil pace, so that the young nobleman and his followers had full time to contemplate them. At their head rode a gentleman in in a common hunting-dress, with a large white plume in his hat, and a white scarf over his shoulder; and, after gazing for a minute, the guide touched De Montigni on the arm, saying, "The white plume, the white plume! It is the king!" and, rushing out, he cast his hat up into the air, exclaiming, "Vive le Roi! Vive Henri Quatre!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The moment her son had left her, Madame de Chazeul rose and began to dress herself in haste; but, although she grumbled at her sleepy maids for their slowness, and called them by many an unpleasant name—which, indeed, she was not a little accustomed to shower upon every one who approached her when her eager impatience prompted—yet the strong spice of coquetry which remained with her, as a relic of former passions, did not suffer her to conclude the arrangement of her dress without the aid of the various cosmetics she was accustomed to employ, and many a touch of that pigment which had obscured the real colour of her skin for years. Thus, from the dawn of day, what between her conversation with Chazeul, and her devotion to the toilet, at least an hour and a half had passed away before she was ready habited in deep mourning, to appear in the hall of the castle.

"Now call Martin to me," said the lady, as soon as the whole structure was complete; "be quick for once, jade. You will drive me mad this morning with your idle sloth."

"The boy Philip, madam, is waiting in the ante-room," replied the soubrette; "would you please to see him first, or Martin?"

"Why in the name of Satan did you not tell me he was here?" demanded Madame de Chazeul. "Call him in, hussy."

"He has just come, madam," said the girl, willing to justify herself; "he put his head in as I went out for the wimple."

But the marchioness did not always confine the punishment of offences to the tongue, and she pushed the girl rudely by the shoulder, exclaiming, "Call him in, I say!"

The maid ran to the door, and shouted, "Philip, Philip! my lady says come in."

The boy instantly approached with the book in his hand, saying, "Here, madam, are the Hours. I suppose they are the right ones, for the old woman would get them herself. I should have been back a long while ago, but she kept me waiting in the hall, and—"

Snatching the book from him as he came near, the marchioness exclaimed, "Hold your tongue, little miscreant. How dare you go for anything without my orders!"

"Why, madam, you sent me orders to go," replied the page; "at least, Father Walter told me so."

"He is a liar, and you are another, I believe," cried the marchioness, struggling with the clasps, which for a moment or two resisted all her efforts.

"Ah, Mathurine could not open it either," observed the page, in a natural tone.

"Did she try?" demanded his mistress, turning upon him vehemently.

"Yes, that she did," was his reply, "for at least five minutes; but she could not get it open."

"Perhaps you can do it," said Madame de Chazeul, holding out the book to him, fixing her eye upon his face.

The boy took it, laid down his hat upon the floor, and laboured to open the clasps with all

his might—at least in appearance; and the marchioness, satisfied with the trial to which she had put him, called one of the maids, who, using less force and more skill, unclasped the little volume in a minute.

"Here, give it me!" cried Madame de Chazeul, not withdrawing her eyes from the book for an instant; and as soon as the maid had delivered it into her hand, she turned page after page, looking them all over, but without finding aught written on any leaf but the name of Helen de la Tremblade in the hand of her uncle.

"What could he want with it?" she murmured; "perhaps I have deceived myself. Yet, no! The room she used to occupy! so said the man. Here, boy, what did Father Walter say when he sent you?"

"I do not well remember, madam," answered the page, "for I was half asleep. But I know he told me you said I was to go, and that I must get the book from Mademoiselle Helen's room."

"Did he say the room *she used* to occupy?" demanded Madame de Chazeul. "Answer me exactly."

"I cannot recollect, madam," replied the boy. "He said her room; but I did not take much heed as to the words."

"Fool!" cried the marchioness, looking fiercely at him; "you should take heed of everything;" and then falling into thought again, she murmured, "Well, he is better where he is. If he be there, he may rage when the knot is tied, but cannot unloose it; if he were free, he might stop the tying. Get thee gone, boy; and remember, when any one tells thee to go anywhere in my name, come to me and ask if they have authority."

"What, in the night?" asked the page.

"Ay, in the night," replied his mistress; "if I can give them directions, I can give thee an answer. Now, girl, call Martin;" and, leaning on the table while the maid hastened to fulfil her orders, she fell into a fit of meditation.

Many minutes did not elapse before the man she had sent for made his appearance. And still preserving that haughty tone of voice, which is so effectual with dependants, even when requiring evil actions at their hands, until they find that all real power to injure or disappoint is at an end, she demanded, "Well, is the priest safe?"

"Ay, madam," answered the man; "I have done your will, though it be against my conscience."

"Conscience!" cried Madame de Chazeul; "what have you to do with conscience? Is it not in a priest's keeping?" she added, seeing an unpleasant shade come over the man's brow; "and can he not give you absolution? This may cost a score more crowns than any other offence; but it is purchasable, and I will pay the money. To kill a cardinal is a ruinous thing, but it can be absolved on a fair calculation of his weight in gold. These candlesticks of the Church can always be replaced; and this is but a trifle. Methinks you will become a Huguenot next, and fancy that the pope has no power to absolve us. I tell you what, Martin, if such were the case, many a fair lady and gallant gentleman in France would be in a perilous case."

"I shall never turn Huguenot, madam," replied the man, gravely; "but, as Father Walter said, 'to drag a priest from the altar is more like the act of a heretic than of a Christian man.'"

"Ay, so he said," exclaimed the marchioness, "because he was the person dragged; but, on my honour, he would have told a different story if he had ordered the thing to be done. But you shall have the money. Here, Madeleine, bring me the casket. Where have you put him?"

The man paused till one of the maids had brought in a small ebony and ivory box, and the Marchioness de Chazeul had counted out into his hand a hundred small pieces of gold, upon which his fingers clinched with zealous eagerness.

"Where have you put him?" demanded the lady, again.

"In the sacristy, madam," replied the servant. But at those words Madame de Chazeul started from her chair like one possessed.

"In the sacristy?" she cried; "then, on my soul, he is free by this time! Do you know that there is a way out through the walls?"

"Yes, madam," answered Martin; "but that door is locked."

"And that," exclaimed the marchioness, "through the vestiary and out into the court?"

The man looked confounded, and, after a moment's musing, he replied, "Ay, that is the way he got out."

"Out! out! Is he out?" screamed Madame de Chazeul.

"He was out, but is in again," rejoined the man. "René saw him, or his ghost, in the court, and drove it back with his partizan. But as soon as he told me, I went to the chapel and into the sacristy, and there I found the good father seated where I left him, with the book on his knees."

"He takes it very easily," replied the marchioness. "There is some new plot afoot. He must be removed, Martin; no more wandering about the castle till the marriage is over. On that marriage all depends. You know you are promised a command in my son's cornet of horse."

"I did not know it, madam," replied the man.

"Well, then, I promise," answered the marchioness, "for your good services this night. As soon as the marriage is over, Chazeul shall confirm it. But the priest must be removed to the little chamber at the foot of the great staircase. Have him away quick, before my brother comes down—the room where old Estoc slept, I mean. How came you to put him in the sacristy?"

"It was his own wish," said Martin; "you told me I might put him where I liked, and keep him under my own ward; so I gave him his choice, and he preferred the sacristy."

"Because he could get out!" cried the marchioness; "that was his only reason: and now, good Martin, hasten and remove him—with all gentleness, for he is a reverend man, yet firmly too, for he is full of arts and wiles, and will confound you with mere words. Listen not to him, Martin; but tell him to come on without speaking, and lodge him safely where I have told you. What is to be done had better be done completely. The offence is committed, and we may as well make it a secure one, as spoil the benefit by half doing. Go and remove him quickly, and then, keep yourself ready to bear witness to what you saw last night."

"Oh, I am quite ready for that," answered the man; "there I have but to say what I saw,

and that I can swear to. I took care to make all sure, by speaking to monsieur when I met him."

"That was right, that was right, good Martin," said the marchioness. "You always show yourself a man of resolution and discernment. Now be quick, and see that the door be fast locked."

It may be remarked, that she spoke to the man who now left her in a very different tone from that which she used to most of the others whom she employed in the multifarious services required of her domestics; but the truth is, that he was of a more bold, determined, and vigorous cast of mind than the others. She had less hold upon him; she feared him more, she doubted him more; and, from the minister who holds the helm of state, down to the tradesman with his shopmen, we all show more courtesy and smooth compliance to those on whom we have no sure hold than to those on whom we have. It is force of character that usually gains this reverence, and it is vain for any one to say I will acquire it, for the very necessity of seeking such an ascendency is an everlasting bar to its attainment. The only thing that can ever supply the place of that force of character, in obtaining station and command over mankind's esteem, is the force of principle. Every man can say I will be virtuous and true, and, with God's grace, he may be so. Then, sooner or later, honour must follow; but he must never dream of being so for that end, for if he do, the touchstone of the world will soon prove the metal, wear through the outside gilding, and show the baser stuff below.

Madame de Chazeul was with this man a different being than with the rest, because she feared he might resist, and knew, if he did so, it would be with no weak and poor resistance. She spoke him fair, lured him with rewards, flattered him; but she loved him less; and the moment he had left her, she thought, "I must find some means to dispose of him after this affair is over. Yes, he shall have a command in Chazeul's cornet. We will put him in the front of the battle, and then a blow from before or a shot from behind may finish the affair. Oh! David was a wise man."

After sitting before her table for a moment to collect her thoughts, and call to mind all the particulars of the plan which she had already arranged, and which, like every other dark intrigue, had become, as we have seen, more and more complicated at each step she took, the marchioness rose and walked leisurely to the great hall. Her brother, whom she expected to find, was not there; and, after waiting for a moment or two, her impatience persuaded her that it would be better to seek him in his own chamber, where they could not be interrupted. She accordingly turned her steps thither and knocked at the door, though that ceremony was not, perhaps, necessary. It was a quick and hasty knock, however, as if she had come thither on urgent business; and the moment the count's voice was heard, bidding her come in, she entered, with a countenance prepared for the occasion, bearing a mingled expression of grief and bewilderment.

"Why, what is the matter, Jacqueline?" demanded the count, as soon as he saw her. "You look scared. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," she replied, in a tone of affected indifference. "I only wanted to know if you were ready, for we have much to do today. I wished to inquire, too, what Rose was saying to you last night, just before she went to bed—for something has happened very strange."

"I do not recollect her saying anything particular," replied the count. "I said that, from what I saw during the day, I hoped she was more inclined to do her duty, and give her hand to Chazeul; and, as before, she replied, 'Never!'"

"Ay, but she must!" cried the marchioness, "and that this very day, too. The girl is a rank coquette, Liancourt, and only wishes to be driven."

"No, no!" cried Monsieur de Liancourt, "not so, Jacqueline, not so! I dare say she might be brought to love Chazeul in time; but now she clearly does not like him, though yesterday she seemed to endure him, yet it was no very cordial companionship. It did not promise much."

"More than you think or I am inclined to say," replied the marchioness. "But one thing I will add, that if you knew as much as I do, you would be the first to force her, without delay, into a marriage which is necessary for your own honour as well as hers. Ah, you do not know woman's heart, my good brother. I say no more; but if you have any regard for her reputation and for your own good name, let no affected resistance have any effect."

"What do you mean, Jacqueline?" cried the count, hurriedly throwing on his cloak; "what is the signification of all those mysterious nods and looks? If there be anything affecting my honour, let me hear it."

"No, no! you would rage and storm," answered the marchioness, "and perhaps do some rash act towards Chazeul or Rose. But you must remember, women are strange, perverse beings, brother, and you must take them as you find them, forgive them all their little faults and failings, and understand that a woman often refuses most vehemently that which she most desires; and as to such errors as these I talk of, they are but too common."

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried the count. "Come, Jacqueline, come, no more turning and winding; I must and will know what you mean. No one has a right to speak of my honour being in danger without telling me how."

"But it is not in danger, Liancourt," replied the marchioness, with apparent reluctance, "if the marriage takes place at once; and as for the scandal, it can be hushed up. I will give the people money; and, after all, Chazeul may have had no wrong intent, nor Rose either. They may only have wished to talk with each other for an hour or two in private, when every one was in bed. You saw there were secret conferences between them yesterday"

"Speak plain, woman, speak plain," exclaimed the count, growing irritated. "Talk with each other in private, when every one was in bed! What do you mean! where did they talk?"

"Why, if the truth must be told, in Rose's room," replied the marchioness. "It was imprudent, and the people who saw him come out, and told me of it, were not sparing in what they said; but I have no doubt it was but imprudence."

"When did this happen?" cried the count, vehemently; "at what hour?"

"A little after two they saw him come out," answered the marchioness, "and he went there about one."

The count cast himself into a chair, and rested his head upon his hand for two or three minutes. Then starting up, he exclaimed, "It is false! I will never believe it. This is one of your tricks, Jacqueline."

"What do you mean, Monsieur de Liancourt!" cried the marchioness, with a frowning brow. "Do you mean to say that I speak falsehood! Nay, then the matter is easily proved, and shall be proved. The people whom—as I told you I should—I placed to watch, that there might be no more flights from the castle, must be called. I insist upon it, since you accuse me of falsehood. They know my son; they know Rose d'Albret's room. Nay, more, we will have her maid. I have not seen the girl myself, but you can question her. Perhaps she will not acknowledge the truth, but you must make her. I cannot tell that it was not herself Chazeul went to see—for men have strange fancies—only she is as ugly as a sow. However, send for her first, and let us hear what she says. Shall I go away and let you question her alone?"

"No, no!" replied the count, "stay and hear. I cannot believe it! There must be some mistake."

"Of that you can judge better than I can," answered the marchioness, who well knew how to manage her brother. "I don't want to lead you. I know that's quite in vain, Anthony. You never would be led by anybody in your life; but see all the people, hear what they say, and then act as you may think fit."

"I will speak first with the maid," said the Count de Liancourt; and, approaching a door which led down to one of his servants' rooms, he called to the man, bidding him send Blanchette to him with all speed.

The girl made them wait for several minutes, during which time Madame de Chazeul improved her opportunity in guiding her brother's mind into the exact course that she desired. She took occasion to plead for her son's pardon in the tone of a supplicant, but was not at all displeased to see that Monsieur de Liancourt was highly indignant at his nephew, as she argued thence the success of her own plans.

When Blanchette at length appeared, the count called her to him in a somewhat stern tone, saying, "Come hither, girl, and answer me truly. Was there any one in Mademoiselle d'Albret's chamber last night? Don't hesitate, but answer."

The girl did hesitate, however, for Madame de Chazeul had purposely left her in the dark regarding her views and purposes, knowing very well that, the more she faltered and prevaricated, the stronger would be Monsieur de Liancourt's conviction that the tale which had been told him was true.

"Dear me, sir," said Blanchette, at length, "who could be there?"

"Girl, you are making up a falsehood," cried the count. "I insist upon your answering straightforwardly. Was Monsieur de Chazeul, or was he not, with your mistress, between one and two o'clock this morning?"

Blanchette began to wimper; but at length, with many an excuse and many an explanation, she admitted that it was so.

"*And how dare* you, you base girl," exclaimed *Madame de Chazeul, joining* in, "how dare you give admittance to any man into your mistress's chamber in the middle of the night?"

"Why, you told me yourself, madam," replied Blanchette, somewhat saucily, "that I was to admit Monsieur de Chazeul at any time, and to do exactly what he told me."

"At any time during the day," replied Madame de Chazeul, in a tone of indignation. "You could not suppose that I meant at night; and I never expected that he would ask you to do what was wrong, or I certainly should not have told you to obey him. However, for this very thing I will take care you shall be discharged. There shall be no such convenient ladies about my son's wife."

The girl held down her head in sullen silence, very well understanding that she had done exactly what Madame de Chazeul wished, though it suited her now to condemn it, and that she, Blanchette, having been the tool, was destined to be the victim.

"Pray, did Mademoiselle d'Albret direct you to admit Monsieur de Chazeul?" asked the count; and this time he got an eager and a rapid answer, for Blanchette would have done a great deal at that moment to damage Madame de Chazeul's scheme, which she began to suspect.

"Oh no, sir!" answered the girl; "and I am very sure she would be excessively angry if she knew that he was there at all. I only let him in because Madame la Marquise told me to admit him at all times, and to do exactly as he ordered me; and he would have fain persuaded me that mademoiselle had changed her mind, and liked him; but I know better than that, from what she said just as she was going to bed, and from the way she prayed to God to be delivered from him, so that she would be angry enough if she knew that I had admitted him. But he kept mighty still, and took care not to disturb her."

Madame de Chazeul's eyes had flashed fire while the girl spoke, and she had given her many a threatening look to induce her to pause. But Blanchette was not easily daunted by the lightning of the eyes, and she went on to the end as fast as possible, without hesitation or dismay.

"Ay, girl," cried the marchioness, at length, "now you have committed a shameless and infamous act, and aided my son and your mistress in soiling her own reputation forever, you would fain represent the culpability as not so great. But get thee gone—thou art unworthy of more words. Get thee gone, and send my man Martin here. Tell him to bring his comrade with him."

The girl who was by nature saucy as well as sullen, would willingly have answered the marchioness by telling her to call her man herself if she wanted him, but she did not dare; and in a few minutes after she had quitted the room, the servant Martin, and a comrade whom he had had with him during the preceding night, made their appearance. The count questioned them eagerly, and found that his nephew had undoubtedly been in the chamber of Rose d'Albret for more than an hour the preceding night. This was quite sufficient to work all the effect that Madame de Chazeul desired. He gave way to bursts of furious rage, calling his nephew a base villain who had dishonoured his house, and speaking of Rose in terms of the utmost violence, without ever inquiring whether she was to blame or not.

"Where is your son, Jacqueline?" he cried; "where is this young scoundrel?"

"He quitted the castle early," replied Madame de Chazeul, "fearing, I fancy, that this affair would be found out, and then that the consequences between him and you might be serious."

"Most likely to avoid marrying her whose fair name he has blasted," said Monsieur de Liancourt. "But he shall marry her! by the Lord that lives, he shall marry her this very day!"

"There is no fear of him," replied Madame de Chazeul, "though they may be regarding your fair ward, brother; for, depend upon it, she will deny the whole of this affair. The maid Blanchette will go and tell her that it is discovered, and then they will get up some story between them which they will expect us to believe. To make it look like truth, too, you may be very sure that Rose will affect to be more opposed to the marriage than ever; and, if it were not necessary for her reputation, it would be amusing enough not to press her."

"She shall wed him before the clock strikes noon," replied the count. "But where is your son, Jacqueline? Has he gone to Chazeul? He must be sent for."

"Oh no," replied the marchioness; "he has only gone down to the village, to keep out of your way till you are a little cooler. You had better leave him there till the hour of marriage approaches and then be as lenient with him as may be. I have already rated him severely."

"I *must* speak to him, Jacqueline," replied her brother. "This is an insult and an injury to me. What did he say when you spoke to him? Did he deny it?"

"No, not absolutely deny it," replied the marchioness, "but he did as all young men do under such circumstances. He said he had done no harm, but had only gone to Rose's chamber because he wished to speak with her in peace and quietness, which he had not been able to do during the day. It is very likely true," she added, in a tone of mock candour; "I don't think it at all unnatural."

"At all events, it is ruin to her fame," replied the count, "and we must heal the wound as speedily as possible by their marriage. I will go to her and tell her that there must be no more delay; that I expect her to be in the hall to sign the contract at eleven, and in the chapel to take the vow immediately after. I will take no excuse: it shall be done. I will go to her this moment, before I hear mass."

"No, let me see her first," replied Madame de Chazeul; "you accused me of being harsh with her yesterday; I shall be more gentle than you with her to-day. I will be firm with her, however, and let her know that you are so, so that she may make up her mind to it, about which there will be less difficulty than you think, while you and I go to be present at the funeral, which we must get over first, in order not to have the dead body in the chapel at the wedding. Poor Father Walter was taken ill last night while he was watching the corpse. Did they tell you!"

"No," exclaimed the count, with a look of concern; "I will go and see him."

"He is sleeping, and asked not to be disturbed," replied the marchioness, "so I sent down to the village for the curé to attend to the funeral; but I hope that Father Walter will be awake and well enough to perform the marriage ceremony."

"I hope so too," replied the count; "for if this girl makes any resistance, we might have difficulties with the curé."

"Oh, she will be more easily persuaded than you think," replied Madame de Chazeul; "though, of course, she will affect reluctance, it will easily be seen to be all pretence. The more furious it is, the more will the affectation be apparent; so stay for me here, and I will rejoin you directly." Thus saying, she left her weak brother, who, during her absence, which was longer than he expected, worked himself into greater fury than ever, and prepared his own mind, as his sister could have wished, for any act of violence which might be required.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was with a quick and agitated step that the girl Blanchette returned to the room which served as her bedchamber and as the anteroom to that of her mistress. It was that sort of pace that, had she stopped for one moment, it must have been to stamp with rage; and when she reached a seat, she cast herself into it, and burst forth into a violent fit of tears, passionate, not penitent; full of virulent anger, not of sorrow or remorse. The same feelings were in her heart with which Macbeth exclaimed, "For Banquo's issue have I 'filed my mind;" feelings which led to fresh crimes rather than atonement for those that are gone.

"I shall be discharged, shall I!" asked the girl, "and all for doing what she told me. I have heard of her ways. Fool that I was not to believe it. I might have known that what she does to others she would do to me. Oh that I could but match her! Well, I may, perhaps. Now, if I could get Mademoiselle out of the chateau? But she will watch me. Well, let her; I will watch her. The old hag is cunning enough, but there may be others as shrewd;" and she dried her tears, and laughed at the thought of the bitter sweet potion of revenge. "I know her now," she continued, "I know her now. Oh, she can feign and speak sweet, and promise all kinds of things. But she shall not take me in any more. I can see well enough. Her game is nearly played. If she wants any more help, she will be as smooth as oil; and then, when all is done, I shall be kicked off to die on a dunghill, for what she cares. But I have taken care of that. I have got as many crowns as promises, and I will take none of the latter any more. Oh yes, she will soon come, and be very civil, doubtless, if she has anything for me to do, and tell me she was obliged to speak so before her brother, but that it meant nothing. She shall see that I am affronted, however, but not too much—no, not too much, for then she might not trust me any farther, and I should miss my opportunity; for vengeance I will have, one way or another."

With such sweet and innocent thoughts Blanchette entertained herself for some time, till at length the door swung open, and Madame de Chazeul walked in, with no signs of plausibility in her countenance. The girl was sitting, with the handkerchief which had lately wiped away her tears upon her lap, and her whole face

showed that she had undergone no light emotions. The marchioness did not stay to inquire of what sort they were, but jumped at the conclusion that the dread of losing her place was the cause of the girl's agitation, and believing that by that fear she could rule her as she thought fit, she was only careful to prevent her from thinking it irretrievably gone.

"Why do you not rise, girl, when you see me?" she demanded, in a haughty tone.

"Why, I have done so much wrong, madam," said the maid, with a sullen face, "In doing what I thought was your will and pleasure that I am sure I do not know what to do to give satisfaction."

"You must do better than you have done if you would long keep your place," replied the marchioness; "but if you really thought you were pleasing me, that makes a difference. An error may be forgiven, disobedience not. Your mistress is up, I dare say."

"Oh yes, hours ago," answered Blanchette. "Shall I tell her you are here, madam?"

"No!" replied Madame de Chazeul, advancing towards the opposite door, "we will have no farther ceremonies;" and, without giving any sign of her approach, she walked straight in. Rose d'Albret was seated, as before, near the window: the favourite spot of the prisoner, where he can see somewhat, if it be but a glimpse of that free world which is no longer his; but when the marchioness entered, she started and rose. Madame de Chazeul had gathered her face into a frown, and Rose, who felt in her heart a deeper degree of indignation at the events of the last night than at all the injuries, deceits, and harshness which had been practised on her before, gazed at her with a swelling heart and firm determination to tell her what she thought of all her conduct.

The marchioness did not clearly understand that look, and it somewhat puzzled her as to her course; but, after a moment's pause, she said, "I have come, Mademoiselle d'Albret, to tell you that at eleven the contract is to be signed in the great hall, and immediately after the marriage will take place in the chapel."

"Madam, you have already had my answer," replied Rose, "and I have only to beg that you will not insult me by even naming your son's name in my hearing. I have long disliked and despised him; I now abhor and scorn him; and I would sooner give my hand to a beggar on the road than to one so utterly base and degraded."

"I should have thought," answered the marchioness, with a bitter sneer, "that, after what passed last night, your reluctance would have quite vanished, and that Nicholas de Chazeul would have found in Rose d'Albret a very willing—nay, perhaps, an over-willing bride;" and she pointed, smiling sarcastically, to a man's glove that lay upon the table.

"I had not remarked it," replied Rose, advancing to the table and taking it up with a look of disgust.

"No, I suppose not," answered Madame de Chazeul. "Such little oversights will occur in such circumstances, mademoiselle."

"It was no oversight on his part, at least," said Rose, turning to the open window; "the low-minded villain who left it here knew well, in that respect at least, what he was doing; but I treat it and him, and all his arts, with the same contempt," and she threw it out into the court below.

"Weak, foolish, guilty girl!" cried the marchioness. "Do not think to escape thus. Your fate is sealed, and within three hours you are his wife, however unworthy to be so. For your own sake, for your own reputation's sake, it must be so. However little care you yourself take of your own fame, there are others bound to be more thoughtful, and to use any or all means of saving you from the disgrace which would fall upon you but for them."

"Madam, my reputation is in no danger," answered Rose; "happily, neither you nor your son can affect that."

"Indeed!" said Madame de Chazeul, with an incredulous smile. "Perhaps your high purity is not aware that Monsieur de Chazeul was seen last night, by two trustworthy persons, entering your chamber at one o'clock, and quitting it somewhat after three; perhaps you are not aware that your maid has confessed she gave him admission to it."

"To this chamber—not to mine, madam," answered Rose, with a look of calm scorn. "Your admirable plan has failed, lady, and you cannot drive me into a union with one so despicable as to take part in it, even by the fear of calumny."

Madame de Chazeul gazed at her with rage struggling with surprise. "You are wonderfully tranquil," she said, at length; "but still all your calmness will not disprove to the good busy world what several persons, independent of each other, know, that Monsieur de Chazeul passed more than one hour in your chamber last night, and that your maid admits the fact."

"I have better witnesses than my calmness, madam," replied Rose d'Albret, "who will be quite credible against your servants, planted on purpose on the stairs, and my maid, bribed long ago to betray and deceive her mistress; and they will prove that, warned of the base scheme contrived against me, informed of all its particulars, I slept undisturbed in another chamber; and that, if your son thought fit to pass his time in this place, he passed it here alone."

"It is the priest!" muttered Madame de Chazeul.

"I have not spoken with him," said Rose, who caught the words not intended for her ear, "since my return hither."

"Who are your witnesses, then, girl?" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul. "I do not believe you! the whole tale is false—invented but to screen your own dishonour."

"My witnesses I will produce when need may be," answered Rose, "but not to Madame de Chazeul alone; and, for the rest, you know right well which tale is false and which is true. It is needless to argue with one so well informed already. Moreover, remember that no force shall ever make me wed your son. My hand is promised by myself to him for whom my father destined it, and the well-devised story of his death has failed, as well as the artful scheme that followed it. I now know him to be living, as well, or, rather, better than you do, and you may find that he is so when you least expect to see him."

The marchioness turned red, and then pale, even through the paint upon her face; but for

several moments she made no reply, turning rapidly in her mind every chance in the wide range of circumstances that could have given to Rose the information she possessed. Be it remarked, however, that she never doubted the truth of what she said; for, though the deceitful are very suspicious, there is something in the plain, straightforward simplicity of truth which raises it, in general, above doubt. Men may affect to disbelieve it when it militates against them, but in their hearts they recognise it for what it is. "If the priest had not told her, who had?" Madame de Chazeul asked herself. "Could it be the maid?" But then Blanchette had not been informed of the whole plan. "Could it be one of the servants?" None knew more than a part. "Could Chazeul have betrayed the secret to one of his own people, who again had communicated it to Rose?" It was most improbable. "Could De Montigni himself have returned, and made his way into the chateau unperceived?" It might be so; but still her scheme was unknown to him. She was in a maze which, with all her quick wit, she could not thread; and all that she could decide upon doing was to pursue her plan boldly, to exercise all her influence over her brother's mind, to blind his eyes and overrule the better feelings of his heart, and to watch warily for every accident, to guard against any event which might frustrate her design.

"It is all very well, Mademoiselle d'Albret," she said at length, in a calmer but not less stern tone than she had hitherto employed, "to set your simple assertions against facts unfortunately too well and widely known. I shall be happy to hear, when you are my son's wife, the proofs you say you can give that you did not commit the imprudence, to call it no worse, of admitting him to your chamber in secrecy and silence, at an hour past midnight. It will be a great satisfaction to me, and I will take care that those who witnessed the scene, and may otherwise spread the scandal abroad in the world, shall be present to hear your exculpation. But it must be as my son's wife, for both your guardian and myself have consulted and determined that it is absolutely necessary for your fame and respectability that you should be united to Chazeul without delay. My brother, indeed, has sworn a dreadful oath that he will compel you to obey before noon, and you well know, when he has sworn—"

"Oh no, no!" cried Rose, now greatly agitated, "not sworn. He would never swear!"

"Ay, but he has!" answered Madame de Chazeul; "he has sworn by all he holds sacred—he has called down the vengeance of heaven on his head. He has taken the name of his God and his Saviour to witness that he will force you to follow his will, and relieve your name of the stain that hangs upon it by your marriage with Nicholas de Chazeul."

Poor Rose d'Albret covered her eyes with her hands in terror and in grief, for she well knew that Monsieur de Liancourt was one who would consider such an oath, however rashly and intemperately spoken, as full justification for violating every dictate of propriety, right, and justice. Madame de Chazeul saw her agony, and enjoyed it, for anger and wounded pride had their share in the bitter determination which she had formed, to force the poor girl into the arms of her son; and among the many images which a quick fancy brought before her mind of future triumphs, was the prospect of mingling misery and care with Rose's married life, and avenging what she called the disdain of the haughty girl upon the unwilling bride. She sat silent, then, and Rose remained with her fair face covered, hiding the tears that would burst forth, and striving to smother the sobs that struggled for free course.

Neither uttered a word for several minutes. The house and the chamber remained quite still, and then came a sound as of a key turning in a door, and then a gentle tap close to the chair where Madame de Chazeul was seated. Both Rose and the marchioness started up; but, ere Mademoiselle d'Albret could utter a word, in the wild confusion into which her thoughts had been thrown, her fierce companion said, in a low but quick tone. "Come in!" The door from the priest's room opened, and Helen de la Tremblade stood before them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, bursting forth into a long peal of laughter, "so the secret is discovered! So here is the precious witness! So here is the wise intelligence bearer! Strumpet, how dare you shew yourself in my presence?"

"Neither willingly nor wittingly have I done so, madam," answered Helen de la Tremblade, in a much calmer and firmer tone than the marchioness had ever heard her assume; for in the fire of adversity she had gained strength, and the loss of hope had carried with it the loss of all those thrilling emotions, those vibrations of the heart, which shake and agitate the mind also. Thus, though surprised at seeing the woman who had so harshly used her, and who, in the long pause that had taken place in the conversation with Rose D'Albret, she had thought gone from the chamber, she was nevertheless not confounded, and far less dismayed than might have been expected. "Neither willingly nor wittingly," she repeated; "but since it is so, it may be no better. I am, madam, as you have said, both the witness and the intelligence bearer; but, happily not the only one."

"What, minion! will you dare me?" cried Madame de Chazeul, advancing a step as if she would have struck her.

"Have a care, lady," said Helen, in a deep tone. "Remember, I am not a servant, and no longer in any way under your authority, or, as you once termed it, protection. Protection! Oh, God, what protection! Our position is different, and I bear not now what I have borne before."

"On my life," exclaimed the marchioness, "this is admirable! Where do you stand, girl? Is this my brother's house, or yours?"

"Your brother's, madam, but not yours," replied Helen; "and I know that brother too well to doubt that he will do justice when he knows the truth. To him I am now going, and at his feet I will tell all—my own faults and my own folly—ay, and your crimes to me and others."

She took a step towards the door, but Madame de Chazeul cast herself in the way with a look of terrible fury. She well knew that the poor girl had the power, if she could but obtain a few moments' interview with the count, to

overthrow all that she had done with him, to expose her conduct, ruin her schemes, and blast by a breath all that she most desired to see bear fruit. The worm she had trampled upon had turned to sting her, and her only safety was to crush it.

"Stand back, minion!" she cried, in a stern tone; "back to your den, this moment!"

"Nay, nay, madam," cried Rose d'Albret, interposing, "Helen has suffered enough; you shall not make her suffer more here."

"Blanchette! Blanchette!" exclaimed the marchioness, aloud, without heeding her, and still keeping between the door and her victim; "Blanchette! Blanchette!"

The girl appeared, and gazed in surprise upon a scene in which she found a new actor whom she had thought far away. "Quick! call Martin and the other men from the bottom of the stairs," cried the marchioness. "Quick! not a moment!" and, advancing again upon Helen, she repeated, "Back to your den, serpent, back to your den!"

"No!" cried Rose d'Albret, taking her poor friend by the hand, "she shall not be driven from my chamber, if she chooses to stay."

But Helen whispered, "By the other door!" and, running back into the priest's room, she turned the lock, and hastened to seek exit by the door at the top of the stairs.

She had, however, to deal with one quicker in every combination than herself, and, ere she could unlock it and go out Madame de Chazeul was there before her, calling loudly, "Martin! Martin!" At the same time she laid her hand upon the small dagger which, as was not unfrequent with ladies in that day, she carried at her girdle. Helen, resolved to make a great effort, would in all probability have attempted to pass her at all risks, and blood would very likely have been spilled, for the tiger in the heart of Jacqueline de Chazeul was roused, and overbore every consideration even of danger. But as the poor girl paused for a single instant, the head of the man Martin and another appeared on the stairs, and she saw that her escape was cut off.

"Now, will you back?" exclaimed the marchioness, with a triumphant smile. "Oh, I am to be set at naught, am I?"

With a sinking heart and a slow step Helen retreated into her uncle's chamber, and Madame de Chazeul was following, when the voice of Monsieur de Liancourt was heard below, exclaiming, "What is the matter, Jacqueline? Is anything amiss?"

"Nothing! nothing," cried the marchioness. "I will come and tell you directly."

Helen sprang forward again, but the fierce woman caught her by the shoulder, and threw her back headlong into the room, muttering in a low, bitter tone, "Back, minion, I say! Stay on guard here, Martin," she continued; "let no one in or out. If my brother come, beg him civilly to pause. I will return in an instant."

Thus saying, she entered the chamber, where Helen, stunned and bruised by the fall, still lay on the floor. Seizing her by the arm, Madame de Chazeul dragged her farther in and closed the door, then gazed on her for a moment, while every terrible passion that agitates the human countenance crossed the face turned towards poor Helen de la Tremblade. The fingers of the marchioness felt the hilt of her dagger, and the spirit of Cain moved her heart strongly; but she refrained for the moment, murmuring, "No, not blood—not blood." Then advancing to the door leading to the adjoining room, she tried it, took out the key, and hurrying across to the other, she went out by it and locked it also.

"Monsieur de Liancourt speaks, madam," said the man Martin.

"I am coming! I am coming!" cried the marchioness, and began to descend.

"Shall I wait here?" asked the servant.

"No, all is safe now," rejoined his mistress, going on; "we shall want you for other matters, my good Martin."

She hurried down without a moment's pause, endeavouring to smooth her countenance and calm the vehement agitation of her thoughts as she went; and although, in the latter effort, she was not altogether successful, for her angry spirit, when once moved, was long ere it regained tranquillity, yet her face was smiling, though with a turn of contempt hanging about the nostril and the corner of the lip, when she met her brother just ascending to see what was the cause of the noise and outcry which had reached his ear.

"What is the matter, Jacqueline?" cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "has anything new gone wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied the marchioness; "something more amusing than anything else; but I will tell you all about it after the funeral; I think it will make you laugh to see what tricks there are in this world."

"But what is it? what is it?" asked the count, whose mind, vacillating and uncertain, was too much agitated by the course he was persuaded to pursue against his better judgment not to feel a movement of dread at every new incident in the drama, whenever he fell back into a fit of passionate vehemence, into his usual state of weak hesitation.

"Oh! I will tell you by-and-by," replied the marchioness, who was anxious to have a little time to arrange her plans, and think over the turn that she should give to all that had just taken place. "The story is too good to be spoiled by relating bits of it, and the hour appointed for the funeral is already past—hark! there is the bell. All the people must be waiting in the hall, and we must go and put poor old Michael in the vault before we can talk of other things."

The count suffered her to lead the way to that large hall in the chateau of Marzay into which we first introduced him when we brought him to the house. There several of the principal members of the household were assembled, under the guidance and direction of the count's major-domo, and had already begun, with the assistance of the good priest of the village, to discuss some of the savoury pasties and rich old wine which were spread out upon a table in the midst of the room. The worthy curé looked somewhat mortified at the early arrival of the two mourners, if we may so term the count and his sister, for he had got his plate loaded with a fresh supply of viands, and it was understood that their appearance was to be the signal for beginning the ceremony. Monsieur de Liancourt, however, courteously pressed him to go on, and with a capacious mouth and ready hand the priest brought his meal to a speedy conclu-

sion. It was, to say the truth, a relief to the count to see him eat, for his mind, more impressible than that of his sister, shrunk from the solemn scene he was about to witness. He felt higher and less worldly thoughts, which he dreaded and disliked, crowding upon him against his will; and certainly the very mundane appetite of the curé, though it formed a strange contrast with the functions he was about to exercise, was well calculated to deprive the ceremony of part of its gloomy solemnity, as, indeed, is the case with all eating and drinking on such sad occasions. The moment he had done, he started up, wiped his knife, and put it in its case. Then turning to Monsieur de Liancourt, he said, "Give me three minutes, sir, to get everything in order in the chapel, for as Monsieur de la Tremblade is ill, probably no preparations are made."

"How is he?" asked Monsieur de Liancourt; "have you seen him, father?"

Before the curé could answer, Madame de Chazeul's servant, Martin, who stood behind her, stepped forward, saying, "He is still asleep, sir, and begged particularly not to be woke till he rose himself."

"Ay, let him sleep," said Madame de Chazeul, in a low and gloomy tone. "He will have sorrow enough, poor man, when he awakes."

The count looked at her in surprise, but she nodded her head significantly, and the priest, quitting the hall, hurried on to the chapel.

The count and his sister followed soon after, and the ceremonies of the interment began. Impressive and terrible as they always are, perhaps the peculiar form and pomp of the Roman Church add more to them than to any other of the rites of religion. The count felt them much; the tears rose in his eyes when he thought of his brother, the companion of his boyhood, scarcely more than a year younger than himself, who had passed through life in friendship and affection with him, but had gone down to the grave with indignation and just displeasure at his acts. He asked himself, too, how long might it be ere that vault, which now yawned in the midst of the chapel, with the stone which marked its place, and bore the name and arms of De Liancourt lying by the side of the gaping chasm, would be opened for him also: and he shrunk with dread from the sad answer. A few short hours—a few short days—it could not be longer than a few short years; and then, the dust to dust, and the spirit to God who gave it! Next came the—what then? The terrible what then? The terrible account, the secrets of the heart laid open, the judgment, the stern, the irreversible, the unalterable decree, the doom for all eternity!

He wished it was over; he loved not such thoughts; he felt his soul shaken within him. But the Roman Catholic Church affords so many passages for escape from all those dark but gloomy convictions, which the tomb and its terrible lessons are calculated to produce upon the mind of him who looks alone to Scripture for his guide—purgatory, absolution by the lips of men as frail as ourselves, indulgences, the intercession of saints, the masses for the dead—that Monsieur de Liancourt soon found means of consolation. He looked to the confessional. He thought that there he would find relief from the burden. He vowed a hundred masses for his brother's soul; he determined that he would dedicate a lamp to the Virgin, and give a candlestick to the altar of our Lady of Chartres; and half his sins and errors vanished from his sight when he remembered how easily the past and the future might be atoned for.

Madame de Chazeul felt none of these things. She maintained a decent gravity, indeed, but kept her eye fixed upon the countenance of her brother, marking the varying emotions that passed over his countenance, and calculating very accurately the sources from which they sprang in his mind. From time to time she suffered her own thoughts to revert to the conduct which she had to pursue, and her insight into her brother's character, with the moving picture it displayed, aided her not a little in determining her course. Of the rest of the things around her she took little or no heed. It was but a pageant in which she took a part; a procession in which she walked; one of those ceremonies in which her state and station as a mortal being required her to share. Too much, indeed, are we apt to go through all the strange and instructive scenes of life, as if we were automata. Their lessons are learned by rote, and not by heart; and oh! how much wiser and how much better should we be, if out of everything that surrounds us, out of each event affecting ourselves and others, lighted by the Word of God, we were to draw the high moral that is to be found in all his works! Who would dare to do wrong if he saw the hand of God close to him in every event of existence!

All was at length concluded; the body deposited in its last home; the priest returned to the altar; the labourer, with his pickaxe and his trowel, ready at the side of the vault to close the coffin of the good old commander forever from the light of day; and Monsieur de Liancourt offering his hand to his sister, led her out into the court.

The spring sunshine was beaming brightly; a light bird perched upon a shrub that grew out of the wall, was carolling sweetly in the warm air, the image of thoughtless life; and the count felt relieved, for it was all over, and his heavy thoughts were buried with his brother in the tomb. Madame de Chazeul too felt relieved, though in another manner, for she had dreaded the effect of what had just taken place upon her brother's mind. It was done. The sad paraphernalia of the funeral would soon be removed from the chapel, the decorations for the marriage would take their place, and it seemed to her as if a step was gained.

"Well, Jacqueline," said the count, as they came forth, "what is it you have to tell me?"

"It must be in private," replied the marchioness, "for various reasons, which you will soon see. Come to my room, where we sha'n't be interrupted—but first give orders about the marriage. We cannot get any flowers but violets and snowdrops—but they must deck the hall and the chapel out as well as they can. You are sure the notary will be here? Tell them to have everything ready."

The count hesitated, but her ascendency was complete; and, after a short pause, he called some of his servants to him, gave some of those orders which his sister knew he would not be willing to recall, for fear of betraying that weakness of resolution of which he was inter

nally conscious, and then accompanied the marchioness to her apartment.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It is very rarely indeed, I believe, that human beings become so hardened in evil as to commit crimes deliberately, without some shrinking reluctance, without some moments of hesitation and dismay. The voice of conscience may be reduced to a whisper; but still, if an interval of silence occurs in the tumult of the passions, that whisper is heard. If unattended to for reformation of purpose it does but, indeed, serve to irritate the guilty mind to more culpable excess; for conscience, to those who are resolute in wickedness, soon ranks itself among their enemies, as one of those to be overcome by the most outrageous opposition; and in its defiance they go beyond even the point they at first desired, as a fierce and hard-mouthed horse leaps much farther than is necessary to clear an opposing fence.

As Madame de Chazeul walked to her room, with her brother, a momentary glimpse, a vision as in a dream, a picture, like the scene of a play, presented itself to her all at once, of the complicated intrigue in which she had involved herself; the difficulties which awaited her whichever way she turned; the consequences of the deceits she had practised, and their ultimate exposure; and the contempt and suspicion which might follow her after-life, from the discovery of all the falsehoods she had told, and all the arts she had had recourse to.

For a single instant the question shot across her mind like a flash of lightning, "If men will so judge me, how will God judge me?" But that gleam of awful light she crushed out in an instant, like a dying spark in a mass of tinder; and to all the rest she had a ready, and to her a convincing answer, "I shall have triumphed! That is enough! Success is justification!" Hers was the philosophy of a great modern usurper applied to domestic life, and the springs which moved her in many of her proceedings were not very different from his own.

The next consideration was the government of her brother; and step by step, through the hall and up the stairs, the incredible rapidity of thought brought her to new conclusions; not a footfall but had its thousand questions and replies in her own breast, its examination of plans and results, its calculations of character, its meditation of weakness, and its application of the means to the end. Half a lifetime was spent between the court and her own chamber—I mean thoughts that would have filled half a lifetime better disposed; but when she reached her own door, her mind was calm and clear, and she entered with the full assurance of overruling all opposition, extinguishing all suspicion, working out her own schemes in despite of every combination of circumstances against her, ay! and of taking revenge and closing the tomb over one of the chief sources of doubt and anxiety for the future.

With a smiling countenance, as if all memory of the ceremony just past had left her on the staircase, she invited her brother with somewhat formal courtesy to be seated, closed the door, and then began, without waiting to be questioned.

"*Well, Anthony,*" she said, "I thought I knew every turn and will of a woman's heart. I have a good right to know, for I do not think there are many women who have dealt more in matters of policy, public and private, than I have done"—she added these words in a tone of gay candour, which she knew would not be without its effect—"but yet I have found one to go beyond me, and, for a time, to overpower me, till I discovered the truth. When I went from you to Rose d'Albret, I found her in a high and haughty mood, ready to treat remonstrance with contempt, and evidently wishing to be pressed, if not forced, so that she might cast any blame in point of haste on us, and justify herself. Her conduct and her tone provoked me—foolishly, I will allow; and I did, sillily enough, what I ought not to have done: I told her of the discovery we have made of Chazeul's visit to her chamber, which I should have studiously avoided; but I was off my guard—"

"I do not see that," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "why should you have avoided it? I should tell her the first thing, as the motive which made me urge the marriage upon her."

"Ay! that is very well for you, brother," replied Madame de Chazeul, "but you stood in a different position. You have a right not only to speak such truths, but to command the conduct which can take away the sting from them. I should have remembered that for me to show I knew the fact would but irritate her to resistance and denial, and to efforts for exculpation, even to resist the only remedy for the evil situation in which she has placed herself; just as mad people deny they are insane, and refuse the medicines which might soothe their brains. In an instant she had a story ready. She had not slept in that room, she said, and gave me to understand that she had passed the night in the adjoining chamber. Seeing the error I had committed, I replied that it might be so, but that the injury to her reputation was the same, and that the only remedy for that was her immediate marriage with my son."

"In which chamber did she say she slept?" demanded the count.

But Madame de Chazeul did not wish to be brought to the point, and replied, "I do not well know; there is one on the right, and one on the left, you know. However, I told her that you took the same view that I did, and that you had sworn, in the most solemn manner, that she should be Chazeul's wife before noon to-day."

"Did I swear?" asked Monsieur de Liancourt, in a low voice.

"As solemnly as ever man swore," replied the marchioness; "you called heaven to witness—you vowed a vow to God—and that seemed to move her more than anything; indeed, it appeared that she was just going to say, when she found that you were so resolute, that she was prepared to obey, when the door opened, and in walked—who, think you?"

"Nay, I cannot divine," said Monsieur de Liancourt; "not De Montigni?"

"No! no!" answered Madame de Chazeul; "it would take longer for a ghost to travel post from Chartres: and he is dead beyond all doubt. No—who but Helen de la Tremblade."

"Ah! poor little Helen! I shall be glad to see her," cried the count; "she has not been here for three months or more—nay, it was in October, wellnigh six months, upon my life."

"And in those six months, what events have happened," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, "to blast all our regard for her, to show her the veriest—but I will not give her the name she deserves. Suffice it, my dear brother, that, not long ere I came hither, I found, by letters I discovered, that I had been nourishing a serpent in my house. I found her base, unworthy—impure, ambitious, scheming. Sickened and indignant, I gave way, as I am too apt, to the fierce burst of passion—for I can never conceal what I feel—and drove her out to carry her schemes and vices elsewhere: but I speedily repented, and sent out to seek her, intending to treat her kindly, and, if I could not forgive her faults, to put her in the way of repentance and atonement; but she had gone off at once, and has since come hither, when or how long ago I know not, but she has evidently been here in secret for some time, prompting Rose to all this resistance, prejudicing her mind against Chazeul, whom the vain girl thought to wed herself, and inspiring her with continual schemes for thwarting our purposes. She had clearly heard all that had passed between me and Mademoiselle d'Albret; and when she found Rose was beginning to yield, as I showed her how resolute you are, forth she came to dare me, thinking that she could frighten me by her influence over her uncle, and her threats—I believe she would have struck me had she dared; but I taught her I was not to be intimidated, laughed her menaces to scorn, and gave her to understand that I would now expose all to you, though I had hitherto carefully concealed her guilt and folly from all ears—even from her uncle's. It was wonderful to see how the girl's daring spirit was cowed before a little firmness, how she shrunk and quailed. She would have fled, indeed, perhaps to brew new mischief; but I resolved that should not be; and, like one of the men who tame the lions at the Louvre, I assumed a commanding tone, and ordered her to retire into her uncle's chamber, well resolved not to let her forth till the marriage is over. It was then that she tried to run past me; but I called loudly for my people, and, finding it in vain to resist, she obeyed, though sullenly and gloomily."

"To the priest's chamber!" said Monsieur de Liancourt. "Will not all this rouse good Father Walter? Why, there was noise enough to wake the dead."

"Oh no!" replied the marchioness, who had foreseen that such a question might be put, and was prepared with an answer. "It would have roused him certainly, if he had been in his own chamber; but he was so faint and ill with long watching, doubtless fasting and prayer, that the people who were with him took him first into the sacristy, and then to a room on the ground floor, rather than carry him up stairs. There he sleeps quietly, and, doubtless, will awake quite refreshed and well. I only dread having to tell him this story of his niece, for I do not think he knows it yet. She looks very ill, poor wretch, and I should not wonder if her violent temper killed her; but, if possible, I will still keep the matter secret."

"Do, do," replied the count, "her violent temper! Why she was the most gentle and timid of creatures, Jacqueline."

"Ay, so she seemed," replied Madame de Chazeul; "but vice and ambition have brought forth the natural character; and, if you had seen her just now, you would not have said that she was gentle. I thought she would have stabbed either me or herself, and yet it made me laugh to witness her impotent rage. But to return to Rose: she now knows her fate fully; for, as soon as I told her you had sworn, it was easy to see that her knowledge of your firmness showed her that your word was quite irrevocable."

The count looked gloomily down upon the ground, for he would fain have shrunk from the task she put upon him; and yet, like all weak people, endeavoured to assume the qualities that were imputed to him. "Yes," he said, "having sworn it, I must do it; and it is certainly necessary for her own reputation, after what you have told me, and what the other people saw, that she should marry him at once. It must be done—that is clear."

"Ay!" answered Madame de Chazeul, "whether she slept in her own chamber or another. It is known, unfortunately, to so many people, that Chazeul, like a rash and foolish boy, passed a great part of the night in her usual room, that, for both their sakes, there must be no delay; and, besides, your word must be kept, as it always is."

"Certainly," replied the count, working himself up to the pitch required; "and it shall be kept, by all I hold sacred."

The repetition of the oath was very pleasant to Madame de Chazeul, for she knew that her brother would now not shrink from its execution; and that, in order to guard against his own vacillation, he would put on a degree of violence and sternness calculated to intimidate all remonstrance and overbear all opposition.

"Well, then, Anthony," she said, "as we have now but little time to spare, I will go and make some change in my apparel;" and, sending for Rose's maid, Blanchette, gave her orders for dressing her mistress in somewhat like bridal costume.

"Do you think I ought to go and formally inform her of my resolution!" asked the count.

"As you please," answered Madame de Chazeul; "and yet, perhaps, you had better not. I have told her already; and, if she have no farther inducement to display a headstrong spirit, we shall find her less obstinate at the time of the marriage. We shall have some affectation of reluctance, beyond doubt; but it will be soon got over when she finds you firm; and if you then go and bring her from her chamber, it will be enough. You will thus have only one disagreeable scene instead of two."

"The fewer the better," replied the count. "But where is Chazeul? has he returned yet?"

"No," answered the marchioness, "I fancy he is afraid to meet you; but I will send down to the village, and tell him to come up, if you will promise not to be too angry."

"I must reproach him," replied the count, putting on a firm and dignified air. "You must admit, Jacqueline, that he has been very much in the wrong."

"Well, I know he has," answered the marchioness. "But, however, it will all be done away with by the marriage, and so there is no use of saying too much about it."

"Ay, but I must say something," answered

Monsieur de Liancourt. "However, go and make your preparations, for it is now past ten, and immediately after the marriage I will see Helen de la Tremblade myself, and inquire into the whole case, that I may break the tidings to poor Father Walter. 'Tis very odd that she should become such as you represent, for she was as sweet and gentle a girl as ever I saw."

Madame de Chazeul left him without reply; but, ere she reached her own apartments, she paused twice, and at length, after a few moments' meditation, murmured to herself, "No, that must be prevented."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

When Madame de Chazeul entered the anteroom, she found the two maids busily engaged in ornamenting a dress which she had ordered them to prepare against the marriage. It mingled, in a somewhat strange manner, the colours of mourning and rejoicing; and the two girls were tittering at some observations made by the page, who stood looking over their work, and who had just said, "Why, if madame put on that, she will look like an old magpie." The boy's face was perfectly grave, but the maid's could not recover a demure look quite so easily; and Madame de Chazeul, who was herself in deep and stern thoughts, gave them a fierce glance, saying, "What are the fools laughing at! One of you, go and tell the girl Blanchette to come to me; and you, Philip, run down to the kitchen, and fetch me two basins of soup. I am hungry," she added, in a tone that she intended him to remark; "and that poor girl must have some food too."

The boy hastened to obey, and the maid went to call Blanchette; but the countess retired to her own chamber, opened a little bonbonnière which she carried, and shook out a small quantity of a white powder into a piece of paper, which she folded up, not indeed completely, for one end was left open. This she concealed between her first and second finger; and then, leaning her head upon her hand, she meditated for a moment or two, turning her own dark schemes in her mind, with some doubts and misgivings as to how she should carry the next step she purposed to take into execution.

"If I take it to her myself," she thought, "she will doubt something, and will not drink it. I'll send it by the maid Blanchette. Yet, perhaps, if she knows it comes from me, it may rouse the same suspicions; and I doubt that girl too. She has given me black looks and saucy answers. No, I had better take it myself; or, stay! I will send it by the page. He was always fond of her; and a light, thoughtless boy like that one can make say what one will. He will suspect nothing, and the girl will not doubt him. Martin I dare not trust, for the fool thinks his conscience sufficiently burdened already with the imprisonment of the priest. He would not be so easily taken in, either, as to believe that I had any very tender consideration for the hunger of Helen de la Tremblade, any more than those two wenches in the ante-room. All my people know too much: I must get some new ones; and, if I can breed up this boy in perfect obedience, he may prove useful hereafter."

As she was going on with these pleasant meditations, the girl Blanchette presented herself, and Madame de Chazeul, turning towards her, asked in a calm and complaisant tone, "How long has Mademoiselle de la Tremblade been here, Blanchette?"

"Really, madam, I do not know," answered the maid; "I did not know that she was here at all, till I found her with you and Mademoiselle d'Albret."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, with an air of surprise; "I thought you had known all about it."

"Not I, madam," said Blanchette; "but she can't have been there long, or I must have known. I think she must have come last night, for I saw the door of the priest's room open just before sunset, and I looked in. There was nobody there then; and I am sure nobody slept in the room the night before, for he was in the chapel all night himself, and the bed was untouched in the morning."

Before Madame de Chazeul could make any further observation, the page entered the room, bearing the two basins of soup which he had been commanded to bring, and his mistress ordered him to set them down on the table before her, and retire. The boy did as she bade him, but remained in the anteroom; and the marchioness proceeded to talk farther with Blanchette, changing the subject of her conversation, however, to the approaching wedding, and the preparations for it which it was necessary to make.

"You will not have much time, Blanchette," she said; "But still, you must try to make your mistress's dress look as gay as possible."

"I will do the best I can, madam," replied Blanchette, "but I doubt very much whether she will put it on."

"Oh, nonsense," cried Madame de Chazeul. "She knows that Monsieur de Liancourt has sworn that she shall marry the marquis before noon to-day, and she does not doubt that he will keep his word. She must, therefore, have made up her mind to it by this time, and I dare say we shall hear no more objections."

Blanchette shook her head, saying, "I think you will, madam, as many as ever."

"Well, then," exclaimed Madame de Chazeul, "force must be used, that's all, for my brother will not break his oath for the whims of any girl in Europe. Bring me that mantle, Blanchette," she continued; "that one that hangs by the wall there;" and she pointed to the other side of the room, in such a direction that Blanchette, in going thither, must turn her back to the table at which the marchioness was seated. The girl walked straight across to the spot where a crimson silk mantle was hanging, but as she did so she turned her eyes quietly towards a small mirror that hung exactly opposite the fireplace. At first it presented nothing to her view but the wide, open hearth, and the curiously carved dogs, with some large pieces of wood burning upon them. The next moment, however, her own figure crossing reflected in the glass, and then was seen, as the angle became greater, the figure of Madame de Chazeul, seated at the table with the two basins of soup before her, and her right hand raised above one of them. She was shaking in the powder which she had wrapped up in the paper between her fingers, and Blanchette saw clearly the white substance fall into the liquid. She took no notice, however, but in order to give the

marchioness full time for what she was about, she affected to have some difficulty in unfastening the mantle from the peg.

Madame de Chazeul turned round the next moment, saying, "Untie the string, untie the string! How clumsy you are!"

Following her directions, Blanchette easily got down the mantle and returned with it to the lady's side, who began a long unnecessary explanation as to how certain knots and ribands were to be placed on Mademoiselle d'Albret's dress; and Blanchette took out her scissors to unfasten one of those from the mantle, in order that she might see exactly how it was done, affecting, to say the truth, a greater degree of stupidity than was natural to her. "There, that will do," said Madame de Chazeul; "you must understand it now. Oh, I forgot," she added, aloud, "I must send something to Mademoiselle de la Tremblade. She has had no breakfast, I suppose? Here, Philip!"

The boy did not appear, and Blanchette still continued to fumble at the bow upon the mantle without offering to go and call the page.

There was a good deal of tremour in the marchioness's manner; she was agitated, and her voice shook when she called; and at length rising, she went to the door to give her orders to the boy. He was not there, however, and only one of her women, seated near the farther window, whom she directed in quick and eager words to call the page directly.

The whole of this proceeding occupied not a minute and a half; but the moment that her back was turned, Blanchette, with dexterous rapidity, took the mantle between her teeth, and employing both hands, changed the relative positions of the two basins of soup, but was busy at the knot again, with a dull face, and a heavy, unmeaning eye, before the marchioness turned round. Not the slightest sound had she made, and it was only a gentle undulation of the liquid in the two bowls which could have betrayed to any eye that they had been moved. That, however, had subsided before the marchioness had returned to the table, and Blanchette soon received her dismissal, with injunctions to make haste with what she had to do.

Scarcely was she gone when the boy Philip entered the room, and Madame de Chazeul asked sharply, "Where have you been, sir?"

"I went to get some breakfast, madam," replied the boy, "for I was very hungry, having ridden all night."

"There may be other people hungry as well as you, young glutton," said the marchioness; "however, here's a task for you that I know you will like. Do you know that Mademoiselle Helen is here?"

"No," cried the page, with well-feigned astonishment; "is she, indeed? Oh, I am so glad, and I am sure I hope you will forgive her, madam, for she is so good and so kind."

"Not yet," replied the marchioness, in a significant tone, "but I may soon. In the mean time, I must not have her for the world know that I take any interest in her, for she is locked into her room, and must remain there till I think she is punished sufficiently. However, she must not be without food, so take her this basin of soup, as if you had brought it for her yourself, without letting her know that I sent it. She will take it kind of you, but you must not stop a minute with her, but lock the door and bring me the key again directly. If you were to let her get out, I would have you flayed alive."

"I will take care that shall not be the case," replied the boy; and, stretching out his hands, either from some suspicion or by accident, he was about to lift the basin farthest from him, when Madame de Chazeul thrust back his arm hastily, and laying her finger on the other, exclaimed, "This! I told you this! Don't you see I have taken some of the other?"

The boy could not perceive that there was any difference in quantity between the two; but the quick eagerness with which Madame de Chazeul spoke would have created doubts in his mind if there had been none there before, and he determined at once to warn Helen against touching any food but that which he himself procured for her.

Madame de Chazeul then gave him the key; but she exacted a promise from him that he would lock the door with it, and bring it back without suffering Helen to go out. "If she should try to master you, and be too strong for you," said the marchioness, in a low voice, "use your dagger."

"Oh! madam," cried the boy, with a look of horror.

"I mean but to frighten her," replied Madame de Chazeul; "and, at all events, call out loudly should such be the case. I will place some one within hearing."

Carrying the soup in his hand, the page then left the room, and, descending that flight of stairs, he passed through the passage below, and ascended the others towards the priest's room. If Madame de Chazeul had reflected upon all the circumstances, she would have perceived that the boy was not altogther sincere with her, for he had affected not to know that Helen was in the chateau, and yet, without her ever telling him in what room she was confined, he went away towards it directly; but the truth is, that, as usual, the whole events of the morning had been talked over among the servants in the hall, and he had heard the fact of Helen's appearance, and where she was to be found.

The first sound of his step upon the stairs brought out Blanchette from the neighbouring room. Her face was as pale as ashes, and her limbs trembled, but she stopped the boy at the top of the stairs, asking in a whisper, "Which of the two basins is that! The one on the right, or the other on the left?"

"The one on the right," replied the boy, "Do you know anything about it? You look very white!"

Blanchette still held his arm, though she murmured, "That is right. Well, however," she continued, as if speaking to herself, "it will be better to be quite safe. Tell her not to take the soup, Philip; let her throw it away, and you find means to give her food that you know is safe."

"How?" demanded the boy. "How is that to be done?"

"Throw a ball of twine into the window from below," replied the girl. "Then, while they are all at the wedding you can tie a basket to it, and let her pull it up."

"Thank you, Blanchette," replied the boy, with a nod; "I will do so. But hark! I hear steps along the passage below; I must go on."

Blanchette instantly disappeared, and the boy, unlocking the door of the priest's room, went in. He found Helen de la Tremblade gazing eagerly towards him from the other side of the room, with a look of terror in her eyes, like that of the wounded bird when approached by the retriever. It was changed instantly to joy, however, when she saw the boy, and she ran forward a few steps to meet him. But then the poor girl stopped, and shook her head sadly, exclaiming, "Ah, Philip, you should not have come. You do not know to what you expose yourself. That woman will never forgive any one who shows any kindness to poor Helen de la Tremblade."

"I know she will not, Ma'am'selle Helen," answered the page, setting down the soup upon the table and kissing her hand; "but she sent me to bring you that. But I have much to say to you, and am afraid to stay more than a minute; and I have promised to lock the door too, and take back the key."

"Oh, let me out, Philip, let me out!" exclaimed Helen, clasping her hands.

"I cannot! I cannot! even if I had not given my word," cried the boy.

"If I could but see my uncle for one minute," urged Helen, "it might save many from destruction."

"Impossible now, dear lady," replied Philip; "there are her men at the bottom of the stairs. Your uncle, too, is confined below—so I have gathered from the talk of Martin and the rest—and I pledged my word, also, when she gave me the key; but I did not pledge my word not to contrive to free you afterward. So listen to me, and I will do it."

"Well, speak! speak!" said Helen; "what have you to say? I know you are a good, kind boy, and wish me well."

"I would give my life to serve you," replied the page. "First, you must not touch that soup. It is poisoned."

Helen shrunk back in horror, exclaiming, "Oh! wretched woman!"

"Next," continued Philip, "here is my dagger. It may be useful to you in case of need; and, besides," he added, significantly, "the locks are all on the inside; the blade of the dagger would soon force them back. But do not try it yet, for you will find people in every corner. In half an hour the marriage contract is to be signed—"

"She will never sign it!" cried Helen, vehemently. "She will never, never sign it!"

"They will use force," answered the boy; "but, at all events, they will drag her to the hall and to the chapel. If I can, I will come under your window the moment they are all in the hall. Look out and speak to me; but if I do not come within three minutes after you hear all quiet in the next room, you can open the door easily with the dagger, and get out. Your uncle is in the room on the left at the foot of the great staircase—the little room with the low door. I am sure he is there, for I have seen Martin and René go in there twice to-day. *But if* I can, I will fetch the key of this room, *and—hark! was that some one calling?*"

"No, no!" cried Helen; "go on, go on, Philip."

"And then, when I come under the window," continued the boy, "I will bring it with a basket of provisions, and throw you up a ball of string, with which you can draw them all up, so keep the window wide open that I may cast it in."

"Oh good, dear boy!" cried Helen.

"I met your friend, Monsieur Estoc," said the page, "this morning, as I was coming back from Chazeul, and I promised him that I would do whatever you or Father Walter told me, if it cost me my life. So do you think, dear lady, what I am to do till you see me under the window, and then tell me quickly, and I will do it, upon my honour." As he spoke he retreated towards the door, and as he opened it he said, pointing to the soup, "Mind you do not touch it! I was to tell you that I brought it for you myself out of kindness; they will perhaps want me to do other such deeds, but I cannot, and I will not for any one."

The last words were spoken vehemently, with the door open in his hand, and when he had uttered them he went out, closed, and locked it. Then turning round to descend the stairs, he beheld Madame de Chazeul standing a few steps down, with one of her men a little behind her. The boy's heart sunk, fearing she might have heard too much; but it had happened otherwise. All that had caught her ear was, "I cannot, and will not for any one;" and as he approached, she asked, "What was it she wanted you to do Philip?"

"To let her out," replied the boy, readily.

Madame de Chazeul put her hand approvingly upon his shoulder, saying, "You are a good lad, an excellent lad! That is the way I love to be served; and if you behave so, you shall have more advancement than you think of. There's a gold crown for you, Philip. Did she take the soup?"

"No," answered the page; "and I do not think she will till she is very hungry, for she seemed afraid of something."

"Then she shall be hungry enough," muttered Madame de Chazeul. "But come, Philip, give me the key."

The boy delivered it unwillingly, and his mistress proceeded: "Now run, wash your face and hands, and put on your gay satin pourpoint as quick as may be, for the marriage is to take place in ten minutes, and I shall want all my people with me in the hall."

Philip thought to himself, "I will contrive to slip away, however," and proceeded to his own chamber, while Madame de Chazeul retired to put the key by, and then sought her brother the count to speak with him once more before the last trial of his resolution with Rose d'Albret.

The count was in a different frame of mind, however, from that in which his sister expected to find him. He had employed the time during her absence in working himself up to the necessary pitch of determination, and had, as is not uncommon, gone even beyond the point. He talked loud and high of the privileges and power of guardians, and spoke angrily of those who ventured to oppose them.

"I have always understood, Jacqueline," he said, in a sharp tone, as if the marchioness herself had been one of those who sought to prevent him from exercising his proper authority, "I have always understood that a guardian stands exactly in the position of a parent, and

who ever heard of a daughter daring to object to the man her father has chosen for her?"

"Never that I have heard of," replied Madame de Chazeul; "nor of a ward objecting either, when her guardian has provided for her a suitable alliance."

"Never! never!" cried the count, vehemently. "I have suffered myself to be set at naught by this girl too long, Jacqueline, and I will do it no longer. Even if I had not sworn as I have, I would not suffer this to go on another hour. The notary has arrived, and the contract is drawn up correctly, except the names. I will go to her at once. I have seen Chazeul, too, and spoken to him seriously on his conduct."

"What did he say?" demanded the marchioness, with an eager look. "He was penitent, I am sure."

"Yes," replied the count. "I have nothing to find fault with in his demeanour. He expressed his sorrow for what he had done, assured me that he had never considered it in the light of an insult to me, and that he had no bad intentions at all, but merely wished to speak to Rose in private for a short time, to persuade her to yield calmly to all our wishes this day, as he had every reason to believe that her inclinations were really not opposed to him, and he knew that if she did attempt to resist, it would give me pain."

"Persuasions are all in vain, my dear brother," said Madame de Chazeul; "when a woman's vanity is engaged in a particular course, you may argue till you expire without moving her. Firmness is the only thing under such circumstances, and she will at her heart feel obliged to you for forcing her to that which she does not choose to admit that she wishes. If I were you, I would not either attempt to use any solicitations, or listen to any replies, but assume at once the tone of authority; tell her that she must submit, and that you will not suffer her to say one word in regard to your right of disposing of her hand as you think fit."

"Such is the course I intend to pursue," answered Monsieur de Liancourt. "She has offended me enough by resisting my commands; and, indeed, I do not propose to suffer anything farther to be said upon the subject. If she will not sign, I will put the pen in her hand, and guide it by force over the paper. If she says "no" at the altar, I will say "yes" for her. I will not be thwarted and conquered by the obstinacy of my own ward in my own chateau."

"Well, then, go to her, Anthony," cried the marchioness, who knew well that, as long as this mood lasted, all was secure, and that any opposition would but drive him to violence, though she had seen such fits in full force in the morning, and pass away before nightfall. "I will wait for you in the hall, and will have as many of the people gathered together as possible, to overawe her by the crowd."

"Few or many, it will be the same to me," replied the count; "but yet, the more the better, for I am quite firm and resolute, and am sure that I have every right to do as I am doing. Now, Jacqueline, let us proceed, for the sooner it is done the less painful will it be; and, thus saying, he led the marchioness from the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Parting with his sister at the bottom of the stairs which led up to the apartments of Rose d'Albret and the priest, Monsieur de Liancourt mounted in haste. It might be that, as he said, he was anxious to have a painful scene over as speedily as possible; it might be that, like a certain stage hero of the name of Acres, he began to feel his courage oozing out of the tips of his fingers. It were vain to deny that, ere he came to the first landing, his heart beat quick and his breath began to fail; but, finding the man Martin sitting there in an idle attitude, he found an excuse in that fact to pause for an instant, asking his sister's servant why he did not go and join the rest in the hall, and ordering him to do so. The man obeyed without reply, for, in the first place, he was tired of his post; in the next place, he never knew how far any one was trusted by the marchioness, so that one indiscreet friend might do much mischief by chattering to another: and, in the third place, he could not well refuse or neglect to obey the orders of the count in his own house.

As soon as he was gone, the count resumed the ascent, and in a moment or two reached the door of the anteroom. He gave a gentle knock, and, entering, found Blanchette sitting with a pale cheek and clouded countenance, some piece of female apparel lying on her knee, apparently scarcely touched.

"Well, Blanchette," he said, as he went into the room, "is your mistress ready to accompany me?"

"I am sure, sir," replied the maid, "I do not know. I got all her things ready, and told her what Madame de Chazeul said; but she answered me as bold as a lion, saying that she would put on no other things than her ordinary clothes, as the idea of forcing her to a ceremony with a man she hates was quite vain and foolish."

"She shall learn that it is not so," answered Monsieur de Liancourt, in a sharp and angry tone; "whether dressed as becomes a bride, or like a wandering vagrant as she returned hither, she shall be wedded this day, if my name be De Liancourt. Go, tell her I am waiting for her."

The maid went into the inner chamber, and the count could hear the murmur of voices speaking for some moments, and yet Rose d'Albret did not appear.

"She mocks me," he said, at length; "she will not even come forth to speak with me. Then I must seek her;" and, advancing to the door of her chamber, he entered without ceremony.

Rose was seated at the very farthest part of the room, with her hands clasped over her eyes, and the bitter tears rolling down her cheeks. The moment she heard his step, however, she dried them hastily, rose from her seat, and, advancing a step or two towards him, cast herself at his feet, clasping his knees. He felt his resolution begin to waver, but, making an effort, he exclaimed, "How now! how now! No more of this! You know my determination. I announced it to you the day before yesterday; I have solemnly sworn to keep it; and I insist upon obedience."

"Hear me, hear me, sir!" cried Rose; "if you have no pity, if you have no regard for me, hear me for my father's sake, hear me for the memory of your dead friend, and have some compassion on his child."

"It is no use hearing," cried the count; "the

matter is determined. It is to be done. Rise, and follow me! I command, I insist."

"Not till you have heard me," answered Rose; "that, at least, I may require. Would you, Monsieur de Liancourt, not only break your contract with my father, by which my hand was promised to Louis de Montigni—"

"Pshaw! that contract, if it referred to him at all, is at an end by his death," cried Monsieur de Liancourt; "talk not to me of that any more."

"But he lives! he lives!" exclaimed Rose, vehemently. "You have been deceived, indeed you have, by the tale they invented to deceive me; and I have more wrongs, more deceits to tell you of, from which I know your noble mind will shrink with horror—schemes which none but the basest of men could conceive or execute."

"It is all in vain, Rose, it is all in vain," answered the count. "Nothing you can say will make the least difference. I know all that has taken place; Chazeul's folly, which has compromised your character, and all the rest. But he is sorry for it; is willing to do all that is right to justify your fame, by wedding you this moment, and—"

"Is willing, you mean to say, sir," exclaimed Rose, "to profit by his villany, to gain the very object he had in view by the very means he employed. Why did he come here but to injure my reputation, with the hope of forcing me to marry him, and inducing you to drive me to such a course? But I heard it all beforehand, and escaped the snare. Helen de la Tremblade was sent by good Father Walter to tell me of the base treachery, to warn me of my danger, and show me the means of escaping from it."

"She came here because she wants to marry him herself," replied the count. "Once more I say, Mademoiselle d'Albret, I command you, as your guardian, to rise and follow me without farther words, to give your hand to Monsieur de Chazeul, for whom I have long destined you, and to forget Louis de Montigni, who misled you to quit this house, and has since paid for some other imprudence with his life."

"He is living; indeed, indeed he is living," cried Rose. "Give me but an hour and a patient hearing, and I will show you, sir, that he is living, and that it is you who have been deceived, not I."

"Thank God! I am not so easily deceived, Mademoiselle d'Albret," replied the count. "I cannot grant your request. The contract lies ready for signature; every one is waiting for you in the hall; they cannot be disappointed; my word shall not be broken; and I insist upon this vain, this stupid resistance ceasing instantly."

"The contract may lay there, sir, forever," replied Rose, rising and seating herself again. "I will never sign it, so help me God! You refuse to hear reason and truth; you listen to falsehood and wrong; you may kill me, place me in a convent, do aught with me you like; but make me the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul, of so base, so bad, so contemptible a being, you never shall, while I have breath."

"Now listen to me, Rose d'Albret," replied the count, advancing angrily towards her. "I am your guardian, am I not? You are my ward; is it not so? By the power given me by the law, I have promised your hand to Nicholas de Chazeul—"

"In violation of the contract from which your *only power* is derived," replied Rose. "That *contract, in which you are named my guardian, promises my hand to De Montigni.*"

"The girl will drive me mad!" exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt. "Once more I tell you he is dead; and if you refuse yourself to sign the marriage contract, I will sign it for you. Rise, and come with me without another word, or you will compel me to force you."

"Never!" answered Rose; "Louis de Montigni is not dead. I have offered to prove it to you, but you will not even hear in what the proof consists, although you know that, until he has resigned his claim to the succession of De Liancourt, not even a doubt can exist that he is the person specified in the contract."

The count seemed not shaken, no, not in the least, but embarrassed, for his own doubts of De Montigni's death were strong upon the side of Rose d'Albret; and the certainty that, if his nephew still lived, he was committing a gross violation of the contract with her father, left him but little to say in his own defence. He was not shaken, for he had before made up his mind to overleap his own doubts upon that score; to take advantage of the bare report that had reached him, to justify the course to which he had been led by others; and resolutely to believe that report true, in despite of all that could be said to prove it false. The combat of weak people is with themselves more than with any external things. They wish to convince themselves they are acting right, while they know they are acting wrong, and their labours for that object are not light; but Monsieur de Liancourt had no reply ready, no reason to assign for not listening to the proofs Rose offered, and he paused for a full minute, in painful hesitation as to what he should say.

"This is all an artifice to gain time," he said, at length, "and I will not yield to it. It is ascertained, beyond all doubt, that Louis de Montigni is no more, and has justly paid for insulting a prince like the Duke of Nemours."

"Oh! sir," cried Rose, in a tone of mingled indignation and grief, "how can you suffer your own nature to be so changed by the base counsels of others, so to speak of your sister's son? He is not dead! he will yet live to shame those who calumniate him. Were he indeed laid in the tomb, I still say, nothing should ever lead me to marry Nicholas de Chazeul; but, as long as Louis de Montigni lives, I shall regard him as my husband. Show me that he is indeed gone, and I am willing to resign everything that this man really covets—my wealth, my lands, and to retire to a life of seclusion and prayer; but not willing, and never shall I be willing, to wed one whom I so much despise and abhor."

"You will have no choice," replied the count. "You shall be his wife this day ere noon. These are all evasions and affectations. I know right well which way your mind inclines. You would save your credit, Rose, appear reluctant, and only yield to force; but force shall not be wanting, and perhaps more than you expect or like. Yes, you may weep. We are prepared for such things; but you had better dry your eyes; and, as you must appear before a large assembly of witnesses, look your best."

"Sir, you are ungenerous and unkind," replied Rose d'Albret; "but I know whence your impulses are derived; and shame upon them who fill a noble mind with such base suspicions. Use what force you like; the power has not yet appeared on earth that shall make my hand or my tongue so belie my heart as to promise aught like love, attachment, or obedience towards Nicholas de Chazeul."

"Oh, is it so?" exclaimed the count. "This is carrying the matter too far, Mademoiselle d'Albret. Will you, or will you not, accompany me, in obedience to my commands, quietly and decently?"

Rose was silent; her mind agitated with many conflicting thoughts. She feared to yield the least point, lest it should be accepted as a promise of farther compliance, and yet she naturally shrunk, with all a woman's timidity, from driving those who oppressed her to have recourse to violence. She dreaded the moment when it was to begin; she would fain have procrastinated: every minute seemed something gained ere the actual struggle commenced. She was silent; but, after waiting a few moments, the count seized her by the wrist, exclaiming, "Come, I insist. Not one moment more!"

"Well, sir, well," cried Rose d'Albret, trying to withdraw her hand, "I will go with you to the hall; but remember, it is but to refuse most resolutely to do that which would be equally against my duty and my heart."

"Duty!" cried the count, with a scoff, unloosing her arm. "We shall see what is your conduct, and I will answer for it I will match it. Go on, mademoiselle. You know your way to the hall, I think."

With a slow step and trembling limbs Rose d'Albret proceeded through the anteroom and down the stairs. She felt at every moment as if she should faint; but yet remembering that, if such a weakness overcame her, they might take advantage of her insensibility to proceed rapidly in whatever course they thought fit, she nerved her heart to the best of her power, and paused for a moment before entering the hall to make one more appeal to the Count de Liancourt. But he would not hear her speak, and, throwing open the door violently, he waved her to go in.

There was a crowd of faces, some of which seemed strange and some familiar; but they were almost all those of men: there were wine, and meat, and laughter, and flowers, and everything the most dissonant to all the feelings of her heart, while through the whole mass of misty images were seen, in terrible prominence, like some colossal statue in an Eastern temple, the tall, rigid form, and stern, sarcastic features of Madame de Chazeul. She was leaning upon a table just opposite the door; her face, where not besmeared with rouge, was unusually pale; there was an expression of weariness, and even of pain, in her face; but when Rose appeared, that harsh countenance lighted up with a look of scornful triumph, and the poor girl's eyes grew dim, her head turned giddy with the thought of all she was to encounter in that hall.

CHAPTER XL.

Helen de la Tremblade sat alone in the priest's room, and sad and terrible were the thoughts that crossed her mind. It may seem that to have found one even out of many, though but a mere boy, sincerely attached, and willing to risk all, and sacrifice all for her happiness and deliverance, might well have brought cheering consolation to her heart. He could have no concealed motive, he had no dark treachery to practise. There, in his young enthusiasm, he had stood before her, a friend indeed. But what was the errand on which he had been sent? the errand which he had refused to fulfil? To bear her poison! to consign her to the grave at the mandate of one who had promised, with specious and sweet-spoken words, to guard, protect, cherish, watch over her; to consign her to the dark and silent grave, after having neglected, abandoned, ill treated her.

There were glimpses of some of the darkest realities of earth breaking on the mind of one who had lived her youth as in a dream, and oh! how cold and more cold grew her heart, as proof after proof was given of what human beings can become, when, godless and heartless, they give themselves up to the mastery of strong passion. It was more than even the kindness of the poor boy could compensate, though she had found some relief in every word he spoke.

She sat and gazed upon the poisoned drink with thoughts almost approaching to madness flashing through her brain. She asked herself, "Shall I drink it? Then pain, and anguish, and remorse, and shame, will be all over. I shall be delivered from all this weight, this intolerable burden. I shall be free. They cannot say I did it: it is no fault of mine. They sent it to me. They are murderers, not I. Oh, how I long to be at rest! But Rose—dear, good Rose—I must not leave her to struggle on unaided. The boy said he would soon be here. I will see:" and, opening the window, she looked out into the bottom of the deep corridor or passage between the chateau and the walls. There was nobody there, however; all was free; and even on the ramparts, the scanty watch had dwindled away to nothing; all who dared, hurrying away to witness the gay wedding of Mademoiselle d'Albret, and making their own comments upon the decency and propriety which their noble lord and master displayed in burying his brother and marrying his nephew on the selfsame morning.

The eye of Helen de la Tremblade ran along the wall towards the chapel, where she had found her uncle not many hours before. First came a large mass of masonry, containing some of the best rooms in the chateau, and projecting from the rest of the building; then appeared a round tower with a turret fastened to its side; and then the roof of the chapel, built against the walls, was seen, with part of one window peeping out from behind the tower. But all the way down, neither on the walls, nor between them and the chateau, could Helen descry any one. As her eye strayed, however, to some low trees and bushes, which ran down the slope in the neighbourhood of the chapel, she thought she saw something move among the gray branches, but she could not distinguish what; and as she was gazing more eagerly to trace the object as it proceeded, she heard high tones speaking in the adjacent room, and turned to listen. She recognised the voices of Monsieur de Liancourt and Rose d'Albret; but she could not catch the words that were uttered, though some of them were spoken loud and in apparent anger.

"He has come to take her," said Helen to herself, "and she will not go. Oh, that I could aid her!"

Her first impulse was to approach nearer the door, in order to push back the lock with the dagger the boy had left with her; but then she reflected that singly, there, she could do nothing to prevent the count from dragging poor Rose to the altar. "No!" she said, reseating herself near the window, and a look of dark and gloomy determination coming over her face, "no! I will let them take her away, and then I will confront

them all—ay, in the hall, amid menials, and soldiers, and friends, and they shall hear truth. Hark, how loud he speaks! He is threatening her. Poor Rose! 'tis all silent now: she must be gone! Hark, the door bangs to! They have dragged her away. Now, boy, now, for I must follow soon."

She ran hastily to the window again, and gazed out. The page was not yet there, and Helen hesitated whether to wait or hurry away to the hall. At that moment the sound of a hunting horn reached her ear, and she looked up from the passage on which her eyes had been bent to the undulating country straight before her, beyond the walls. There was a large party of horsemen issuing from the nearest wood, distant about half a mile, and Helen, with her quick fancy, cried, "It may be De Montigni!"

But just then, from the bushes beyond the chapel, a man on foot darted forth, and ran round, as if he perceived her at the window. She instantly recognised Estoc, and stretched her head farther forward, in order that he might certainly see her. The old soldier paused immediately opposite, and came as near the wall as he could, without losing sight of her; and then he raised his voice, and pointed with his hand to the party of horsemen, still advancing. But the distance rendered most of his words indistinct, and Helen caught only the few last: "The postern a little to your right, before they can arrive, for they have barred us out of the chapel," was all that she could distinguish. "Then these are enemies coming," she thought, "and all depends upon Estoc getting in first."

She tried to make him hear, but in vain; her weaker voice was lost in air; but just as she was about to withdraw, force back the lock, run down and open the postern, she saw the figure of the page coming round the square tower. He had a heavy basket on his arm, and was proceeding, with his eyes cast down, to wind up a quantity of string upon a piece of wood, when Helen called aloud, "Philip! Philip!"

The boy looked up. "Run round, without a moment's delay," cried Helen, "and open the first postern; show yourself beyond, and you will find Estoc. Run, Philip, run, if you would save us all."

The boy threw down the basket, and sped forward as rapidly as possible. Helen saw the postern unlocked and pushed open, and then withdrawing from the window, she murmured, "Now, then, to stop them till help arrives. I will at least do that, if it cost my life or that of others. He said my uncle was in the room at the bottom of the great staircase. Perhaps I can set him free too;" and, running to the door which led out at once at the top of the stairs, she easily forced back the lock with the well-tempered blade of the boy's poniard, and threw it open. She started, however, on seeing the maid Blanchette straight before her; but, resolved to pass at all risks, she grasped the dagger firmly in her hand, and gazed upon the girl's countenance for an instant. It was as pale as death; but Blanchette, seeing her thus pause and look at her, exclaimed, "Pass on, Mademoiselle Helen, pass on to the hall; you may see things there that you do not expect: I won't stop you."

"Wo to those who try," cried Helen; and, *passing* on without another word, she descended that flight of stairs, and *passed* through the corri*dor below.* An old man met her as she went, *but started back as if he had seen* a spectre; and *Helen hurried on,* reached the foot of the great staircase, and darted towards the chamber which the boy had mentioned as her uncle's place of confinement. The door was locked, and the key had been taken out; the lock, too, was in the inside. Helen shook the door, and exclaimed, "Are you there? are you there?"

"Yes," replied the voice of her uncle from within. "Is that you, Helen?"

"Yes," cried the girl. "How can I let you out quickly?"

"Run up the passage," cried the priest, "and take the key out of the last door on the right hand. It fits this lock."

Helen flew rather than ran, returned with the key, unlocked the door, and threw it open.

"Quick! quick!" she cried. "There is not a minute to spare! They are now forcing her to the marriage, but I will confront them all—I will stop them or die!" and with her whole frame thrilling with excitement, her eyes flashing with unnatural light, and the wildness of almost insanity in her look, she darted away up the great staircase, through the corridor at the top, and reached the door of the hall. Before it stood the man Martin, who, as soon as he beheld her, exclaimed, "Ah, Mademoiselle Helen, you cannot pass here!"

"Stand back, or I will stab you to the heart!" exclaimed Helen, raising the dagger; and as he retreated a step to avoid the blow that seemed ready to descend, she darted forward, and, before he could stop her, was in the midst of the hall.

CHAPTER XLI.

All had been prepared in the great hall of the chateau de Marzay for the marriage of Rose d'Albret with Nicholas de Chazeul, as far as the time and circumstances would admit. A few of such flowers as the early season of the year afforded had been gathered to strew the floor or to form into nosegays. Various old banners and decorations had been brought forth, to give an appearance of splendour and gayety to the scene; and if friends and relations had not been summoned to do honour to the occasion, their places were filled up by all the servants and attendants of the family, dressed in their best attire. All Madame de Chazeul's maids were there; all the women servants of the chateau, with the sole exception of Blanchette, who, as the reader knows, had remained in her mistress's apartments. But the principal group in the room was stationed near the table in the midst, on which lay the contract of marriage, neatly tied with white riband, and surrounded by a chaplet of violets and snowdrops, and consisted of the young Marquis de Chazeul, dressed in all the most extravagant finery of that extravagant day, of the marchioness his mother, and the notary public of the Holy Roman Empire, who, called upon continually to deal with great people, was conversing familiarly with his two companions, and giving them his advice how to proceed in certain cases which they had suggested for his consideration.

When first Madame de Chazeul had entered the room, she was followed by her page, but in the conversation which succeeded between herself, the notary, and her son, she did not remark that the boy slipped away quietly and quitted the hall, without attracting the attention of any one.

The reader will have the kindness to remember, that, as I have described this hall at first, it might be entered by three different doors; the one communicating with the great staircase by means of a short corridor with deep windows at the south end; another, leading by a separate passage to the apartments of the Count de Liancourt, and to those which Rose d'Albret had formerly occupied; and the third on the western side, giving exit to the walls by the little flying bridge which we have more than once already mentioned. As it was the door on the north by which Rose d'Albret and the count were expected to enter, the eyes of the whole party were turned, from time to time, in that direction; but yet, for more than a quarter of an hour after the Marchioness de Chazeul had entered, no one else appeared, and she herself seemed to be, as probably she really was, somewhat anxious and impatient of the long delay which took place. Every one remarked that her face looked pale, notwithstanding her rouge, and that a sort of sharp and irritable twitching about the muscles of the mouth and nostril displayed itself in a manner which none of them had ever seen before. At the end of that quarter of an hour, she advanced to the table at the farther side of the hall, where various refreshments had been set out, and drank a quantity of water and some wine. Then she sat down, and then she rose again, and then advancing to her son, she whispered, "How long they are! I fear your uncle has been fool enough to let her argue with him, instead of stopping her at once." But, just as she spoke, the door was thrown sharply open, and the Count de Liancourt himself appeared, followed by poor Rose d'Albret. She was as pale as death, and before she entered she paused, and put her hand twice to her head, as if her brain grew giddy; but Monsieur de Liancourt took her by the arm, not quite as gently as might be, and led her into the hall. All parties made way, and formed a circle round the table on which the contract lay, leaving sufficient space for the principal parties to advance and sign the document.

"I am faint," said Rose, as the count hurried on; "give me some water."

"Give her some water, give her some water," cried the count. "Mademoiselle d'Albret is somewhat faint."

Chazeul instantly sprang to the other table, and got a cup of water; but when he brought it, Rose put it aside with a look of disgust, replying, "Not from your hand!" and, seeming to recover strength and courage from the effort, she took a step forward as if towards the table. The notary immediately advanced with the pen in his hand, saying, "The contract has been read, mademoiselle, by your guardian, Monsieur de Liancourt, on your part, and by Monsieur de Chazeul on his own. It is, therefore, doubtless unnecessary to read it over to you yourself, as they are quite satisfied."

"Oh! quite unnecessary," cried the count. "Point out where she is to sign."

"Stay a moment," cried Rose d'Albret; "I told you, sir, before I came hither, that I did not intend to sign this paper; that nothing shall ever induce me to sign it; and my only object in appearing here now was to protest before all these witnesses that I will never be the wife of Nicholas de Chazeul."

Looks of surprise passed round the greater part of the crowd, and many of them whispered to each other, inquiring what would be done next, while Madame de Chazeul stepped forward with a flashing eye and a quivering lip to whisper something to her brother, and Nicholas de Chazeul, stretching out his tall form to its full height, tossed back his head with a look of scornful indignation.

"What says Monsieur de Liancourt?" said the notary, who had received his instructions from the marchioness. "Does he admit of this protest? for the lady, I conceive, must act by her guardian."

"No, I do not admit it," cried the count. "I insist that the marriage goes forward. Is it competent for me to sign on her behalf?"

The notary hesitated. "No," he said, at length; "I think we must have her signature."

"That you shall never have," replied Rose. "I would rather cut off my hand."

"I would pass over ceremonies, sir, if I were you," said the notary, speaking to the count in a low tone. "The lady's hand can be guided over the paper."

"It shall be done," replied the count; and Madame de Chazeul beckoned up one of her men, whispering to her brother, "Do it suddenly, and it will be over before she is aware."

"In the first place," said the notary, "to make it all formally right, we had better inquire whether there be any one who wishes to take act of opposition to the marriage. You are sure of all in the hall, I suppose?"

"The marchioness nodded her head, and the notary proceeded to demand, in a loud voice, if there was any one who had any lawful cause of opposition to the marriage between Nicholas, marquis de Chazeul, and Rose Demoiselle d'Albret.

There was a sudden noise at the other side of the hall even while he was speaking, and a moment after a voice, sweet and melancholy, though clear and firm, exclaimed, "I have!" and, as the crowd broke away, and turned towards the spot whence the sounds issued, Helen de la Tremblade advanced, and stood directly opposite the Marquis de Chazeul and his mother

Chazeul turned first as red as fire, and then as pale as ashes, and the marchioness stood by his side, not with the rage and vehemence which might have been supposed, not with the ready command of resources and the power, as well as the will, to bear down opposition, but with her teeth chattering, her face pale, her lips white, and her limbs trembling.

"I feel ill," she said, "I feel ill. I must have taken the wrong cup. Chazeul, I feel ill."

But none attended to her, for the notary had turned to Helen de la Tremblade, and was inquiring what were the grounds of her opposition, when another voice was heard, exclaiming, "These!" and Father Walter strode forward and took her by the hand, holding forth an open letter: "these are the grounds of her opposition, inasmuch as she is contracted with Monsieur de Chazeul, *par paroles de futur*."

The notary turned and looked to Monsieur de Liancourt, who exclaimed, in a furious tone, "They are all in a conspiracy to stop the marriage. I will have it go forward, as I have sworn."

"You can pass over this objection, sir," said the notary. "If it be at all valid, it must be pleaded hereafter in nullification."

"Well, then, pass it over," exclaimed the count. "Will you sign, Mademoiselle d'Albret?"

"Never!" answered Rose, firmly. "Never! so help me God!"

"Then thus I will make you," cried Monsieur de Liancourt; and, seizing her suddenly by the

wrist, he dragged her forward to the table; and while the man René stood behind to prevent her escape, he placed the pen partly in her hand, partly held it in his own, and was actually running it over the paper before Rose was well aware of what he was doing.

"I protest, in the name of God and the Holy Catholic Church, against this violent and outrageous act," exclaimed Walter de la Tremblade, lifting up his hands to heaven.

"Hold!" cried a voice of thunder at the same moment; and, striding forward through the crowd, a stout short man, with a gray beard and hair, dressed in a plain suit of russet brown, advanced to the table, and struck the pen out of Monsieur de Liancourt's hand, exclaiming, "Hold! hear a word or two first. Parbleu! you make quick work of it!"

The count laid his hand upon his sword, exclaiming, "Who are you, insolent villain?"

"Why, this is that man Chasseron," cried Chazeul. "What have you to do with this affair, sir?"

"Why, Ventre Saint Gris! I oppose the marriage," cried Chasseron, "as the lady's cousin."

"Her cousin!" exclaimed Chazeul, bursting into a scornful laugh. "Who ever heard of you before?"

"That will not do, unless you can prove your relationship," exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, looking to the notary. But that worthy officer was gazing down upon the ground somewhat pale in the face; and Chasseron, in his bluff way, replied, "Will that not do? Pardie, then, this will!" and, drawing his sword, he laid it naked upon the table, and taking up the contract of marriage, tore it to atoms.

Chazeul sprang towards him with fury in his countenance, but the notary darted in between, holding up both his hands, and exclaiming, "The king! the king!"

"The king!" cried Chazeul, staggering back. "The king!" exclaimed Monsieur de Liancourt, gazing upon him.

"The king! the king!" cried many voices in the hall; and at least one half added, "Vive Henri Quatre!"

"Even so, my good friends," said Henry. "Monsieur de Liancourt, you will excuse me for taking such liberties in your chateau. I have been obliged to make it my halting-place this morning, with about a couple of hundred of my friends, who have just been hunting with me in these woods. But we shall all depart before night, and leave you in full possession of your own again, as I came with no hostile intention, but merely to do a little act of justice. And now, my fair cousin," he continued, turning to Rose d'Albret, "you must prepare for a journey to-night, for we intend to take you with us."

"My lord the king," said the Count de Liancourt, assuming a tone of dignity for a last effort, "I have to beg that, whatever you do, you would abstain from meddling with the arrangements of my family."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Henry, "what would the man have? Without, there! send in the captain of the guard and a file of soldiers. Either as a friend or an enemy, Monsieur de Liancourt—either as a good and obedient subject, or a rebel against his king—you shall act which character you please, and I will behave accordingly. In the mean time, sir, this lady is no longer your ward; for, let me tell you, that you have attempted to violate the contract with her father, by means—of which the less we say the better. It shall be my task to carry that contract into execution. Ha! the guard! attach Monsieur de Chazeul for high treason! Ha! what have we got here?" he continued, looking to a spot a little behind the count, where the servants of Madame de Chazeul had placed her in a chair, and gathered round her. "A dead woman, I think! By my life! my old acquaintance, Jacqueline de Chazeul!"

"Good God, my mother!" exclaimed Chazeul, starting forward: but the hand that he took was cold and inanimate, and the poisoned chalice she had prepared for others had worked too certainly upon herself. At first it was supposed she did but faint: but the truth was soon ascertained; and when Chazeul rose from his knee, and turned round to the rest of the party, he beheld what was to him a more painful sight than even that on which he had been just gazing. It was Rose d'Albret in the arms of Louis de Montigni; while Monsieur de Liancourt, with all his assumed firmness gone, was apparently making amends to the king, by courtesy and explanation, for the tone which he had at first assumed towards him. But in another part of the hall stood Helen de la Tremblade, with her hand in that of her uncle, while her eyes were buried on the old man's shoulder; and around, at each door of the hall, and filling up the whole of one side, were seen the scarred and weather-beaten faces of the veteran royalist soldiery, with their white scarfs over their shoulders, and their naked swords in their hand. Chazeul turned again to the form of his dead mother, and then once more bent his eyes on Helen de la Tremblade. "It is the hand of God!" he murmured. "It is the hand of God!" and then, as the captain of the guard advanced to arrest him, he said, "Wait one moment," and strode across the room towards the priest and his niece.

"Helen," he said, in a low tone, "Helen, I have done you wrong. I am ready to make atonement. Will you be my wife?"

"No!" cried Helen, turning round towards him, "no! My fate is fixed. The cloister is the only shelter for one whose heart has been trampled on like mine."

"Nay, nay!" cried Henri Quatre, stepping forward. "Remember, my fair friend, penitence should be always accepted. Were it not so, how should I ever find grace, as I yet hope to do? Nay, suffer me to be the arbitrator. Here, Monsieur de Chazeul," he continued, taking Helen's hand, and placing it in that of the marquis, "take her: and if she have loved you too well already, it is a thousand chances to one that you soon teach her to mend that fault, when you are her husband. However, you shall have fair room to try; for we must not cage so promising a bridegroom. Captain, we shall not want your good offices for the present." The augury of the king was unhappily but too correct; and two years had barely elapsed, when Helen, marchioness of Chazeul, retired forever from the busy world, with the consent of her husband, to the convent of a body of cloistered nuns.

THE END

THE STEP-MOTHER.

A TALE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

'ARABELLA STUART," "ROSE D'ALBRET," "THE FALSE HEIR," "ATTILA,"
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THE STEP-MOTHER.

CHAPTER I.

In a certain county of England, which cannot exactly be called a midland county, because at one point it comes within a few miles of the sea, there is a village, with a somewhat detailed description of which I must trouble the reader; and, moreover, I must beg him, as he proceeds, to mark all the particulars, and to remember them throughout, for in this village and its immediate neighborhood took place the principal incidents of the story about to be told. The scene is narrow, certainly, but very important things are often enacted in a very confined space; and, though amongst the personages to be introduced appear neither kings nor statesmen, yet there are as strong passions moved, and as deep interest affected in private life, as in the movements of parties or governments.

The village, then, is situated upon the slope of a hill, and extending from the top to the bottom. A few houses, indeed, are scattered along the valley, by the side of a river swarming with fine trout; and there, too, in a pleasant and sheltered situation, stands the church, with the clergyman's house, a low-roofed but neat and comfortable residence, at the distance of about a hundred yards from the gate of the churchyard.

Half way up the hill is a white house, with a brass knocker on a mahogany door, and the traveler as he passes by, if he be not shut up in a close carriage, may see, through the left-hand window, ranges of bottles and gallipots upon numerous shelves, and a lad, with an apron before him, pounding in a mortar, or pouring liquids from one bottle into another. Written in letters so large that those who run may read, is inscribed upon a brass plate, "Mr. Nethersole, surgeon, &c."; and very often, before the door, is seen standing a neat one-horse chaise, with a very respectable, plump, and well-conditioned horse figuring in the harness.

At the top of the hill, and at a short distance from the actual village, is a large red-brick dwelling-house, raised upon a bank formed by the cutting of the high road, along the side of which runs the wall of the extensive and well-stocked garden. The mansion has every appearance of comfort and opulence, the windows are numerous and large, the spaces between wide, the chimneys many—indicating at least twenty rooms possessing the advantage of a fire-place—and the state of repair in which the whole is kept is exact and perfect. A high brick wall, with broken glass bottles upon the top—very unpleasant for the hands of urchins possessed with the spirit of appropriating other people's apples—encircles the premises, containing, perhaps, a couple of acres; and in this wall are three different entrances to the grounds: one a small door, reached by a flight of steps up the bank; another at the north side, presenting two large gates and a graveled road; and the third on the side directly opposite to the small door above the bank, and communicating with a path, through some pleasant fields and lanes at the back of the village, which leads down to the church and the rectory. I may add, to render the picture complete, that the garden wall and entrance on the north side is sheltered by a fine grove of tall trees from the bleak air of a wide common beyond.

On the other side of the valley and the river, is another hill, higher, though less abrupt, than that on which the village stands. The thick trees of a park, which lies on that side, hide the face of the ground from the lower part of the village; but the windows of the mansion which we have described, looking over these giants of the forest, give a view of the interior of the park and of a fine old gray building, known in that part of the country as "The Hall."

At the time at which the events I am about to relate took place, the hall was not in the very best state of repair, though by no means dilapidated. The old stones were rather green and mossy; a part of the copings might be seen here and there suffering from the ravages of time; the doors and windows had not been painted for more than thirty years; and the latter, though perfectly sound, were seldom cleaned. It was a large, rambling, irregular edifice, with a vast door and porch in the old style; many curious, ancient halls within; and having, without beauty, a grand and imposing air, from the gravity of its coloring and from its extent. The park, however, and all that it contained—its long winding walks, the lawn before the house, the broad gravel terrace at the back, the gamekeeper's cottage, the kitchen garden, the very wilderness—regular in its irregularity—were kept with the utmost neatness and propriety. The secret of this difference between the appearance of the house and the grounds, was simply this: the proprietor was a nobleman of somewhat singular character, immersed in the politics of the day, passing the greater part of his time in London, and rarely spending more than six weeks in the course of each year at his house in the country. He was reputed to be avaricious, and was certainly haughty. That he was stern and reserved he made sufficiently apparent during his short residences in that neighborhood, never associating with any of the gentlemen around, seldom exchanging a word with any one, and when forced to do so upon business, making his communications as laconic as might be. He was, also, it must be remarked, without wife or child, and never brought any party down with him from London to the

hall. A cook, a *valet de chambre*, a butler, and a footman, together with a personage who performed the offices of both coachman and groom with the occasional variation of a three-cornered hat and a round one, were the only people who accompanied him; and the old housekeeper, with a coeval housemaid, and a girl from the village hired while he was there and discharged when he was gone, were found sufficient to do the work of the house during his stay.

Thus it will be seen why the dwelling, though not suffered to go to decay, was not kept in a high state of repair. The dining-room, the library, and his own bed-room were the only chambers of which he saw much, and the old housekeeper declared that there was many a room in the house which his lordship had not set his foot in for thirty years. He did not, indeed, take much greater heed of the arrangements of the park, though he used apparently to find some pleasure in rambling through the wood-walks with his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent upon the ground; but it is much to be doubted whether he would have discovered any little marks of negligence which might have taken place during his absence, had they been apparent. There was one, however, who took a pride in the neatness and propriety of everything about him; and this was the park-keeper, a blunt, straightforward Englishman, clean and regular in all his habits, doing his duty faithfully and exactly, whether looked after or not, and having no great reverence for any mortal man, so long as he thought he was pleasing God and satisfying his own conscience.

The poor old housekeeper, who was frightened out of her life at her lord, seldom ventured to point out that this or that required repair, and did so, when absolutely necessary, in so low a voice that she was often interrupted by a cry of "Speak out, woman;" but the park-keeper went boldly up to his master whenever anything was wanted, told his story plainly, and generally got what he required. In the management and arrangement of the park, and all that it contained, he took great delight, and often did he say to himself, "If my lord does not choose to live at it, that is his fault; I will keep it fit for him."

The noble owner of the property, however, never rewarded him with any praise of his exertions or any observation upon their success, for, in truth, he never remarked them; coming down, as he called it, for relaxation, and yet bringing all the thoughts and cares of London down with him into the country, so that his mind had no more opportunity of resting upon the things that surrounded him than if he had still been in the capital.

Now, doubtless the reader may imagine that because we have introduced this noble lord before any one else to his notice, and have spoken of himself and his dwelling somewhat at large, we intend to make him one of the principal characters in the story, and introduce him frequently upon the stage; but such is not at all the case. You have seen him, dear reader, and you will never see him again. You may, indeed, hear his name mentioned, but he will never more appear upon the stage. It was necessary, nevertheless, that you should know to whom *that park and* mansion belonged, and what was its state and condition, though in what way any of these particulars affected the course of events about to be detailed, the story itself must show.

The large red house, which, as we have seen, was pitched upon the top of the opposite hill, was possessed by a gentleman as different in every respect from the owner of the hall as it is possible to conceive; and we must go some way back to trace his history before the actual commencement of the tale; for this chapter must be taken as a sort of proem or introduction to what is to follow, in which (notwithstanding the great poet's hint to plunge into the middle of events, and leave the preceding circumstances to be explained afterwards) I wish to gather all that might be cumbersome or difficult in after details. The gentleman of whom I now speak was the son of a lawyer, who had risen to eminence in his profession, and obtained a seat upon the bench. The judge had not died very wealthy, however, and his eldest son followed his father's course, till he was elevated to the office of one of the Barons of the Exchequer; but the second and youngest, whose history we are about to hear, after having pursued a course of liberal education till he was about eighteen, was then placed in the house of a great merchant, and in due time became a partner in the firm. He was well to do when his father died, and the sum which he then shared with his brother made some addition to a fortune already considerable. He was a quiet, unobtrusive, and somewhat timid man, but clear-sighted in most cases, and possessed of a fund of strong good sense, which would have been very serviceable to himself and others, had he not been withal, if not indolent, at all events very fond of peace and tranquillity. He had a great aversion to strong emotions of any kind, loved the ordinary course of business, was as great an enemy to adventurous speculation as the oldest partner in the house, and a great deal more so than the youngest. He did, however, make one bold speculation; and it proved a successful one—he married, and, having chosen well, had every reason to be satisfied. His wife had everything but one to recommend her: she was very handsome, she was a lady by birth, and what is of far more importance, by nature; she had accomplishments enough to make time pass pleasantly, and to bear her full part in interesting and entertaining others; and she had a kind and affectionate heart, as well as a strong sense of all the duties of life. This was everything that he wanted, and though her fortune was very small, he paid no attention to that point. Though a very good-looking man, Mr. Charlton was nearly forty when he committed this act, and his days passed in uninterrupted tranquillity for about ten years, with wealth increasing, a happy home, a cheerful and amiable companion, and one fair daughter, "whom he loved passing well."

But his felicity was to have a turn, and in one week he lost his brother, for whom he had always entertained a deep affection, and his wife, to whom he was bound by all the strongest bonds of the heart. The Baron of the Exchequer had never married, always declaring that he had no time; and consequently his wealth, which was considerable, devolved to his brother. But the disaster which Mr. Charlton had sustained affected him deeply; and, though he

lingered on for about a year and a half in London, he was seized with a great distaste for business, and began to talk of retiring upon the ample means he possessed. Perhaps this design might have passed away had not the younger partners of the house overruled the elder, and entered into a speculation which seemed to the more prudent members of the firm extremely hazardous, and which proved somewhat detrimental, though to no very great extent. It acted, however, in deciding both the gentlemen who had opposed the scheme to retire, which they consequently did, and Mr. Charlton, after having sought through various parts of the country for a house to suit him, pitched his tent upon the top of the hill which, with its dependent village, I have already described.

He carried with him into the country his daughter, all his old servants, many of his old habits, his powdered hair and his pigtail, though a renowned minister had nearly banished powder from society some years before, and royalty itself had set its face against all manner of cues.

His daughter was by this time about ten years of age, and had already received such an education from her mother as to ensure a good foundation for whatever afterwards might be done to improve her mind. She had by inheritance her mother's heart and warm affections; and for two years after their arrival in the country, her father devoted himself entirely to cultivate her understanding, and give her right and just views of everything on which she might be called to exercise her judgment. I have already said that he was a man of strong good sense, and that quality went so far as to teach him his own prevailing fault, though not to correct it. Men of clear minds but of no great decision of character are generally given to analyse scrupulously their own feelings and motives—to examine as with a microscope their own character as an object which they can pause on and contemplate without fear or trouble. The result of their research may be right or wrong, according to their powers of intellect; but the investigation is still going on, and has but this inconvenience, that from that which they discover in themselves, they are apt to judge of the conduct and motives of others. The bolder and firmer analyser of the characters of those who surround him, escapes, perhaps, that error, but is likely to fall into the still greater one of not knowing himself.

Mr. Charlton, however, was of the former class; and in turning his mind inward, like the eyes of the sages of Laputa, he saw and acknowledged that he had too strong an inclination to do many things, in order to save himself trouble and annoyance, which his judgment condemned; and he strove diligently to impress upon his daughter's mind, to judge rightly at first, and to adhere to her decision when once it was formed. He did not fear to render her obstinate or headstrong by such lessons, for her character was naturally gentle and yielding, like that of her mother; and he also guarded it with all care, by showing the necessity of using every power of the mind to insure that the course we choose be the right one. Thus were formed within the bosom of Louisa Charlton certain principles of action which proved her safeguard at an after period, and the good sense of her father turned his very faults to her advantage.

Although the education of his child, the arrangement of his dwelling, the improvement of his grounds, and the various amusements of country life, afforded Mr. Charlton some occupation, and at first filled up his time to his satisfaction, yet after the first little bustle of the change was over, he began to feel lonely and listless. Two great losses were felt in his course of life, business and society. He had no companion—he had no constant employment. When he had quitted London he had felt that every object which he saw around him in his dwelling, recalled the memory of her he had lost; and though it was not forgetfulness he sought, it was to escape having painful remembrances continually forced upon him. Now, however, he would often have given much to have recalled his hasty decision, for though grief subsided gradually, as it does, somewhat too rapidly, indeed, with those who may be termed easy-minded people, he felt the want of the companionship to which he had been accustomed, and the employment which had become natural to him, more and more every hour. He might often be seen walking up and down the longest gravel walk in the garden, with his hands crossed behind him, and his eyes bent sadly upon the ground. Then he would roam out into the country, or take a quiet canter upon his round, short-legged horse, or drive out with his daughter to see some object of interest in the neighborhood; but still at his return he would fall again into listlessness.

The village afforded no society except that of the clergyman of the parish, the surgeon, and the lawyer. The former was an amiable, learned, and thoughtful man, doing all his duties well and zealously; but, having long been accustomed to live almost totally without society himself, he had lost the taste for it, and spent his time either with his books, in the cottages of his inferior parishioners, or in dispensing justice, healing quarrels, and deciding differences, in his capacity as a magistrate. Thus, although he was always very happy to see Mr. Charlton, every now and then returned his visits, dined with him once or twice, and showed a strong prepossession in favor of his daughter, he did little to supply the place of all that the worthy gentleman had lost, or given up.

The surgeon was still less serviceable in this respect; he was a busy little man, clever in his profession, active, bustling, round, fat, and generally dressed in knee breeches and black silk stockings. He was always cheerful, especially when he could rub his hands, and say to a brother practitioner in the neighborhood, "A pretty sprinkling of fever about, Mr. Stubbs;" or when an epidemic cold, or influenza as we should now call it, hurried him rapidly from house to house through the whole of his district; but he was too busy, too small in mind, and too full of rhubarb, magnesia, jalap, and calomel, to be any companion for a man of high intellect and wide information such as Mr. Charlton. He did, indeed, occasionally dissipate half an hour, by bringing him the news of the neighborhood, and sometimes more effectually interested him by introducing to his notice a case of distress, to which the heart and

the purse of the worthy gentleman were always equally open.

The lawyer afforded still less sources of amusement or interest; he was a shrewd, clever, calculating, very silent man; each word that he uttered, and they were very few, was well weighed and pondered, although he had the reputation of occasionally helping his neighbors into disputes, from which it required his own assistance to deliver them; but, nevertheless, whatever he did in this way was well considered, and he seemed on all occasions to ask himself before a sentence was suffered to pass his lips, whether it was actionable. With him Mr. Charlton was often obliged to act in matters of business, but their intercourse went no farther, though the lawyer was always profoundly civil to his wealthy neighbor.

Though there were several other persons, in various ranks of life, living at the distance of a few miles, some of whom I may have occasion to introduce to the reader at an after period, these three formed the only society that the village of Mallington afforded, and the very retired and quiet situation which had been its great attraction in the eyes of Mr. Charlton at first, now proved a source of discomfort to him.

It is not improbable, indeed, that, under these circumstances, he might, sooner or later, have returned to London, and, indeed, he was beginning to argue himself into a belief that the masters which he procured for his daughter from a large town, about seven miles distant, were not so good as could be desired, when an event occurred which changed the whole course of his ideas, and fixed him on the spot where he was. But I must not introduce an important character at the end of the chapter; and the one who is now about to appear, well deserves a clear stage and no favor.

CHAPTER II.

In walking up the village of Mallington, from the rectory towards the mansion which was called Mallington House, we forgot to notice the linen-draper's shop, kept by two maiden sisters, somewhat past their prime, but very respectable women in their way. They were, it is true, rather apt to inquire into and report the affairs of their neighbors; but this must not be attributed to them as any great sin, for, to say truth, the village afforded so few sources of amusement that, as they neither fished, shot, nor hunted, they had very little else to do during, at least, three quarters of their time. The Misses Martin, then, employed a portion of each day in settling the business of every one in the place, and as their tongues were somewhat feared, and they had the reputation of being wealthy, they were courted by their neighbors, invited to take tea at the surgeon's, and held a hand at cards with the solicitor. They were, however, thrifty people, notwithstanding the elevated position they held in the society of the place, served in their own shop, and let the first floor and part of the second, when any one seeking a pure and salubrious air came down to find it at Mallington.

One afternoon, then about two o'clock, in the spring of the third year which Mr. Charlton spent in the country, a post-chaise drove into the village, and stopped at the little public-house—for it could not be called an inn—called the Bagpipes, which had been established from time immemorial at the end of the street nearest the rectory.

The Misses Martin went to the door of their shop and looked out; but they could discover nothing but that a lady in mourning and a boy of about thirteen got out of the vehicle, and entered the place of public entertainment. After they had paused for a minute to see, what more? —they returned into the shady retreat formed by cloths and printed calicoes, and were busily engaged in wondering who the strangers could be, when the lady and the boy walked with a slow and sauntering pace up the street, looking at the houses on each side of the way as they came.

"Lor, Mathilda," cried the eldest Miss Martin, as she saw them pass, "perhaps they are looking for lodgings. Tell Sally to put up the bill."

The younger sister hastened to obey, and then passed out between two pieces of muslin to see the further proceedings of the visitors.

"I declare they have gone into Dixon's," she cried; "the creature keeps her bill up always; but I am sure they will never be contented with that nasty place."

"If they are," said Miss Martin, in the true philosophical spirit of a certain fox who once had to do with the fruit of the vine, "they would not suit us, that's clear."

In about a quarter of an hour, however, the strangers came down the hill again, looking about them as before, and, much to the satisfaction of the two ladies in the shop, they walked in as soon as they perceived the bill. Inquiries were made—the rooms to be let were looked at; no haggling about the price took place, but some additional conveniences were required, and, especially, a fourth room for a servant. All was promised by the Misses Martin that the lady demanded, and the next day she and her son were safely installed in the apartments over the shop, with a private door, *quite to themselves*. A prim and tidy girl was hired to wait upon them till the lady's own servant could come down from London; and several costly articles of dress, with a handsome dressing-case, fitted up with silver, a writing desk to correspond, and numerous applications to know where certain luxuries and conveniences were to be procured, showing habits of expense, if not affluence, convinced the Misses Martin that they had obtained as their tenants a very respectable family indeed.

The lady herself did not look more than two or three and thirty, although she was dressed in the unbecoming garb of widowhood — not, indeed, in deep weeds, for her fine flaxen hair was shown, but in such garments as many a woman feels inclined to wear long after the customs of the country require her to bear about the external signs of her bereavement. She was a very pretty woman, moreover, with bright blue eyes, fine teeth, a good complexion, soft clear skin, a chin somewhat too prominent perhaps, a beautiful hand and arm, and as smart a foot and ankle as ever were seen. She was tall, and

though not absolutely graceful—for real grace depends as much upon the mind as upon the body—yet she was well formed, plump, but not stout, with a very charming fall of the neck and shoulders, and a waist of a mere span. Her son was, as we have said, about twelve or thirteen years of age, with his mother's complexion and features; tall, strong, and active, but with something unpleasant in the expression of his face, which it was difficult to account for. His forehead was, indeed, rather low, the back of the head large, and there was a wild, rash expression about the eyes and mouth, which made the elder Miss Martin somewhat apprehensive of her tables and chairs. In every other respect he was a handsome, good-looking boy; and no sooner was he in the house than out again down to the stream, over the hill, and through the lanes, leaving his mother to arrange their rooms to her own taste, and take the trouble of unpacking the numerous trunks and portmanteaus which had been crowded upon the chaise.

Though the lady herself seemed a little thoughtful as she proceeded with this task, Miss Mathilda Martin, who gave her every assistance in her power—to see what was contained in the packages, remarked that she could occasionally laugh with a gay and merry laugh, as if she had once been possessed with what is called, in vulgar parlance, the spirit of fun, and as if, moreover, that spirit had not yet entirely gone out of her. She acquired also, even before her sister, various pieces of information of which she was desirous, and, amongst them, the name that was engraved upon the boxes, which, as they had been carried up under the lady's own eye, she had not previously been able to discover. There it stared her in the face, every trunk that was opened, "The Hon. Mrs. Latimer," and with this grand intelligence, she hurried down to inform her sister, as soon as she had satisfied her curiosity in other respects.

Now, had Mrs. Latimer lodged at Dixon's, and had the good mistress of the house ventured to attach Honorable to her name, the two Misses Martin would instantly have pronounced the lady an impostor, and asked, with a triumphant sneer, whether lord's daughters ever travelled without a single servant in yellow postchaises, and had but one maid, who was left in London! But Mrs. Latimer was their own lodger; and that made a wonderful difference. She was for the time a part and parcel of themselves; and their importance, the very importance of their lodging, was vastly increased by the Hon. Mrs. Latimer lodging there. They looked forward into futurity; they thought of speaking for many years to all persons viewing the rooms, of their last lodger, "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer;" they even saw a likelihood of mentioning her to their acquaintances, in more familiar conversation, as their friend "the Hon. Mrs. Latimer, who had been spending a few weeks with them."

The self-same night they told it to Mr. Nethersole and to their neighbors, right and left; and when, on the day but one after, the lady herself appeared at church, every body was prepared to open the door of his pew to give her admission; and all declared that she was a very beautiful creature, and looked "quite the lady." She was ushered, however, by the clerk into the rector's pew, which, as he had no wife, and his sister was absent, generally stood vacant. Her demeanor was composed and decorous; she looked little around her, except once, when a man in the gallery began to play upon a hautboy, beginning with a dismal squeak, to lead the congregation in singing; and, to do them justice, they followed him exactly in the same tone. She then turned round with an expression of surprise, but speedily fixed her eyes upon her book with a grave look, and joined the rest, though with more music in her tones than the other members of the choir. Her son did not, indeed, preserve the same decent solemnity, but laughed aloud; and to say truth, through the whole service displayed a sort of indifferent, careless inattention, which would have shocked the good clergyman not a little, but that luckily, both in the pulpit and the reading desk, his back was turned upon his own pew. The next seats, however, were those of Mr. Charlton and his daughter; and the worthy gentleman remarked his young neighbor's want of decorum with displeasure; but as he walked up the hill after church he perceived, well satisfied, that the fair widow, who was just before him, spoke seriously and evidently in a monitory tone to her son, who, for his part, held down his head and said nothing.

About a week after this occurrence, in writing to a friend in London, Mr. Charlton added in a postscript the following words:—"We have had an addition lately to the society of our little village, which, indeed, it much needed: a widow lady who styles herself, or who the people where she lodges style, the Honorable Mrs. Latimer. I have fallen into a sort of acquaintance with her; but before I enter into anything like what people in general call friendship, I would fain know who she is, and something more of her history. See if you can find out, in case you cannot tell me yourself."

An answer to the letter came in the course of a few days, and on this head the writer afforded full information. Mrs. Latimer, he said, if it was the same person he meant, was a young widow, formerly the wife of the Honorable Captain Latimer, who had been a gay reckless young fellow, and had terminated a career of thoughtless folly and extravagance by shooting himself one morning in his dressing-room about two years before.

"She is but poorly provided for, I believe," continued the writer, "for his family disapproved of the match, as she was the daughter of a singing master; and though she has always conducted herself with perfect propriety, they do nothing for her, so that she only has the interest of a younger brother's fortune, sadly shattered as he left it. Frederic Harvey, who has seen her, says she is a monstrous fine woman."

All these particulars roused Mr. Charlton's best feelings in her behalf. He pitied her deeply for the shock and distress which her husband's rash conduct must have inflicted; he felt sympathy for her, and indignation at her husband's family for the harshness with which they had treated a person, who, placed in difficult circumstances, had always acted with perfect propriety; and he compassionated a lady who, prob-

ably accustomed to affluence, and even luxury, had been so suddenly reduced to very inferior circumstances; and he admired her for the equanimity and right feeling with which she bore the reverse, and adapted her style of living to her means.

A passing bow or an occasional word was all that had yet taken place between Mr. Charlton and Mrs. Latimer, but he now walked down to call upon her, with the determination of showing her every attention in his power. The lady received him with grave politeness, thanked him for his civility, and easily smoothed down the first roughnesses of new acquaintance. She talked well and sensibly upon various subjects; never referred in the most remote degree to her own state and station, but spoke a good deal of Miss Charlton, and praised her beauty and grace of demeanor with discrimination and delicacy.

Mr. Charlton went away even better pleased with what he had seen than with what he had heard, felt convinced that the society of such a person would be of great advantage to his daughter, and after some hesitation, determined to ask her to dinner, taking care to invite some of the distant neighbors, who had wives and daughters, to meet the fair widow at his house. To her he bore the important request in person, and prefaced it by some apology in regard to having no lady of the house to receive her.

Mrs. Latimer smiled somewhat sadly, replying, "Oh, my dear sir, when people come to our time of life, and have seen many sorrows, though they may have lost many bright things with youth, yet they have gained freedom from those restraints which youth is wisely, though unwillingly, forced to impose upon itself."

"Our time of life, my dear madam!" said Mr. Charlton, shaking his head, "you must not class yourself with the good old people yet."

"Oh! I am older than I look," replied the lady, "and look, I am afraid, younger than I could wish. But to speak to your invitation, my dear sir. I really seldom go out. Indeed, I have not been anywhere since—since—for a long time, I mean."

"Nay, I will take no denial," rejoined Mr. Charlton, kindly; "and your young gentleman must come up, and amuse himself as well as he can."

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Latimer, thoughtfully; but really—yet, for the boy's sake, I must get rid of such feelings of reluctance."

"Certainly, my dear madam," replied Mr. Charlton; "you have duties which must be performed, and it is far better not to suffer feelings, however natural, however laudable, to interfere with their execution at the commencement. I shall count upon you, then, and will now take my leave."

The day of the dinner arrived. After some of the more distant guests had made their appearance, Mrs. Latimer was announced. She was dressed more plainly than usual; her widow's cap was brought further over her face; her hair was less shown. She was grave, too, and seemed a little agitated; but if such was the case, Mr. Charlton's kindness and good breeding soon put her at her ease, and every-*body showed* her attention and civility, for her worthy host had communicated to those in the room what he had heard regarding the propriety of her conduct, and the sad circumstances in which she was placed. Before dinner and after dinner she showed great fondness for Miss Charlton, talked with her, smiled upon her, and admired in her to her father all those things which Mr. Charlton himself most admired in his child.

In the course of the evening there was some music; several of the young ladies were requested to sing; and one of them, after having done so, inquired if Mrs. Latimer would not favor them in the same way. She answered that she never sang anything but sacred music now; but she was prevailed upon to try a song from some favorite oratorio of the day, and nothing could be more beautiful than the manner in which she executed the task. It was chaste, high-toned, and sweet, without any effort or exuberant ornament, and every one listened, rapt and delighted till it was done, when a murmur of applause spread through the room.

From that day Mrs. Latimer became a great favorite in the neighborhood, and several invitations to dinner immediately followed, but she had chosen her course by this time, and replied, without concealment, that her means were too limited to admit of her going out far for society. In one or two instances, a kindly, though, perhaps, considering the shortness of the acquaintance, not a very delicate spirit prompted the inviters to send their own carriages for her; and in these cases she accepted. She also went out to several other dinner parties to which Miss Charlton was invited, taking a place in Mr. Charlton's carriage; but her principal intimacy was at Mallington House, and circumstances soon arose to make her almost a daily visitor there, as I shall proceed to explain.

CHAPTER III.

It very often happened, during the month or two which followed, that Mr. Charlton, sometimes accompanied by his daughter, sometimes alone, dropped in for half an hour in the morning, to see how Mrs. Latimer and her son were going on; and on more than one occasion the conversation turned upon the education of children, in regard to which the lady seemed to have thought deeply, though, to say the truth, her own offspring did not afford a favorable specimen of her practice. That circumstance, however, was easily and naturally explained by her one morning, when the boy was absent, "I have a hard task before me, my dear sir," she said, speaking of this subject. "Poor Alfred has been so terribly neglected, and so sadly spoiled, that the efforts to restrain him and make him apply are almost too much for me. I long foresaw what would be the result, and foresaw it with fear and trembling, but the will of those who had the best right to speak was, of course, obeyed, and between contending duties I yielded to that which appeared paramount. I did not, indeed, think," she added in a low tone, "that I should be left alone to struggle with the faults encouraged by indulgence I could not counteract."

"Do you not think, my dear madam," asked Mr. Charlton, "that the best plan would be to send him to school?"

Mrs. Latimer shook her head with a rueful smile. "I cannot afford it," she said in a low tone, and then added, a moment or two after, as her words had thrown her worthy visiter into a train of thought, "No, I must be contented to do what I can myself, and for the rest must trust to masters, when I can hear of any good ones."

"There are some very fair masters in the neighborhood," replied Mr. Charlton. "With the exception of music, which he does not want, you will find all that you require. The music-master, indeed, is a very indifferent teacher, and I have on more than one occasion thought of going back to London again, in order to give Louisa better instruction."

Mrs. Latimer turned a shade paler, but the next moment she exclaimed "Oh! Mr. Charlton, I have thought of something that will indeed be delightful. You must let me be your daughter's music-mistress. It will at once be a great pleasure to me, and it will afford me the only means I ever shall have of showing you how deeply grateful I am for all the kindness you have evinced towards me."

Mr. Charlton hesitated and was embarrassed, said he could not think of Mrs. Latimer taking such trouble, and made a number of other apologies; but the lady persisted in her plan, and, as she had no piano at her lodging, it was agreed that she should come up every fine morning to give Louisa Charlton some instruction. Louisa herself was delighted, and every day Mrs. Latimer became a greater favorite both with father and daughter. She was often a companion at their breakfast table; often stayed to dinner. Her son was frequently at Mallington House, and, though by no means much approved of by Mr. Charlton, was tolerated for Mrs. Latimer's sake. She was the greatest resource to that worthy gentleman that could be imagined—his companion, his friend; and he would have been very well inclined that matters should have gone on in the same way to the close of his days, but Mrs. Latimer did not intend that it should be so.

When she had been about nine months in the place, Mr. Charlton observed, with real concern, that she grew graver and more thoughtful than ever; that she seldom smiled, and when she did so it was faintly, and not from the heart. He inquired of himself what could be the matter for some time before he inquired of any one else. But, at length, one day, when he had, during a morning call upon her, remarked that she was more serious than ever, he asked her maid, who opened the door to give him exit—a calm, staid, shrewd-looking woman—if Mrs. Latimer were ill, observing that she looked out of spirits.

"Really, sir, I do not know what is the matter," said the abigail. "I see clearly enough that my mistress is fretting about something, but I cannot tell you what it is. She has had sorrow enough, poor thing, for one so good and so beautiful."

"Pray were you with her when her husband died, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Mr. Charlton.

"Aye, that I was, sir," answered the maid, "and a terrible day, too. He was a wild, rash, violent man, and treated her ill enough. But still he was her husband, sir; and although as to loving him very much, that was not possible, yet the shock nearly killed her."

"Well, pray, Mrs. Windsor," rejoined Mr. Charlton, feeling that it would not be proper to push his inquiries any farther in that quarter, "if you find out that I can be of any service to Mrs. Latimer let me know. You may be perfectly sure I should be delighted to render it."

The maid promised to do so; but nothing resulted from this conversation for some time, and Mrs. Latimer still continued grave and sad. At times, indeed, when walking on the common with Mr. Charlton, or sitting with him alone, a burst of happier feeling would take place. She would give way to some playful sally; appeal to him upon some light matter of taste; discuss the subject with him eagerly; perhaps oppose his opinions at first, but, in the end, yielded invariably, and then would turn her fine blue eyes upon him, and exclaim "The women are not capable of arguing, my dear friend, and I believe we had better never attempt it." Then again, the moment after, she would fall into sad thought again, and at times her eyes would fill with tears.

At length one morning a note arrived from her, at the hour at which she usually appeared, excusing herself for not coming, as she had matters of business which would occupy her all day. A second day she excused herself, a third she had a cold; and Mr. Charlton went down in person to inquire after her. At a little distance from her door he met her son, Alfred, and stopping to shake hands with the boy, naturally expressed a hope that Mrs. Latimer was not seriously indisposed.

"Oh! mamma is well enough," replied Alfred Latimer. "She is only moping. She has been moping these three or four days; but you must not tell her I said so, for she forbade me."

Mr. Charlton went on and rang at her door, nor was he refused admittance. He found her seated reading, and thinking it better to begin upon the subject that he had at heart at once, he said "My dear lady, I have remarked that you have been much out of spirits of late. Now you must not think me intrusive; but, feeling the very sincere regard for you that I do, I may be permitted to say that, as you have no one here with whom to consult, if you require advice or assistance in any way, I should feel it a slight if you did not apply to me!"

Mrs. Latimer colored and seemed a good deal agitated; but after a moment's pause, she pressed Mr. Charlton's hand in her own, saying emphatically, "Thank you! thank you! best and kindest of men. But, alas, I fear that you can give me no assistance, and that your advice in this instance would but confirm the resolution which I have already taken, with bitter regret. Oh! had I had your advice and support, long, long ago, how many sorrows might have been saved me!"

"Well, but take them now," said Mr. Charlton; "and first tell me, my dear madam, what this determination is?"

"I will," replied Mrs. Latimer, "but first you must hear a word or two of preface. Married

very young, partly at my father's persuasion, partly from the giddy thoughtlessness of youth, to a man of whom I shall only say that even then I should not have chosen him, had I had opportunity of selection, or time for thought. I endeavored to do my duty well—indeed I did, Mr. Charlton; nay, more, I tried to make my duty pleasure. The rest I must pass in silence—the memory of the dead is sacred; but I have known little peace in life till I came down here. In this quiet place, and with your kind and beneficial society, I have enjoyed my first happy moments since girlhood; but, alas! now I must leave it."

Mr. Charlton started, as if she had struck him, so completely was the possibility of such an event absent from his thoughts. "But why, Mrs. Latimer! Why?" he exclaimed.

"Because," she replied, "and you will own the reason to be a good one—my means are not equal to living even in the moderate way in which I live here. I have shaped my expenditure by my income; but a sudden claim upon a part of the small property my husband left having started up, even that poor income is diminished."

"Nay, but let me look into the claim on your behalf," said Mr. Charlton; it may not be fair—it may not be just."

"Yes, it is," replied the lady, "I have been forced to become a better woman of business than you give me credit for being. I went into all the details at once about a month ago; I found that it was indubitable—though the lawyers said I might contest the validity of the documents—that the money had been received, and therefore I ordered it to be paid immediately. It is already done; my income is reduced by so much; and I have only to wait till I can receive a sufficient sum to pay a few little bills here, and then, I fear—I must—yes, indeed I must leave you," and Mrs Latimer burst into tears.

Mr. Charlton soothed her kindly and tenderly, and when she was somewhat more composed he said, "Indeed, this shocks and grieves me deeply; and if you would but consider me really in the light which you have often said you do—namely, that of a friend, a sincere true friend—and make use of my purse as if it were your own, till this little storm be passed—"

"Mr. Charlton!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, drawing herself back, as if greatly surprised, "impossible! But no," she added the next moment, "I know you meant it kindly, graciously, nobly—as you do everything. But that is quite impossible. A woman cannot receive money but from a father, or a husband—nay, say not a word more on that score, or I shall think you do not respect me. As to the money, I care not for it. There are countries where I can live at a cheaper rate than here, and I am ready, willing, to live on bread and water—aye, to work for that bread, should need be; but to part with the only people who have been really kind to me—to quit the only spot where I have known tranquillity, is bitter indeed," and Mrs. Latimer wept again.

What Mr. Charlton might have replied at that moment, had he not been interrupted, who can tell! but just as he was about to answer, *Alfred Latimer* burst into the room, laughing at something he had seen or done in the village. The boy was surprised to see his mother in tears, and turned a look quickly, and almost fiercely, upon Mr. Charlton, as if he had been doing something to grieve her.

Mrs. Latimer, however, held out her fair hand to her friend, saying, "Forgive me for thus giving way, and say no more upon the subject at present. We will talk about it more hereafter, when I am calmer."

"Well, then, my dear lady," replied Mr. Charlton, "I shall take it for granted that you will not rashly act in this matter till we have spoken further."

"I will take your advice in all things," answered the lady; "where should I go for counsel, if not to you, my best—I may, indeed, say only friend?"

When Mr. Charlton returned to his own house he found his mind much more perturbed than was ordinary with him, or at all agreeable. That Mrs. Latimer might quit Mallington had never entered his imagination. She had never hinted such an intention; she had seemed so happy, so contented with the place, that he had taken it for granted everything would go on just as it had gone on for an indefinite time, and the idea of losing her society, and being again reduced to the state of listless apathy in which he had been when she arrived, seemed to him a second widowhood. Yet what could he do to prevent such a result? She had reasonable grounds for such a resolution; she was evidently resolved to receive no pecuniary assistance; and, though he might think her a little too scrupulous with so sincere a friend as himself, he honored her scruples too much to strive to shake them. The term, second-widowhood, which he had employed in his own thoughts, ran in his mind. He began to fancy that he should find his time still burdensome to him through life, unless he married again; and the expression which Mrs. Latimer had herself used, saying that a woman could only receive money from a father or a husband, was one of the first things that made him ask himself, if he did marry, who could he so well and wisely wed as herself?"

At first he wished that he were ten years younger; their ages then, he thought, might not have been so out of proportion. As it was, people would only say that he had been caught by the eye, and laugh at the old gentleman for marrying the fair young widow. Yet after all, he recollected that he was not so very aged, as grief and want of occupation, and the dark views they had engendered, made him fancy. He was barely fifty-four; Mrs. Latimer might be thirty-five, or thirty-six, for she had told him that she looked younger than she really was. There was a difference, certainly, of fifteen or sixteen years, but what of that! There was many a more disproportionate match every day; and, let the world say what it would, he was conscious that it was not for beauty, or any ephemeral advantage, that he chose her, but merely for the sake of an amiable and pleasant companion, who had soothed his melancholy, and whose high qualities he knew.

Thus Mr. Charlton went on, diminishing some objections in his own eyes, and boldly meeting others with a flat negative, till dinner time;

and yet he was by no means satisfied, and still less decided. He thought of his former wife—of her he had loved with the fondest affection—who had been the sunshine of his home, the light of his steps, the pride, as well as the darling, of his heart; and when he looked into his own bosom he found nothing like the same feelings there towards Mrs. Latimer that he had experienced towards her. True, it was not to be expected—true, perhaps, it was better not. This ought to be a marriage of reason, whereas the other had been a marriage of love. But then, again, he thought of his daughter; and, why or wherefore he could not tell, his heart misgave him. It was but a prejudice, he fancied. One heard so much of step-mothers, and perhaps they might occasionally act ill, but there must be exceptions—indeed, he had known them himself, and Mrs. Latimer already showed for Louisa almost the affection of a mother.

Yet he was not satisfied; and at dinner he was thoughtful, absent, almost fretful. Towards nine in the evening, as he was trying to turn his mind to other thoughts, with the prudent resolution of sleeping over the matter, and just when Louisa had retired to bed, one of his old servants announced to him that Mrs. Windsor, Mrs. Latimer's maid, desired to see him.

"Show her in, show her in!" cried Mr. Charlton, in some agitation; and when the abigail appeared he exclaimed, "Good evening, Mrs. Windsor, I hope your lady is not ill!"

"No, sir," replied the maid; and then waiting till the door was closed, she added, "but you told me, sir, to inform you if I found out what made my mistress so grave and sad, and as I discovered to-night I thought I would come up and tell you, especially as you are somewhat concerned, sir."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, in some surprise; "how is that, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, sir," answered his companion pausing and thinking for a moment, with a grave and embarrassed look, "it is an unpleasant thing to tell, but yet, as I was saying, I think it is but right that you should know, for I am sure you, who are quite the master of the place, as I may say, will soon put a stop to it."

"If it be anything unpleasant to your mistress, and I have power to do so," replied Mr. Charlton, "I certainly will; but what is it, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Why, sir, it is just this," the maid proceeded, after another hesitating pause—"those two old cats at whose house we lodge, the Miss Martins, are the greatest gossips and scandal-makers in the world, and they can't even keep their tongues off Mrs. Latimer, who never had a word said against her in her life."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Charlton, with a tremulous emotion of the lip, "and pray what can they find to say against her now!"

"Truly, they must needs talk about your coming so often to see her, sir," rejoined Mrs. Windsor, as if with an effort, "and about her coming up here to Miss Charlton, sir—that's what they say; and I have found out that three or four days ago that old tabby, the eldest one, had the face to go up to my lady and speak to her about it, and to say it was not respectable."

"She did, did she!" exclaimed Mr. Charlton, his cheek growing very hot: "well, my good lady, I will soon settle that business!"

"They are cunning old creatures," continued the maid, with a scornful smile, "for they never said a word till they thought Mrs. Latimer was going to leave them, and then they chose to begin. However, sir, I thought it right to let you know, for I never like any one to be spoken ill of behind his back, and to have things put upon him that he never dreamt of—especially a gentleman so kind and good to every one as you are."

"You did very right, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "there's a guinea for you. Do not say anything to Mrs. Latimer about your having seen me. I suppose she did not know you were coming here?"

"Oh! yes, sir," said the maid, "she had told me to take a note to Miss Charlton, which I have given to your man; but she did not know that I was going to speak with you, and, for heaven's sake, don't tell her, sir. She would be so angry."

"No, no, make yourself easy, Mrs. Windsor," replied Mr. Charlton, "I will not betray you; but I will find means to put a stop to their idle gossip, depend upon it, and now good night. I shall call down before luncheon to-morrow."

Thus they parted, and Mr. Charlton walked up and down the room for at least half an hour. A new and powerful motive was given to him for doing as he wished to do; nay, it was better than a motive—it was an excuse. Mrs. Latimer's reputation was affected by his friendship for her, there was no means of removing that evil but one, and Mr. Charlton from that moment determined to put it in her power at least to do so. He was somewhat anxious and nervous upon the subject, indeed. She might take a different view of the matter—she might look upon the difference of age as an insurmountable bar. She might like him very well as a friend, but not think of him as a husband. Yet, when he had retired to rest, and thought over a thousand little traits which he had perceived, he began to hope that he was not altogether so indifferent to her. That she had a great regard for him was evident; that to abandon his society was painful to her she had acknowledged; and he remembered more than once having caught her eyes fixed upon his face with an expression of interest. He was conscious that he was a good-looking man of his age, and now he began to wish that he had not continued to wear powder and a pigtail. That, however, could not now be helped, for he would not venture upon the ridicule of cutting off the latter incumbrance upon the eve of a declaration, and thinking that a sleepless night would not improve his personal appearance, he turned upon his side and courted the drowsy god. As usual in such cases, the god was somewhat slow to come, and Mr. Charlton was up early the next morning refreshing himself with a walk in the garden. At breakfast his daughter sat opposite to him, and entertained him with her young conversation; but every time his eyes turned upon her his heart smote him. However, his resolution was taken, and about eleven away he went to execute it.

He found the fair widow looking, he thought,

more fascinating than ever, and, luckily for his purpose, alone. Her eyes beamed when she saw him; and she held out her soft delicate hand with a smile so enchanting, that Mr. Charlton began to feel emotions of tenderness which carried him on wonderfully after a while, though they interrupted him a little at first.

"You seem busy, my dear Mrs. Latimer," he said, looking at her writing-desk, which was open before her, and at the table covered with papers. "I hope I do not disturb you; but even if I do I must still intrude a little, for I have one or two things to say."

"I was only putting my desk into order for a journey," said Mrs. Latimer, with the smile passing away, and giving place to a look of sadness; "for I see, my excellent friend, it must come to that."

"Nay, I think not," replied Mr. Charlton, seating himself beside her on the little hard-stuffed rosewood sofa of the lodging. "I think not," he repeated, "unless, indeed, you be very resolute to go. There is such a thing, my dear lady, as a choice of evils in this world, and I am going to put such an alternative before you. You have expressed great unwillingness to go from Mallington, and I believe you to be quite sincere, for where one is loved and esteemed, there one generally finds some sort of pleasure. You have, also, been kind enough to say that the loss of my daughter's and my own society had no slight part in causing your unwillingness."

"A part, my kind friend, so great, that the alternative you propose would be a very painful one indeed if I did not choose it to avoid such grief. For yourself, I can only say that you have acted towards me a part that has ever made me look upon you as an elder brother."

"Well, my dear madam," said Mr. Charlton, "I tell you the alternative is but one of two evils: it is for you to judge which is the greater. I wish you, then, to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and to come to mine."

Mrs. Latimer looked all amazement; but Mr. Charlton proceeded with more calmness than he had himself expected—"This, my sweet friend, can but be done at the expense of a great sacrifice. To render it right—to render it possible, I may say—you must consent to give your hand to a man much older than yourself, and to make him happy at the expense, perhaps, of some regrets."

Mrs. Latimer pressed her hand upon her heart as if its beating were too much for her; and then, bending down her head, she hid her eyes in her handkerchief and wept.

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Charlton, taking her hand somewhat alarmed, "I did not intend to grieve you."

"Grieve me! grieve me!" cried Mrs. Latimer, raising her beautiful eyes swimming with tears, but with a smile upon her lips. "Oh! my noble and generous friend, you know not what I feel;" and she placed her other hand in his also. "But I cannot suffer you," she said, after a start. "No! I cannot suffer you to make such a sacrifice yourself. You know that I am poor; but you do not know how poor, my good friend. Debts I have none, but at this *moment I have* less than one hundred per annum. You can, you ought to look for a wife far better endowed than I am. Still in the prime of life, with large fortune, and everything to make a woman happy, you have every right to expect—"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Mr. Charlton, interrupting her, "I will not hear another word upon such subjects. If you can feel that you will be happy with me, if you will be a mother to my daughter and a companion to myself, the journey from Mallington is at an end."

"For ever!" said Mrs. Latimer, leaning her head upon his shoulder. "Oh!" she murmured in a soft tone, "Oh! that I had known you earlier in life, as I said the other day, what misery it would have saved me. But how rarely is it that one meet in early years the only person who can make one happy."

We have, however, intruded somewhat too far upon scenes that are generally private, and we must therefore leave Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton alone to settle all about the marriage without our presence. We have not been the only ones, however, dear readers, who overheard that tender conversation. Ah no! Miss Mathilda Martin, having first ascertained that Mrs. Windsor had gone out as soon as she had let Mr. Charlton in, was upon the stairs close to the door—so close, indeed, that sometimes her ear, sometimes her eye very nearly touched the keyhold. Fie, Miss Mathilda; surely you are not listening! So it was however that after a certain time Miss Mathilda descended to the shop, with a cheek highly colored, and an eye full of excitement. "Oh! yes indeed," she said to her sister, "it is just so! quite as we thought. Dont't say a word, Winifred. I heard it with my own ears. He is now going to forget all decency and to keep her up at his own house. I heard him, I can assure you. He said these very words 'I wish you to stay at Mallington—to change your present residence, and to come to mine.'"

The reader will perceive that Miss Mathilda, as many other persons do, had listened no longer, and for no better object, than to confirm her preconceived opinions.

"And what did she say?" cried Miss Martin, eagerly. "Will she go?"

"Oh, to be sure!" replied Mathilda, "no doubt of it. There were plenty of 'dear friends' and 'sweet friends' going, I can assure you. Ah! the nasty old man, how I hate him."

"She's the worst of the two," answered her sister; "a trumpery minx, with her high airs. Why, she never once asked us to take a cup of tea; as if we were dirt. I should not wonder if she were no widow at all, but just some cast-off, with her boy."

Mrs. Latimer was evidently lost in the opinion of the two Misses Martin; and after having thus discussed the mistress, they proceeded to assail the maid. Of her they said what was true enough, that she was an artful jade; for though they had not exactly hit upon Mrs. Latimer's real faults, she being, perhaps, the last person on earth to be misled by any man, young or old, yet their closer observation of good Mrs. Windsor had given them a good insight into her character. As they were in progress, however, they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of good Dr. Western, the rector, who, after

ordering a few articles of clothing for some of his poor, went on to ask if Mrs. Latimer was at home.

"Oh, dear yes, sir," said Miss Martin, she has got Mr. Charlton with her, as usual, sir."

"She is soon going to quit, however," added Mathilda, "and I cannot say I am sorry."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, with considerable surprise, "may I ask why? Mrs. Latimer is a very respectable person, though not rich, and I trust that you have too much good sense and good feeling, Miss Martin, to value any one merely as they may be wealthy."

"Ay, but is she so respectable, doctor?" asked Miss Martin, with a significant look.

"I have the best assurance that she is so," replied Dr. Western. "I will add something more, my good lady. Knowing the propensity of all small places to deal uncharitably with the characters of strangers, and having last week heard something that did not please me of reports set about respecting this lady, I took the trouble of writing for information, and find, as I supposed, that those reports are without foundation, and that she is in every respect what she seems; in a word, one who has acted through life with perfect propriety, even though placed in very painful and difficult situations. I trust, therefore, that we shall hear no more of this, for it is neither Christian nor generous."

Dr. Western, who had purposely given the Misses Martin an opportunity of drawing this reproof upon their own heads, then proceeded to pay his intented visit to Mrs. Latimer; and it was remarked by the ladies of the shop that he and Mr. Charlton walked out and proceeded down the street together.

A vague rumor, in the course of the subsequent week, spread through the village that Mrs. Latimer was not long to be Mrs. Latimer. Louisa Charlton, or Mr. Charlton, was always with her; the carriages of neighboring gentry were frequently at her door; semptresses and dressmakers were busily employed; and the Misses Martin, beginning to find that they had made a very great mistake, were her most humble servants, fawning egregiously on even Mrs. Windsor, and declaring that "Dear Mrs. Latimer was certainly one of the sweetest creatures that ever was seen."

Dear Mrs. Latimer, however, did not forget them; she was perfectly civil, indeed; but she bided her time.

At length, one Saturday night an elderly gentleman, who was reported to be an army agent, came down to Mallington, spent the evening with Mrs. Latimer and Mr. Charlton, and took a bed at the house of the latter. The next day the lady appeared at the church divested of her weeds; and on the Tuesday following, at an early hour, the widower and the widow stood together before the altar, to be made man and wife. The army agent, who had been a friend of her former husband, acted as father upon the present occasion; a small party of the country neighbors were witnesses to the ceremony. Louisa Charlton and Alfred Latimer were invited to spend a few days with a friend who lived about seven miles from Mallington, and Mr. Charlton and his fair bride set out upon a tour into Warwickshire.

CHAPTER IV.

Christopher Columbus was a great discoverer, as the reader is undoubtedly aware; but he never made half the discoveries that Mr. Charlton did within one year from the time that Mrs. Latimer gave him her hand at the altar. Not that she behaved ill to him; for, on the contrary, she redoubled her affectionate manner, and exerted herself to be more enchanting than ever; soothed, flattered, fondled him. But Mr. Charlton had now nearer means of observation, and he was naturally a clear-sighted man. He was as fond of her as ever—he would not have lost her society for the world; but he was neither old enough nor young enough to be blind to all the little traits of character which presented themselves in his fair wife; and all these traits tended to show that Mrs. Charlton was one of those ladies who never act without an object. She calculated her game with the most precise and definite computation, and worked boldly towards the result which she wished to arrive at by the means she thought most likely to attain it. From her earliest years she had been taught to consider her own interests in the first place, and had willingly seconded her father in ensnaring the son of a noble family into a connection which all his friends disapproved. His first object was to seduce her, but though not without strong passions, they were not of that character which were likely to make her fall a sacrifice to the designs of any man. She could hate heartily, but love was not one of her weaknesses; and thus she skillfully led him on to make her his wife as the only means of possessing her. His fortune, never very great, she aided to impair, for she had tastes and habits as expensive as his own; and as he was of a violent and irritable disposition, and she had no object in soothing him, the coolness with which she listened to the details of his difficulties, and the little care she displayed in extricating him from them, often drove him into fits of passion, which produced scenes that caused all but very close observers to pity the sweet creature his wife very much. She had an admirable art too, of always putting him in the wrong; and as she was certainly ill-treated—for he was known more than once to strike her—and as she resisted, without any effort, many an attempt to seduce her from the right path made by that husband's dissolute associates, the world in general gave her credit for forbearance only equal to her virtue. Thus had passed her younger days, till at length, in a fit of rage and despair, Captain Latimer lost the use of his reason, and raised his hand against his own life.

Mrs. Latimer had then, as we have seen, set up the interesting young widow, and had visited various parts of England in that capacity before she touched upon Mallington. At the latter place, she only proposed at first to look about her for a month; and finding there a clergyman apparently well to do, and a single man, her first thought was that perhaps, in course of time, she might become Mrs. Western. Perceiving very soon, however that Dr Western was not very accessible, and learning that the large house at the top of the hill belonged to a widower of great wealth, she deter-

mined to change her plan, in as much as a campaign against the heart of Mr. Charlton seemed open to more easy tactics, and because the object to be gained was greater. Affluence and ease, carriages, horses, servants, were things that Mrs. Latimer liked very much, and it was well worth a little study and art to obtain such advantages. The disposition of Mr. Charlton was easily read—Mrs. Latimer shaped her conduct accordingly; her maid, Mrs. Windsor, without any full explanation being necessary between mistress and servant, seconded her skillfully; and the result has been already seen by the reader.

It is an invariable rule, however, which often tends to bring down retribution on the head of deceivers, that we undervalue the good sense of people whom we have once taken in. Never cheat any one, dear reader; for depend upon it you will think him a fool ever after, till perchance he cheats you in return. Now, Mrs. Latimer, or, as we must henceforth call her, Mrs. Charlton, did undervalue the good sense of her second husband. She only recollected the result, that she had deceived him into thinking her all he wished, and she forgot the art she had displayed in making him think so. She forgot, also, that she was now placed before his eyes in the microscope of matrimony, and she did not exactly guard all her sayings and doings with that scrupulous care which would have been necessary to keep up the illusion. One great object was gained—she was his wife—and she thought she might have a little repose. She had another great object, it is true; to induce him to leave her at his death a large share of his fortune; but she trusted to habit and natural tenderness, and her own skill in pleasing, to obtain that very satisfactory result. Mr. Charlton had, indeed, settled upon her, previous to their marriage, an annual sum sufficient for her maintenance as his widow, in case of his decease, but Mrs. Latimer had, on various accounts, not exacted as large a jointure as, perhaps, she might have obtained had she, to use an angler's term, "played her fish" after she had hooked him. But two causes prevented her doing so; in the first place, the character she had assumed, and which it was necessary to keep up, was repugnant to such a course; and in the next, she was naturally of an impatient disposition, and eager to enjoy the fair prospect before her. Thus, though she delicately hinted to her friend the army agent that some settlement might be necessary, yet she left the matter entirely in his hands; and he, for his part, thought the proposal of Mr. Charlton on that score very liberal.

After a bridal tour of somewhat more than a month, Mr. and Mrs. Charlton returned to Mallington house; and the lady's taste for expense and display began to show itself. Her husband, however, did not object; he could well afford it, and, indeed, had somewhat reproached himself in days gone by with living too far within his income, solely from not knowing how to spend it reasonably. His former wife had no such habits, indeed, and the contrast struck him not altogether pleasantly; but he said nothing, and only insured that his expenses should be kept within due bounds. Then Mrs. Charlton thought it right to see the trade of the village improved by the establishment of a rival shop, in opposition to the Misses Martin. Encouragement was given to a speculative tradesman of the neighboring town to break in upon the monopoly so long enjoyed by those ladies, and as he had all Mrs. Charlton's custom, and her strongest recommendation, besides smart new articles, which had never been seen in Mallington before, the old shop was soon neglected, the dull-colored prints and muslins hung unpurchased in the windows, and the Misses Martin, growing every day sourer and more sour, rued the hour when they had put up the bill of lodgings which had caught the widow's eye, and mentally gave her over to ruin and condemnation.

Neither of this did Mr. Charlton wholly approve, but his fair wife took care to conceal the animus of this proceeding from his eyes, and he was, therefore, obliged to content himself with her notions of free trade and anti-monopoly. One thing, however, did annoy him; he had forgotten that, in marrying the widow, he ran a great risk of marrying her son too, and Alfred Latimer soon gave him cause to repent of having done so. He proved a wild, capricious, rash, unfeeling boy, and it became evident very speedily, that his spoiling had not been entirely on his father's part. He was very ignorant, very arrogant; and, with none of those principles which, implanted in very early youth, prove sooner or later the correctors of follies and the tamers of passions, he seemed to have no idea but of indulgence and amusement.

After having given way for about six months, Mr. Charlton, moved by a sense of duty to the boy himself, shook off his desire of ease and tranquillity, and represented to his wife the absolute necessity of sending him to school. He proposed Eton, and offered to provide liberally for his expenses there, saying that of course he looked upon her son nearly in the light of his own. But Mrs. Charlton was in despair at the idea; she showed in feeling terms that he had been so long brought up at home that the change to a public school would be more severe and trying to him than to other lads; and all that her husband could obtain by his most reasonable arguments was, that he should be sent to a private school some fifteen miles off, where she might be at hand herself to watch over him.

Not long after this Mrs. Charlton hinted to her husband that it might be better if their dear Louisa were sent to a finishing school in London. She suggested that it would give a polish to her manners, a tone, a style to her appearance and demeanor that never could be acquired in country society; that all the accomplishments which she possessed wanted the perfecting touch of the first masters, and that it was good for all young people to see a little of the world before they had to play an active part in it.

Mr. Charlton heard her to an end with perfect composure, but then replied gravely, but not unkindly, "No, my dear. She never sets her foot in a school."

He said no more at first, and Mrs. Charlton was inclined to argue the point; but he stopped her abruptly, adding, "Her mother was never at a school; she had a great abhorrence of

them. I promised her that Louisa never should be sent to one, and that promise I will keep."

Mrs. Charlton burst into tears, and Mr. Charlton quitted the room.

She found that she had injured herself, however; and hastened to retrieve her false move by renewed kindness to her step-daughter, towards whom, to say sooth, she had somewhat cooled since her marriage; but she did not love Louisa the more for being the subject of her first dispute with her husband. In manner she was sweet and gentle to Louisa Charlton, always calling her either My love, or My dear Louisa; but there were many small traits which showed to Louisa herself, and, what was of still greater importance, to Mr. Charlton also, that there was little sincere affection. Often in a kindly tone, and with numerous professions of regard and assurances that she did it for the child's own good, she would reprove Louisa for one little act or another, and lecture her upon her conduct and demeanor. She affected to think that it was her duty to do so, and therefore did it before her husband; but Mr. Charlton was very keen-sighted in regard to his child, and the first question which he asked himself was, whether the censure was just, before he inquired whether his new wife was only actuated by a sense of duty or by some other motive. He generally found reason to think, however, that Louisa was in the right; for though she made no defence, and bore all meekly, yet she had an advocate in her father's heart, and a judge in his sense of justice which did her right, contrary to Mrs. Charlton's expectations. That lady, indeed, only strove to produce an unfavorable impression on her husband of his daughter's conduct and character; but she was not at all aware that Mr. Charlton was silently, and in his own mind, trying them both, and generally giving judgment against her. She did not at all understand at first, and, indeed, never fully understood, the exact nature of his love of quiet and his abhorrence of discussions. She often thought that she had gained her point, and produced the result she intended, because he said nothing. She fancied he did not see and comprehend, because he did not oppose or reprove; but, in truth, Mr. Charlton was always analyzing and forming his estimate by the accumulation of facts which he observed. Thus, on one or two occasions when his quietness had induced Mrs. Charlton to go on to a point where he felt it his duty to oppose decidedly what he thought wrong, and some little dispute took place in consequence, Mrs. Charlton believed that it would all be soon forgotten; but she deceived herself. It was a new page written in her history—a fresh line in the portrait which her husband was constantly drawing in his own mind.

These occurrences were more frequent when her son was at home during the holidays than at other times; for his wild rash spirit, his obstinacy and selfishness, were constant sources of annoyance to Mr. Charlton, and were as constantly defended, palliated, or concealed by the mother. Sometimes, too, in spite of all her skill and self-command, the strong and violent passions which were in her bosom would burst forth with a vindictive fire, which startled and alarmed her husband. Thus, one day, about a year after their marriage, the boy was brought in by the head gardener (who had often complained of the destruction he committed in the garden) for a more unpardonable offence. The man appeared in the hall, where the young gentleman's mother was then standing, holding him firmly by the collar, notwithstanding his kicking, struggling, and biting; and he at once informed the lady that Master Alfred had that moment destroyed the whole melon beds, and broken the glasses of the frames, in revenge for having been prevented from knocking off the blossoms of a fruit tree with a switch. The man spoke calmly and respectfully; but the boy, furious with passion, accused him of striking and maltreating him, and soon made his mother a participator in his anger. The idea of her son dragged in by the collar by a simple gardener was enough to excite her indignation; and ordering the man to quit his hold immediately, without making any answer to his complaint, she took her son by the hand, and, with raised color and flashing eyes, sought Mr. Charlton in the library. Trying to subdue her voice to some degree of calmness, she demanded that Blackmore, the gardener, should be immediately dismissed, for daring to strike poor Alfred, for some of his little follies in the garden; and she proceeded to make out as aggravated a case against the man as possible.

Mr. Charlton heard her calmly, but with his eye resting more firmly on her flushed cheek than was pleasant to her, and then called the boy to him, saying, "Come hither, Alfred, and tell me how all this has happened. But, before you speak, remember I must have the exact truth, which, I am sorry to say, you do not always give. Now, what occurred between you and Blackmore?"

The boy went on, detailed the circumstances according to his own version, admitted with apparent frankness that he had been switching the blossoms on the wall, but declared that the man had taken the stick from him, and struck him with it, and that it was in running away from him that he had jumped upon the melon beds and broken the frames. The story was not well arranged, for a very short investigation would have shown that three frames had been destroyed, with all the wanton fury of passion; but Mr. Charlton made no investigation, and remained silent for a minute after the boy's tale, broken by tears of rage, had come to an end.

"Well, my dear," cried Mrs. Charlton, impatiently, "have I not a right to demand that he be discharged immediately?"

"No, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "he cannot be discharged."

"And pray why not, Mr. Charlton?" asked his wife.

"Because, my dear," was the answer, "Alfred has told a most gross and shameful falsehood. I was standing at the window at the time, and saw the whole affair. If you will follow my advice, you will send Alfred back to school this very day, as a punishment for the lie he has told, and the bad spirit he has displayed. As to discharging Blackmore for simply doing his duty, that is out of the question."

Mrs. Charlton made no answer, but it was a terrible struggle between prudence and passion.

She burst into tears, however, and, taking her son by the hand, quitted the room. There was another line drawn in her picture; and a darker one still was to come. Blackmore remained for about two months more in the service of his old master, and then gave warning. Mr. Charlton asked no explanation, and the man offered none; but the former was well aware that the place had been made too uncomfortable for the man to remain in it.

Although Louisa Charlton had not sufficient knowledge of the human heart to analyze and examine as her father did, yet she *felt* the character of her step-mother, if I may use the term. She knew that she was not loved by her, and that her tenderest tones and sweetest terms were not real. She avoided her as much as possible, then, and Mrs. Charlton was very glad of it; for she was, somewhat too apparently, anxious to be free from Louisa's society. If she were going out to drive or to walk she always contrived to believe that "the dear child" was busy about something—that she had this to study or that to do. But Mr. Charlton, in his quiet way, soon put a moral restraint upon her in these respects. When such excuses for not taking his daughter were made, he remained at home, saying he would wait till she had done and then walk with her. This was a course which his fair wife did not at all approve of, as by that means the daughter became her husband's companion, not herself; and when she found that it was systematically pursued she altered her conduct, not without some apprehension of having made another false move.

Louisa was always gentle, and kind and affectionate, and treated her father's wife with perfect respect; but even that Mrs. Charlton did not like, for she would fain have discovered something substantial to find fault with. As the sweet girl grew up, however, and displayed promises of great beauty, Mrs. Charlton thought of a change of plans; and in her own mind laid out a scheme for uniting Louisa to her son—thus securing possession of the whole of Mr. Charlton's wealth. The great obstacle, indeed, was the boy's own disposition, of which she well knew neither father nor daughter approved; and from that moment she strove eagerly with the lad—not to make him amend, but rather conceal his faults. Advice, exhortations, reproaches, were all employed in vain, and her own indulgence tended to frustrate her object. Each day as he advanced in life Alfred Latimer showed himself more headstrong and wild, and a taste for low society began to display itself when at home; for the quiet cheerfulness of Mr. Charlton, and even the gayer gentleness of Louisa, were not at all to his taste. Towards the latter, indeed, he showed some affection of a particular kind; but even after they had become the young man and the young woman it never assumed the character of love. It was, in a degree, that of a brother for a sister, by which name, indeed, he always called her, in spite of all Mrs. Charlton could say; but it was less strong, less elevated. At times he would be angry and sullen with her for days together; at others would forget her entirely in his own pursuits; at others would tease and give her pain. But whenever he was in trouble or distress, he would fly to her, even in preference to his mother; and often, by her advice, assistance, or intercession, she would extricate him from the difficulties that his own faults and follies had brought upon him. Louisa, who was gentle and kind to all, was so to Alfred Latimer especially; but it was only because he was the son of her father's wife. She approved neither his character nor his conduct; she disliked his society; she shrank from his conversation, except when he sought her for counsel or aid; and the more she saw of him, the more unworthy she thought him, till she learned at length to regard him with something like fear, though it was more fear for himself, and for the follies and evils he might commit, than for the annoyance he might bring upon her.

I have said above that Mrs. Charlton was not pleased at his giving Louisa the name of sister; and the reason was, that she wished to bring Mr. Charlton and Louisa herself to look upon him in a very different light. She strove for this object gradually, however, shutting her eyes to all the many motives which could make her husband reject such a son-in-law. She endeavored to persuade him that all Alfred's faults would pass away in time, that they were but errors of youth and over indulgence; that the world and the weight of high duties would keep down his too high spirits and warm passions; and she attempted to rouse pride in favor of the alliance she had in view, by casually speaking at different times of the probability—which she represented as great—of her son succeeding to the title and estates of his cousin, whom she declared to be a sickly and feeble youth, not likely to see maturity.

Mr. Charlton had by this time gained deep insights, and he heard her without any marked reply, waiting to discover her object; for he now knew that she always had one. At length one evening when Louisa had gone to bed, and she and her husband were sitting alone, Mrs. Charlton, as he seemed in a cheerful and yielding humor, ventured to say, "I know not what you feel, my dear; but if I could see my poor boy united to a woman who would guide him aright; and, by occupying all his affections, give him those high objects which I am sure are all that is wanting to correct his errors, I should think the great end of life attained."

"I fear such a one would be difficult to find, Emily," replied Mr. Charlton; "and for her sake, poor thing, if ever he is destined to meet with such a one, it would be better to let his passions be broken by the hard struggle of the world, or tamed by their own excess."

"Such a one is our dear Louisa," said Mrs. Charlton, in a hesitating tone.

"She is certainly one to make any man happy," replied her father, gravely, "but she is out of the question, and her like is not easily found."

"But why is she out of the question?" asked Mrs. Charlton, a little irritated. "Suppose they loved each other."

"That cannot be supposed," said Mr. Charlton. "They are brother and sister, indeed, and may love each other as such, but my curse would follow any other tie between them."

He spoke in a tone that the lady had never heard him use before, and, as he did so, he rose as if to put an end to the conversation.

The next morning her husband was up somewhat earlier than usual, and went down into the village before breakfast. He had not been long gone, however, before one of the lawyer's clerks came up to ask for a memorandum book which Mr. Charlton had left in his library. The servant could not find it, and applied to his mistress, who was now making breakfast. At first she told Louisa to go and look, but the moment after a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she exclaimed "No; I know where it is. I will go."

She did, and found the book; but before she gave it to the man, who was waiting, she unclasped it, and looked at the first page, as if to see that it was the right one. Her eye instantly lighted upon the words "Mem. for will: —If, contrary to my express commands, Louisa should by any chance marry A. L., everything to go to next heir."

Mrs. Charlton restrained herself with pain while she handed the book to the man; but the moment he was gone she gave way to a burst of indescribable rage. Her pretty features became animated with the expression of a demon, and in her wrath she threw off the table and broke to pieces an inkstand which she knew her husband valued greatly. It had belonged to his first wife. When she returned to the breakfast room she was still under the influence of the same feelings; she scolded the servants, she spoke angrily to Louisa, she fell into fits of sombre thought; but the moment Mr. Charlton's step sounded in the hall, she was changed as if by enchantment. Her sweet smile came back like sunshine returning to a stormy sky, and she was all grace and gentleness when he seated himself at the breakfast table.

She saw that her object was hopeless from that moment, however; and all that remained was to secure herself as large a share of Mr. Charlton's property as possible. For that purpose she redoubled all her efforts, and the next three or four years passed in very skilful, but very ineffectual manœuvres. Mr. Charlton's eyes were open; and he was not to be deceived any more. He well knew that to secure peace and tranquillity, and to induce his wife to behave with tenderness to his child, it was necessary to appear blind to everything but any unkindness towards her; and he did appear so. Mrs. Charlton soon found that to show unkindness, or even coldness to Louisa, was to injure herself; and, therefore, before her husband she was as gentle as a lamb, though often at other moments she ventured upon an insinuation, or a taunt which wounded deeply a heart very susceptible of, and accustomed to, kindness. Louisa complained not, however, for she knew that to do so would be to embitter the life of her father; but neither in this was Mr. Charlton blinded; for he often remarked, when he joined his wife and daughter, that the latter was very grave, and he attributed a mood not natural to her to its right cause.

To escape from conversation that was painful to her, and from thoughts that were painful also, Louisa Charlton often would walk down to the rectory, where good Dr. Western, and a widowed sister, of nearly his own age, who now lived with him, offered her society, if not cheerful, serene, and if not amusing, instructive. She joined in all their works of charity towards the poor of the neighborhood, and contributed with a liberal hand to relieve many a case of urgent and unmerited distress; for she was nearly eighteen years of age, and her father took care that an allowance proportioned to the fortune she was to inherit should be placed at her own disposal. Mrs. Charlton was always glad to see her go; and generally, when a reason was thus afforded for not taking her with them, hurried Mr. Charlton to distant visits, or to parties of pleasure which did not always agree very well with his somewhat failing health. He was now above sixty years of age, and his originally strong constitution and regular habits might have seemed to promise a green old age; but there was something preyed upon him. Perhaps it was regret, not unmingled with self-reproach; and if so, it was natural that the restraint he put upon his own feelings to prevent their ever appearing in the eyes of either his wife or daughter, should aggravate the sufferings inflicted by a consciousness of having acted weakly.

Alfred Latimer was now frequently absent; for Mrs. Charlton had found it necessary, for the success of her own plans, to prevent the follies and vices, which were becoming more conspicuous as he grew towards manhood, from being obtruded upon the eyes of her husband; and he had been placed under the care of a clergyman at some distance, to prepare him for college. But his stay there did not tend in any great degree to improve his disposition, for the tutor was an indolent man, with whom he might study if he pleased, or remain idle if he liked; and, as the reader may well suppose, he showed strongly his affection for "the mother of vice."

Louisa had commenced her nineteenth year, and her birth-day had been celebrated with affectionate joy by Mr. Charlton, when the morning after, as he was rising from his chair, he fell back insensible. The surgeon, Mr. Nethersole, was sent for in haste, and by copious bleeding relieved him for the time; but he remained ill for some months, and never fully recovered his health. Alfred Latimer was at Mallington at the time, and remained there while his step-father was obliged to keep his room, wandering about the country, no one knew whither, coming home late at night; and making constant demands upon his mother's purse. One day, however, Edmonds, the park-keeper of Lord Mallington, appeared at Mallington House, and demanded to speak with Mrs. Charlton. He was shown into her presence, and, in his usual bluff and straightforward manner, proceeded to inform her that her son had been seen on the preceding night in the preserves of the earl.

"He had two other young fellows with him, madam," he continued, "and I dare say the young gentleman only did it for a spree; but there were guns fired and pheasants killed, that is certain. Now I thought it best to come and tell you, madam; for these fellows he was with are not fit company for him, and will get him into mischief; and as he has been always very civil to our people when he has called in at the cottage, I thought it a pity to see him go on so."

Mrs. Charlton was really shocked and alarmed, for she had previously entertained no idea of the length to which her son's taste for low society had been carried. She thanked the man sincerely, then, for his warning, and in order to break through such dangerous connections, as well as to remove him before Mr. Charlton was well enough to come down and resume his usual habits, she acted with more firmness than usual where Alfred was concerned, and sent him back to his tutor's with the most serious admonition she had ever bestowed upon him in her life. He might perhaps have resisted, for he seldom showed any great reverence for his mother's authority, but the fact of having been discovered by the gamekeepers frightened him, and he obeyed.

At the end of about a month after his departure, Mr. Charlton had sufficiently recovered to go out and walk about the village and the neighborhood, as he had been accustomed to do, and his daughter Louisa was now his constant companion; for Mrs. Charlton, who had got into habits of great self-indulgence, had, by this time, grown marvellously stout and heavy, and loved the exercise in her carriage better than on foot. His conversation was now generally serious, and sometimes sad; and he often referred to the probability of his death taking place at no very distant period.

"I speak thus," my dear Louisa, he said one day, "because I would have you prepare your mind for such an event, as mine is prepared. I know how terribly the loss of one we love comes upon those who have never looked forward to it; and after such a fit of apoplexy as I have had, one always lives with a drawn sword hung over one, which may fall at any moment."

Louisa wiped some drops from her eyes, but only replied, "There is one favor I have to ask, my dear father, which is this: whenever you are ill again, do not let me be kept out of your room. You know that I will be quiet and not disturb you, and the anxiety and pain of being absent from you, and not knowing really and truly how you are is too terrible," and poor Louisa wept.

"Were you kept out when I was ill lately?" asked Mr. Charlton gravely.

"Yes, my dear father," replied Louisa, "several times. I was told, when I came, that you did not wish to be disturbed, that you would rather not see me then—as if I would have disturbed you, when I would sit by your bedside for hours, without noise or movement, if they would let me; I can bear anything but to be kept from you."

"You shall not, my sweet child!" said Mr. Charlton. "I thought there was something of the kind, from not seeing you so often as I wished for. But I understand it all, and it shall not occur again."

Whether the attempt might or not have been made to exclude the child once more from the bedside of her sick father I cannot say, for it was never put to the proof. Mr. Charlton went on apparently regaining health and strength for some months. The winter and the spring passed away without any event; Mrs. Charlton was all kindness and tenderness *to her* husband, and Louisa was giving way to the full hope of seeing his dark presentiments remain long unrealized. About the month of June, news reached the village that the Earl of Mallington had been taken very ill in London, and three days after came the intelligence that he was dead; but what horrified the attorney in the first instance, and also puzzled both the servants on the estate, and the gossips of the place was, that he had died without a will, so that all his estates would go to the next male heir. Who was the next male heir then became the question; but the only house in Mallington which possessed a peerage was Mr. Charlton's. The solicitor begged leave to borrow it for a day, even Dr. Western looked into it, and Mr. Charlton himself examined it, with some curiosity, to know who was to be their new neighbor. It afforded little satisfaction, however, for it there appeared that the late lord had no brothers or uncles living; and in tracing back the ancestry, the lawyer declared that the nearest male heir was the Rev. Mr. Wilmot, a gentleman born about sixty years before, who was particularly marked as having no issue. "And yet," he added, "it would bear a question between him and the heirs of his uncle, Thomas Wilmot, of the Grange, if he had any."

He seemed to derive satisfaction from this view of the case, but more especially from the probability of there being great difficulty in settling the claims to the personal property, as the late lord had made no will.

Whether Mr. Charlton had, or had not made a will, or whether he intended to alter one he had made, or to make a new one, this fact seemed to occupy much of his thoughts; and during three days he visited the solicitor's office every morning. It was remarked that he grew more grave about this time; and, as if to dissipate unpleasant imaginations, he made several little excursions, sometimes for a day, sometimes for two or three. Thus passed June, July, and part of August; but towards the close of the latter month Mrs. Charlton ventured to have a few friends to dinner. The ladies had not long left the table, when a loud ringing of the dining-room bell startled the servants in the hall. When the butler ran in, and the footman followed, they found one gentleman supporting Mr. Charlton in his chair, while Dr. Western untied his neck-cloth. Mr. Nethersole was instantly sent for, and came with all despatch; but Mr. Charlton was quite insensible, and when the surgeon attempted to open a vein, no blood followed the lancet. He was a bold and skillful man, however, and he instantly cut the artery of the temple. Some relief appeared to be afforded, and the sick man was removed to bed. The visitors, with the exception of Dr. Western, withdrew, and he waited for the office which he saw he might soon be called upon to perform; to console a daughter for the loss of her father. The moment was nearer than he thought, for in about an hour after Mr. Charlton had been removed to his own chamber, Mr. Nethersole came forth, leading Louisa in tears to the drawing-room. Dr. Western questioned him with his eyes; the surgeon gravely nodded his head and returned to Mrs. Charlton, who had remained in the chamber of death.

The solemn quiet of a great change fell upon the whole house. About eleven Dr. Western took leave of his fair young companion, and she retired to weep in her own chamber. Mrs. Charlton had already disappeared, and the servants, with the exception of one watcher, soon after went to bed. All was still—all was dark—but about three o'clock a faint light was seen in the library by the man who drove the mail cart from the neighboring town.

All the usual proceedings on such an occurrence were gone through with due solemnity, and the lawyer having given notice to Mrs. Charlton, on the day subsequent to Mr. Charlton's death, that he possessed a signed and attested copy of her late husband's will, by which Dr. Western was appointed one of the executors, that lady instantly sent to the worthy clergyman, begging that he would take the whole arrangements on himself, as she was totally unfit for the task. She requested him also to take possession of her husband's keys, and especially those of the library, in which he kept all his principal papers. Dr. Western did as she desired, and, in due time the will in the hands of the attorney was opened, by which it was found that Mr. Charlton had raised the income previously secured to Mrs. Charlton, to one thousand per annum; and then after a few legacies to his old servants, and marks of kindness to his friends, had left the whole of his property, with the reversion of the principal sum from which his widow received her annuity, to his daughter, making it an absolute condition, however, that she should not marry Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton declared herself perfectly satisfied, and having left the room with her stepdaughter, the two executors, of whom the late partner of Mr. Charlton was one, together with the attorney and one of his clerks, proceeded to examine the papers of the deceased. In the strong box amongst the first things that they found was the duplicate of the will; but what was their surprise when, on opening it, a paper headed "codicil" dropped out. By it Mr. Charlton confirmed his former will; but, premising that heiresses of considerable property were too often the dupes of sharpers, he went on to make it a condition that his daughter should obtain the consent of Mrs. Charlton to her marriage whenever that event took place; and that if she proceeded to contract matrimony without the said consent, he revoked all bequests in her favor, and transferred the whole of his estate to his widow. The codicil was not witnessed, but it was dated and signed; and the lawyer, after examining it attentively, and comparing it with some memorandum books in Mr. Charlton's own handwriting, pronounced it good in law.

Here ends that introductory history which it was necessary to relate for the better understanding of what is to follow; and henceforth I shall content myself with the depiction of scenes rather than pursue a continuous narrative.

CHAPTER V.

A YEAR passed, or very nearly a year, when on one bright summer evening, about seven o'clock, the coach—the only coach that passed through Mallington—appeared, as usual, at the top of the hill. There seemed no particular load upon the vehicle: two countrymen going from some village not far off being the only tenants of the roof; the inside being vacant, and one gentleman seated by the coachman on the box. The luggage was as scanty as the passengers were few, and the tarpauling stretched over one or two scattered trunks and hampers looked like the skin of an Alderney cow, so picturesquely irregular was the substratum it covered. The coachman, as may be easily conceived, was not very well pleased with his cargo, and looked for but a scanty supply of shillings and sixpences as his share of the spoil. Nor had the demeanor of his companion on the box by any means tended to lighten his spirits, or make him better pleased with his situation. He had found him in position, when he himself assumed the ribands at the halfway house from London, some five or six and twenty miles off, and from that moment till their arrival at the top of Mallington-hill, not more than ten words had passed between them. In vain had the coachman commended the beauty of the day; in vain had he pointed out the snug little box of a retired citizen, and informed his companion that Mr. Jones had the reputation of being a "terrible screw," not having his carriage and horses out above once in a quarter; in vain did he make sundry other attempts to promote the sweet intercourse of pleasant words: the traveler was unresponsive, or, if he did reply, it seemed but with the intention of proving that he was not altogether deprived of the power of speech, by uttering a mere monosyllable or dissyllable, such as "Yes," "No," "Very," "Indeed." When the guard had put on the skid, however, at the top of Mallington-hill, the coachman was astounded as he turned round his head and raised his left hand with a slight shake of the reins, to hear his companion's voice pronouncing a whole uninterrupted sentence.

"Pray what village is this, coachman?" he said, gazing down the hill, apparently well pleased.

The coachman actually started at the sound, for though he was a strong man, he was not exempt from human infirmities.

"This is Mallington, sir," he said, and then he felt a strong inclination to punish his cooccupant of the box for his long taciturnity, by relapsing into silence, but his natural loquacity required vent, and he proceeded to inform the stranger that the great house on the right was old Mr. Charlton's as was.

"Has he changed his name?" demanded the other.

"Oh, dear, no, sir," replied the coachman, "he's got no name at all now, for he's dead. A very good gentleman he was, too, and wore a pigtail."

"And who does the house belong to now?" demanded the stranger.

"Why, to his daughter," replied the Jehu, "some say; some say to her step-mother, the widow; howsoever, the young lady is a great heiress, that's clear, and has as much as six or seven thousand a year of her own."

Were loquacity communicated by the same

means as hydrophobia, one might have supposed that the coachman had bitten his companion, for he now asked all manner of questions as they went down the hill; inquired the name of the occupant of every house that they passed at all bigger than a pigsty, and willingly instigated the gentleman of the road to give him all the little anecdotes and detailed descriptions he could furnish of the dwellers in Mallington and its neighborhood.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, and could just see the sign of the Bagpipes, which, as the reader knows, stood a little back from the highway, the coachman informed his companion that they stopped there twenty minutes to tea; for those were days when there was such a thing occasionally as leisure in life, even on the highway, and people did not think that the only object in traveling was to be propelled at the greatest possible speed that human nature can endure from one point of the earth's surface to the other. Men were allowed to eat and drink upon the road, to look about them, and sometimes to think. I record it only as a fact in history, for soon it will be forgotten; but certain it is that in the days I speak of the fastest rate of progression was ten miles an hour; and sometimes twenty minutes, or even half an hour was allowed, according to the appetite of the guard and the favor of the inn, for taking refreshment at various times in the day. To the astonishment, and somewhat to the consternation of the coachman, for he had himself nearly twenty miles to go, the stranger replied that he was booked for Mallington, and should alight at the Bagpipes; and the worthy lord of the reins turned himself a little on his seat, to mark better than he had hitherto marked the appearance of the person who was to get down at Mallington; for the dropping of a visitor in that village was an event that rarely if ever happened, except in one of two cases: namely, when the descendants—I think I may use that word—were of the class bumpkin, or when they were inhabitants of the town or neighborhood well known to the driver of the old heavy Blue. Once, indeed, he had brought down a whole inside full of sickly children; and a number of stray hooping coughs and single measles had traveled with him. One or two consumptions and a black jaundice had likewise been his companions; but these were the only people who, as he expressed it, had visited Mallington for pleasure, except Mr. Fothergill, one of the executors of Mr. Charlton, who had come down thither on his friend's death.

Nothing could be more accurate than the young gentleman's whole appearance. He was dressed in black, with a narrow band of crape round his hat, which showed, as the coachman internally observed, that he was in mourning for somebody. Then he had a black handkerchief—not a stock—round his neck, which proved he was not a clergyman, for clergymen did not wear black handkerchiefs in those days; and then he had black gloves, fitting neatly to his hand, which proved he was not an undertaker, for the gloves of undertakers are always too long in the fingers; and then, again, he had a very good hat, glossy in spite of dust and journey, and very well polished boots, which went far to prove that he was a gentleman. He was not what would be generally called a very handsome man, for coloring, which is what first strikes the eye, was wanting. His countenance had not the slightest resemblance to any face that ever was painted on a sign-post. His complexion was dark, with hair, eyes, and whiskers nearly black, and the eyebrows strongly marked. His forehead was both wide and high, rising straight from the brow, and surrounded by wavy curls; his nose was straight, with a somewhat wide nostril, and his mouth was beautifully cut, though somewhat stern, while the chin was rather prominent, but well rounded. Though he could not be called exactly pale, yet he had little color; but his lips were red and healthy, and his eye clear and bright. In height he might be a little above five foot ten, broad in the chest and shoulders, thin in the flank, and long in the limbs, and in age, perhaps, six or seven and twenty.

All these particulars were gathered by the rapid eye of the coachman before he pulled up at the door of the inn; and he had concluded, from his survey, that "the gentleman was quite a gentleman notwithstanding," when the object of his examination got down from the box, and confirmed the judgment internally pronounced upon him by giving coachman and guard each half-a-crown, when the usual fee for "an outside" was rarely eighteen-pence.

"Those two portmanteaus," he said, pointing to the roof, as he stood before the inn-door; and with great alacrity they were handed off, and with greater alacrity received by the porter of the house as indications of a visitor. He put them down, however, before the house, and in a quiet common-place way looked at all the five sides that were visible, as if it were a matter of course, to ascertain the gentleman's address; but there was no ticket to be seen, nor brass-plate either, and remarking that the proprietor of the portmanteaus remained looking about him, the porter stepped up to him and touched his own hair—hat he had not—saying, "Any more luggage, sir?"

"An umbrella in the inside," replied the stranger; and after having turned the portmanteaus on their other ends, for the convenience of carrying them, and of looking for the name; and having taken them into the passage disappointed, the porter came forth again, and searched the coach for the umbrella. He found one with an ivory handle; and, to his great satisfaction, for he was just going to give up the inquiry in despair, he found two capital letters engraved upon the ivory. Those capital letters were E. M.; and although, of course, there was no possible concatenation of vowels and consonants within the vocabulary of proper and christian names, by which those initials might not have been followed, so that the field of conjecture was somewhat large, yet, as I have said, the porter was delighted to have discovered even so much, as he well knew that his importance in the village would be increased in proportion. Before making this important discovery, he had not ventured to intrude upon his mistress, who was taking tea in her own parlor with Mr. Stubbs, the newly-established linendraper, and paying little attention to the heavy Blue, which rarely brought any visitors

to her inn; but he now put his head into the parlor, saying, "Gentleman, ma'am—going to stop—had his boxes down—looking about him—quite a gentleman—E. M. on his umbrella!"

As a spider in the corner of its cunning net, whenever it feels by the vibration of the fine filaments that a fly is struggling in the toils, rushes forth like lightning to secure the prey, so rushed forth Mrs. Pluckrose, the widowed mistress of the Bagpipes, to seize upon the traveler at the first indication of her porter. The thoughts of the Misses Martin, of Mrs. Dixon, of Mr. Crump, and of half a dozen other lodging-house-keepers, came flashing before her imagination, and she saw, in fancy, the traveler ravished from her at her very door, if she did not make haste. The moment she beheld the young gentleman in black, she conceived a high esteem for him, and a desire to cultivate his acquaintance. But there he stood, all unconscious of the tender agitation he was producing, looking up the street towards poor Mr. Charlton's house, or down towards the park of the late Earl of Mallington, or along the river towards the church and the rectory. Mrs. Pluckrose got on a line with him and made a curtsey; but he took not the slightest notice of her, for his eyes had just turned to the other side, and she might have been an elephant for aught he knew. She was a little abashed, but just at that moment she beheld the figure of Mr. Crump coming across, with a sauntering air, as if to see whether the coach had brought anything for him. She knew that no time was to be lost, and moving round directly in front, where it was impossible not to see her, for she was of no inconsiderable width, she dropped another curtsey, saying, "If you are going to stay in Mallington, sir, I hope I shall have the honor of entertaining you."

The gentleman looked at her and nodded his head good-humoredly, replying, "I shall stay a few days, madam, and shall remain at the inn, if it is yours."

There was a little compliment implied in the latter part of this answer, and though it was more in the manner than in the words, and Mrs. Pluckrose was an Englishwoman, yet she took it, and dropped another curtsey.

"We have two nice rooms, sir," she said, "one looking down the river, the other up the village; and I am sure we can make you quite comfortable."

"I doubt it not in the least, madam," replied the stranger. "I am very easily made comfortable; but that which would tend to do so most at the present moment would be some dinner."

"It shall be ready in one minute, sir," answered Mrs. Pluckrose; and then, seeing Mr. Crump rapidly approaching, she added, in terror lest her triumph should be snatched from her hands, "Will you not walk in, sir, and look at the rooms?"

Before the stranger could reply, inexorable Mr. Crump was upon him with a card in his hand. "Allow me to hand you that, sir," said Mr. Crump, "in case you should need lodgings."

"No; I shall not need any," replied the gentleman, after having looked at the card, and at the same time holding it out to Mr. Crump again.

"Pray, keep it, sir," rejoined Mr. Crump, "one can never tell."

"'Pon my life, this is too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose.

But the stranger settled the matter for her, replying, "I would rather not keep it, sir. I do not want lodgings, and am not fond of dirty pieces of pasteboard."

Mrs. Pluckrose tittered in an ecstacy of delight, the porter grinned; but Mr. Crump, with an air of offended dignity, replied, "Oh! no offence, sir, I hope. I only meant—"

"There, that will do, my good man," answered the young gentleman. "I am not offended. Good evening. Now, madam, I will see the rooms," and following the triumphant Mrs. Pluckrose, he walked into the inn.

CHAPTER VI.

The stranger was shown to his rooms; they were clean, tidy, and comfortable. The little bed-room, with its white boards and white dimity, looking up the village street towards the top of the hill, and catching a glance of the green fields at the back of Mallington, over the tops of some low houses; and the sitting-room looking down upon the calm, picturesque stream, beyond which appeared the park with its thick trees, and the several habitations of gardeners and gamekeeper dotting the edge of the woodland. The stranger gazed forth with much pleasure; he seemed to take great delight in the beauties of nature, for his eyes wandered up the stream and down the stream, and over the large rounds of oak and elm with an expression of satisfaction which had something almost melancholy in its very intensity.

At length Mrs. Pluckrose, who stood behind him, waiting till he had contented himself, heard him exclaim, "How refreshing!" and she immediately concluded that he was some gentleman from the city. He was too good-looking, and too well-dressed, she thought, for a merchant's clerk; but most likely he was a young merchant who had over-worked himself in his counting-house, and had come down to Mallington for a little fresh air.

When she had settled that point quite to her heart's content, she spoke to him of his dinner, asking much in the terms of the schoolboy jest, "Will you have it now, sir!" She did not add, indeed, "or wait till you can get it," whatever she or the stranger might think.

"Why, my good lady," replied her guest, "I thought that by this time it was well nigh cooked; but it does not matter. I dare say you have some cold meat in the house, and that will do very well."

"As beautiful a sirloin, sir, as ever you put a knife into," answered Mrs. Pluckrose.

"Well, that will do excellently," replied the stranger; and putting his hand upon the landlady's arm he added, with a gayer look than he had yet borne, "now I will answer all your questions before they are asked. I will not take any vegetables with it. I will not wait till you just get a potato hot. I do not take any pickles; nor any tart; nor any cheese. I am, in short, my good lady, anxious to get out to take a walk this beautiful evening in this beautiful country; and therefore would dine as soon as possible.

Another day your cook shall display her powers in all manner of ways, if she pleases; but at present expedition is the thing required. Moreover, I like the place and the rooms so well, my good lady, that I shall certainly remain for a week, so that there will be plenty of time for cook to show herself skillful."

Mrs. Pluckrose accordingly left him very well satisfied, ordered the cold beef up to the gentleman at once; and going into the room where the coachman was taking his tea, declared that he had brought her a very nice, gay gentleman indeed.

"Gay!" cried the coachman; "why, he did not speak a word all along the road till he got to the top of the hill."

"More's the pity, Master Giles," replied the widow, "for he talks very well when he does set about it, I can tell you. He's quite a gentleman, too. Let's look at your bill, Giles, there's a good creature."

The coachman put his hand into his breast pocket, and drew forth a greasy pocket book, in the heart of which was his waybill; but Mrs. Pluckrose scrutinized it in vain for the stranger's name, and while she was in the act the maid who performed the part of waiter came running in for a bottle of sherry.

If the guest drank it all, it must have been out of tumblers, for he had not time to pour out eleven wine glassfuls before his step was heard upon the stairs; and the next moment he walked along the passage to the door."

"I hope the beef was tender, sir," said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting out her head.

"As a maiden's sigh," replied her guest, with a smile, and out he went.

There was a row of cropped lime trees before the door of the inn, each as round as a counsellor's wig, and tolerably well powdered with dust. The space between the house and them was about ten yards, and as soon as he reached them the stranger turned and looked up at the board over the inn door, studying the landlady's name, for he wished to be able to vary the term "good lady," which was the only appellation which he had hitherto been able to bestow upon her. She herself had been watching him from her parlor window, not without some remaining fears in regard to the syren influence of Crumps and Martins; but, to her great satisfaction, she saw him, instead of walking up the street, take his way down towards the stream, and then turn up the neat broad elm-shaded road that led to the church and the rectory.

Soon disappearing from the sight of Mrs. Pluckrose, the stranger pursued his way at an easy pace, and looked up for an instant at the pretty little village church, about which there were some good old bits of Norman doors and buttresses, and then turned an inquiring eye upon the rectory.

"Yes," he said, after pausing for a moment, "it must be so. There is no other house near. At all events I will see;" and, opening the neat gate, he walked along the neat carriage-road bordered with evergreens up to the porch, covered with ivy and China roses, and rang the bell.

An old whiteheaded man servant appeared without making him wait, and the stranger inquired "Am I wrong in supposing this the rectory?"

"No, sir," replied the man; "it is the rectory."

"Then is Dr. Western at home?" demanded the stranger.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, "but—"

"He is at dinner, perhaps," said the visitor.

"Oh, dear no, sir," was the answer, with a smile, he has dined these three hours; he is at tea."

"Well, then, my good friend," rejoined the stranger, "will you let him know, with an apology for interrupting him by so late a visit, that I wish much for a few moments' conversation with him."

"Will you step into this room, sir," said the man, and he ushered the visitor into the doctor's library.

The clergyman finished the cup of the infusion of the Chinese herb which had been poured out for him, and then, leaving his sister with a young lady who was taking tea with them, he walked with a slow step to the study, where, opening the door, he regarded the stranger with his calm and thoughtful eyes—not long enough to make the glance unpleasant, but sufficiently long to afford the worthy doctor those physiognomical indications which he was fond of obtaining in regard to every new being of the same species as himself with whom he came in contact. The result was in this instance highly satisfactory to him.

"That is a fine countenance," he said internally, "thoughtful and yet frank."

"You wished to see me, sir, I think," he proceeded aloud, "pray be seated," and he himself took his accustomed arm-chair, leaning back in it, but bending forward his head in an attitude of polite attention.

"I have the honor, Dr. Western," replied the stranger, "of bringing you this letter from Sir Henry Scarsdale, who was once, I think, a pupil of yours at Oxford. If you will read it, you will see that I have some business to speak with you upon."

"Delighted to hear from my young friend," replied the old gentleman, his face lighting up; "he was always a great favorite of mine; and any friend of his must be always —"

As he had spoken, he had torn open the letter, and was going on reading it; but something that he saw therein made him stop suddenly in his speech, and fix his whole attention upon the contents. The letter was somewhat long; and the doctor said nothing more till he had got to the end, except such words as "certainly"—"with the greatest pleasure"—"indeed!" but when he had concluded the perusal, he rose, held out his hand to the stranger, and said, "I am delighted to see you, sir. If you will do me the honor of taking up your abode at my poor house, it will give me great pleasure, and any assistance I can afford is, of course, yours to command in any way."

"I feel very much obliged to you, my dear sir," replied the guest, "and obliged to Scarsdale for procuring me the pleasure of an introduction to you; but I think it will be best to retain my quarters at your little inn here, where I have two comfortable rooms enough, and the landlady seems a good woman."

"Oh! an excellent creature!" replied the clergyman. "Were you sick, you would find what a kind motherly being she is."

"Now, my dear sir, I will not detain you longer," said the stranger, "you are at tea, I know."

"May I not ask you to join my little party?" said the clergyman; "there are but my sister and a very sweet young lady, whom we love almost as a child—the cynosure of neighboring eyes, indeed—Miss Charlton."

"What, the fair lady of the house upon the hill?" asked the visitor.

The good doctor answered in the affirmative, adding, "My ward, though she will soon escape from tutelage."

The stranger willingly accepted the rector's invitation, and Dr. Western rose to show him the way, but paused at the door, and turning with a smile to his new acquaintance, said, "I had forgotten to ask the name."

"Oh! Edmond Morton," replied the young gentleman, and the clergyman leading the way, they were soon in the drawing-room, where Mr. Morton was introduced first to Dr. Western's sister, Mrs. Evelyn, and next to Miss Charlton. Louisa had now expanded into the beauty of womanhood, but yet it was that of young maturity. The flower was no longer in the bud, but it was not full blown. She had inherited not only all her mother's features, but her mother's grace; the grace of high lineage, as well as a fine mind and lovely person; and though her dress was very simple, and still mourning, yet there was that look of birth and dignity about her, that calm repose, which may be occasionally found in all classes, but which wherever found speaks one character of heart and spirit. The rich waving brown hair fell without art into the forms that sculpture has loved to give it, and in the whole cutting of the features the eye of Edmond Morton, and he was no mean judge, could discover scarcely one flaw. If there was anything, perhaps, it was a want of animation that struck him at first as a defect; but yet there was a deep light in those soft and somewhat sad eyes, which made him think that the whole face might become full of expression when the bosom was moved by any powerful emotion. However, he had seen many a very lovely girl before that, and was not very easily to be captivated. His was too gentlemanly a spirit, also, to examine the person of a lady as he would have criticised a horse; and thus he was neither so much struck with Louisa's appearance at first as many might have been; nor did he remark all the beauty of her form and face till he had been some time in her company.

On her part, Louisa paid little attention to his appearance. He was a friend of Dr. Western's, and that was enough to gain her favorable consideration. She thought him a very good-looking young man also; and, perhaps, drew some comparisons between the tone and carriage of the stranger and those of the good folks of the neighborhood, rather to the disadvantage of the latter, but it went no further. She thought not of flirting with him, or attracting his attention, and for some time, while he sat talking with Mrs. Evelyn, entering at once, with a peculiar sort of *finesse*, into the position of a friend rather than a new acquaintance, Louisa remained silent, or only said a few words to Dr. Western. The good rector, however, was not pleased with her reserve: he was, to say sooth, somewhat proud of his fair ward; he thought her, in his heart, the loveliest and the best of girls, and his very indignation at Mrs. Charlton, for differing greatly with him on that point, made him anxious to have all the rest of the world upon his side. He was determined, therefore, that he would draw her out; and though Louisa was, indeed, somewhat sad that evening, from various unpleasant things which had occurred in her own house, yet, Dr. Western, who well knew how, soon won her to a gay smile, and then to a laugh. He changed the subject then, and spoke of his parish and his poor, and dwelt upon one or two of those scenes of distress which every clergyman who does his duty must witness, without being able to alleviate, or, at least, not much: the dying mother—the reprobate son—the broken-hearted parents—the anguish of remorse; and as he went on, to Edmond Morton's surprise, that calm and placid countenance which he had thought inanimate, showed that it could express with intense feeling every different emotion of the mind. She forgot herself, too, entirely; conversed eagerly and well on every topic that was brought before her, and poured forth the pure high feelings of a noble and generous heart in sympathy for sorrow or for joy. Towards Morton himself, too, her reserve died away, and finding in him stores of thought and information, such as few possessed around her, joined with a grace and ease of demeanor which can only be gained by long and intimate communication with the noble and the high, she gave herself up to a new charm, and almost forget the passing hours till the change of light warned her that day was coming to a close. Then, starting up, with a smile, she said, "I must away, dear Mrs. Evelyn, or I shall be scolded by my mother for wandering so late."

"Nay, but my song, Louisa—my song," cried Dr. Western.

"Oh, it must be for another night," replied Miss Charlton; "see, it is really growing dark."

"Well, we will walk with you up the village," said the rector, "if Mr. Morton has no objection; and as we return I will give him a full, true, and particular account of all the villagers whose houses we pass, that he may learn to esteem the inhabitants of Mallington properly.

"Oh! pray do not," replied Louisa; "you are so severe upon us, dear friend, that I fear if you give him your view of our faults and failings, he will run away from the place to-morrow morning."

"Nay, I will be just, my dear," answered Dr. Western; and as soon as Louisa's shawl and bonnet were adjusted, they set out upon their way.

CHAPTER VII.

The rector of Mallington gave his left arm to Louisa Charlton, and Mr. Morton walked on the other side of that fair lady; a shade had come over her face, as they passed close to the

churchyard, and as the low cold dwellings of its silent tenants met her sight. It was not exactly the shade of grief, indeed, but of calm, serious thought. The conversation of her new acquaintance had been of many things—various, rich, fanciful, amusing; and, though she did not know or perceive it, the deep current that lay beneath the sparkling surface had tended to promote reflection, even while it seemed only to excite the imagination. It had, of course, been all of worldly things; but it had led the mind by a natural and quiet course to find the latent relations between those very worldly things and the higher, the more spiritual, with which they all have some mysterious connection. Thus it was that, though whenever Louisa Charlton passed within sight of her father's tomb a melancholy feeling of regret would steal over her, her thoughts were now more grave and solemn than they had been for long on a similar occasion, and that she felt, with less buoyancy than youth is apt to know, how short a space, how speedy a close, how unprofitable a career, have all the joys and pleasures of existence.

Dr. Western remarked the shadow, but he took no notice, and their young companion saw it also, but remained silent; so that they had reached the end of the village street and were beginning to walk slowly up the hill before either of the three spoke.

"Had we not better go by the field-path?" said Louisa Charlton, turning to her guardian; "it is so much more beautiful and so much quieter."

"No, my dear child," answered the old gentleman; "that would be hardly fair," and he smiled as he spoke.

Louisa looked in his face with an inquiring glance; and Edmond Morton went further, asking, "How do you mean—not fair, my dear sir?"

"Because I think it would almost amount to robbery," replied the good doctor, "to deprive the people of my parish of the high delight they will experience in seeing you and Miss Charlton and myself walking up the village together as familiarly as if you had been living here for ten years. You cannot imagine, sir, what a source of innocent delight this walk of ours will afford to some hundred of people in Mallington; what an inexhaustible fund of conversation it will supply to persons who have nothing else on earth to talk about; what a diversion it will effect, as you soldiers call it, in favor of poor Mrs. Pilkin, who took a Sunday walk the other day with a gay bachelor, whose banns with her fair self I have to publish for the first time on Sunday next—but the people know nothing of that,—and how you and I and Louisa, without our own consciousness or any effort on our part but merely that of walking up this hill instead of going by the fields, will enliven every tea-table this night, will afford zest and interest to the cold chicken and slice of ham, even if we do not make Miss Martin revoke or Mr. Crump misdeal."

Both Louisa and Mr. Morton smiled, and the latter inquired, "Is it really such a gossiping little place?"

"Just in proportion to its idleness," answered Dr. Western, in a graver tone; "as, indeed, is always the case. Being a place of no trade, and, I might almost say, no society, the people for one-half of their time have nothing to do but comment on their neighbors. The residence of half-a-dozen respectable families in or near the village would speedily work a great change in these respects; for idleness is the parent of gossip, as well as of most minor vices, and of many great ones also; but here the poor people have positively nothing else to do, and their eyes and their tongues, aided each in turn by imagination, are alternately busy with their neighbors' affairs all day long. See, Louisa," he continued, "they are all out at their doors already, as if with a sort of presentiment they would have something to talk about; and now don't you see there is Mrs. Molineux, who keeps the pie-shop, has gone in to Mrs. Stubbs, the plumber and glazier's wife, to tell her the fact that you and I and the strange gentleman who came by the coach are walking up the village together." Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added in Miss Charlton's ear, "You are given away already, Louisa—the whole matter is settled and done in the opinion of the gossips of Mallington."

Louisa laughed and colored a little—very little indeed—but just sufficiently to show that she understood what the good rector meant, and felt that it was a thing not quite impossible that she should marry such a man as he who was then walking beside her. That skittish jade, imagination, which will go galloping hither and thither whether the rider likes it or not, instantly set off with poor Louisa Charlton, and would have fain carried her up to the point of considering whether Edmond Morton was or was not the sort of man that she might have liked in the capacity of a husband. He was handsome, intelligent, gentlemanly, and totally unlike all the people of Mallington—a great advantage in the eyes of Louisa Charlton. He was very unlike, also, Alfred Latimer, which was a still greater advantage; but then, when she had got thus far on the road along which fancy was hurrying her, she recollected that she had not known her companion for more than two hours, and, getting quietly down off her nag, knowing well that if she went on riding she should have no command over her own course, she led imagination back by the bridle, and shut the stable door.

As they proceeded on their way Dr. Western, according to promise, expounded to Edmond Morton the character, situation, and peculiarities of the various inhabitants of Mallington, whose dwellings they passed, and he did it very pleasantly—never uncharitably, nor bitterly, though often a little satirically. The doctor, the solicitor, the retired naval commander, the old maids and their opponent, the new shopkeeper and his pretensions—from a humble and retiring widow woman of very limited income, who lived in the last house at the bottom of the hill, to the little fat bustling demagogue of a retired London tradesman, who had brought down drab gaiters and democracy, the spirit of opposition to everything, and an utter contempt for the aspirate, to the new sphere of Mallington—were all passed in review by the worthy doctor with so much more detail than Louisa had ever heard him use before, that she could not help thinking that the rector must have some partic-

ular desire to give Mr. Morton a full and comprehensive knowledge of his parish and its parishioners.

As they walked up the hill but slowly, they were passed at a quick pace by Mrs. Charlton's maid, Mistress Windsor, who was still in as great favor with her lady as ever, and elevated to the rank of housekeeper; and, to use a vulgar expression, had both feathered her nest and tricked out her plumage handsomely during the three or four last years of Mr. Charlton's life. Though not so young as when first she was introduced to the reader, and bearing certain traces of it in wrinkle and line, she was still a very active woman, and had lost no portion of her shrewdness. She was as keen as her mistress: even, perhaps, a little keener, and she had always made it a point of showing herself especially respectful towards Miss Charlton both before and after her master's death. It had been her common observation that nobody could tell what might happen. Now this was not a maxim of particular application, but a wide, broad, philosophical axiom, which was the basis of one-half of her conclusions; and when Mr. Charlton first fell ill she redoubled her attention to Louisa, saying to herself, "No one can tell what may happen." When Mr. Charlton died, she was still more attentive, repeating "No one can tell what may happen;" and when she heard the will read, and found that the deceased had left the great bulk of his property, except the annuity to his widow, to the young lady, Mrs. Windsor was satisfied with her own conduct; and, although she did think it strange that Mr. Charlton should have so strictly tied his daughter's hands in regard to her marriage, she still determined to show herself devoted to Louisa, observing once more "No one can tell what may happen." She had, indeed, taken care at the same time to give no just cause of offence to fair Mrs. Charlton, but was quite as ready at all times to do everything she could to forward that lady's views as she had been from the first. Mrs. Charlton, indeed, saw through her—yea, through and through her, reader. She was not merely diaphanous, but quite transparent to the eyes of Mrs. Charlton; and yet that worthy lady was not at all inclined to let Mrs. Windsor see that she bore any ill will towards her for courting Louisa, even if she did feel annoyed at it, which I do not pretend to say she did not. Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Windsor had known each other for many years. Mrs. Windsor had served Mrs. Charlton very well and very faithfully, as has been shown; and Mrs. Charlton had every inclination to pass over any little faults, but not from gratitude; for if Mrs. Charlton could have strangled Mrs. Windsor with her own hands, and nothing more said about it, who could tell if she would not have done it?

As the respectable abigail now passed by Dr. Western and Louisa, she paused, half turned round, and dropped a low curtsey, then resumed her quick pace again, and reached the house sometime before them. As soon as she had entered the doors, instead of betaking herself to the housekeeper's room, as she usually did in ordinary circumstances, she inquired of one of the footmen whether her mistress was alone in the drawing-room; and finding that such was the case, she walked straight up thither, without taking off bonnet or shawl.

"What is it, Windsor?" demanded the lady as soon as she appeared, speaking in a querulous tone, and putting a pen with which she had been writing into the inkstand.

"Why, ma'am, I thought I would just tell you that Miss Charlton is coming back," replied Mrs. Windsor.

"Well, I suppose she is," answered her mistress, still crossly; "it is time she should, for it is getting quite dark, I can hardly see to write."

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper; "but there is a gentleman with her as well as Dr. Western, and I thought you might like to know."

"A gentleman!" said Mrs. Charlton, with a greater degree of interest; "what sort of a gentleman, Windsor?"

"You can see him, ma'am, from the window," replied Mrs. Windsor: "he's a fine looking young man, who came down by the coach to-night, I heard, and has put up at the inn; and he took the two rooms there for a fortnight, and then went to Dr. Western's direct."

By this time Mrs. Charlton reached a western window which looked down the hill, and was gazing steadfastly upon the group which was slowly walking up. The remaining light fell full upon them, and she could see them pause, and look round over the scene below, and the high old trees of the park on the opposite side of the valley, and the sunset glow of the sky above; and she remarked that the stranger pointed with his hand, and seemed to make some inquiry, and that when they came forward again Louisa's fair face was raised towards him with a bright warm smile upon her lips.

Mrs. Charlton smiled too; but it was not with a very pleasant, though with a pleased expression. It seemed as if she said to herself, "That will do," but yet as if that which was to be done was not very full of human charities. "Go down, Windsor," she said, "and tell Edward when Dr. Western comes to beg him to walk in, for I wish to speak with him, and the young gentleman who is with him, of course. And hark ye, Windsor, I wish you would find out who he is, and all about him; for, of course, I am very willing to show attention to any one who visits Mallington, and yet, of course, I must be careful of whom I bring into Miss Charlton's company; but, of course, I must wish Mr. Latimer to have some more and some better society than he finds here; and of course—but run down, Windsor, and tell Edward what I have said, for they are coming near."

Mrs. Windsor hurried away with a grave face to do as she was bid, but her grave face only lasted to the back of the door, and then she murmured to herself, "as if I did not know!"

The footman received his instructions in terms that he was well disciplined to understand, and the next minute the great bell rang. He walked with slow and stately step to the door, and having opened it drew back to let Miss Charlton pass, but as she shook hands with Dr. Western, and wished the stranger good night, the man stepped forward again and said, "My mistress, sir, told me to say if you came, that

she wished to speak with you for one moment, if you would have the kindness to walk up."

"I will wait for you here, my dear sir," said Mr. Morton; but Louisa, with color slightly rising in her cheek—for she did not always know how her fair step-mother would view her proceedings—interposed and exclaimed, "Oh, no; pray come in, Mr. Morton; Mrs. Charlton will be very happy to see you, I am sure."

"Perhaps"—replied the visitor, but before he could conclude his sentence the rector kindly laid his hand on his arm, saying, "Nay, come in, my young friend; if Mrs. Charlton has any matter of business to speak of, we can find another room in this house. It is not like my little rectory, and there are plenty of council chambers."

Edmond Morton could only bow, and follow whither the doctor and Louisa led; and in a moment after he was formally introduced to Mrs. Charlton. The fair widow was all smiles and graciousness, though, to say sooth, some part of her youthful grace had fled, for she had become rather fuller in her proportions than was altogether consistent with exact symmetry. As she was not a very tall woman, the difference of the breadth in relation to the length, as compared with what she had been, when she changed from Latimer to Charlton, was not to her advantage—in personal appearance, at least—and yet she was a very pretty woman, *très bien conservée*, as our French neighbors term it; fair, smooth-skinned, delicate featured, with nothing that could indicate a year more than forty, or anything else than the sweetest possible disposition, the most placable and considerate mind. She was delighted to see Dr. Western; she was charmed to receive Mr. Morton; she was tenderly affectionate to dear Louisa. She was the pink of step-mothers, and the pleasantest of friends. All that she had to say to the rector was that she had for the time given up her intention of going to Cheltenham, in consequence of letters that she had received that morning; and although Dr. Western had never heard of her purpose, he expressed himself very well satisfied that she had abandoned it, saying that he was not fond of Cheltenham, especially in what is termed the season; he thought it a bad place for young men, and a worse place for young women.

Mrs. Charlton smiled sweetly, and accused him of being too severe in his notions; and then, turning to Mr. Morton, she inquired if he did not admire their quiet little rustic village, so beautifully situated amongst its woods and fields.

"I have really seen very little of it as yet, madam," replied the young gentleman, "having been here but a few hours; but as I am a great lover of the beauties of nature, I have no doubt that I shall find enough to admire."

Mrs. Charlton was delighted that he was a lover of the beauties of nature; and declared that they would show him plenty of the sweetest scenery in the world; and appealed to Dr. Western whether they would not. She must positively, she said, make a party to take him to the waterfall up the glen, and insisted that he should not venture to visit it without her presence, and she ended by asking the rector, and his friend, and Mrs. Evelyn to dinner the next day at an early hour, that they might take a walk before tea.

"Hang it!" thought the worthy clergyman, "the widow is looking for a third husband already." But he did her great injustice. Mrs. Charlton was no longer Mrs. Latimer, and though she always had her objects, they were very different from what they had been, and from what Dr. Western imagined. For himself, he accepted her invitation; but declined for Mrs. Evelyn, who never went out to dinner, as Mrs. Charlton well knew; and Mr. Morton promising to accompany him, the two gentlemen took their leave just as the lady asked Louisa to ring for lights.

"Well, my dear sir, what do you think of my fair neighbor," asked the clergyman, when they were fairly out of the house, "having seen her yourself, you will need no explanation."

"I think not," replied Edmond Morton, dryly. "May I ask, my dear sir, if she is really that sweet girl's mother?"

"You think you see signs of a different race—eh?" said Dr. Western, with a smile. "Very different, indeed, I can assure you. I never saw Louisa's mother; but from all I have heard, she was very like her daughter, both in person and mind. I need not tell you that Mrs. Charlton is not. Nevertheless, she is a very good and respectable woman."

"A very artificial one, I should think," replied Edmond Morton; "should I be wrong, my dear doctor, if I said a very artful one?"

"Nay, nay," cried the rector, "that is a somewhat harsh term. She seems worldly, it must be confessed, and so far I believe you have judged right, though how you have formed your opinion in so short a time I cannot tell. It took me longer to form mine."

"I have been all my life accustomed to observe small traits," replied his companion, "and have seldom found their indications fallacious. I know, indeed, that they may be so used also, that the habit of remarking them begets in us a particular sort of vanity in our own penetration, which makes us unwilling to admit that we are deceived when we really are so. Therefore I never allow myself to act from the impressions first received, till they are confirmed by further observation. Yet I think I cannot be mistaken in my estimate of either of the ladies we have just left."

"And what of Louisa, then?" asked Dr. Western.

"Hardly fair, my dear sir," rejoined his companion; "she is wonderfully beautiful when she is animated. But I should think that she was a flower that required very tender usage; and that she has not had it always."

"Yet she is of a firm and high mind," answered the clergyman eagerly; "I know not any one in whom such gentleness is blended with such a strong sense of what is right."

"I am sure it is," replied Morton; "in truth, my dear doctor, hers is a neighborhood of which one may well be afraid."

"You know she is an heiress, and her fortune very large," said Dr. Western in a peculiar tone.

"I have heard so this evening," replied the young gentleman; "but I once heard a very noble and amiable friend declare that if it rained

heiresses he would go out with an umbrella; and I have always been very much of his way of thinking." The rector laughed, but Mr. Morton, changing the subject, reminded him that he was to give him a sight of some papers; and they both quickened their pace towards the rectory.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Misses Martin had discovered all about it; the Misses Martin had settled it all in their own minds—they were mighty minds for settling other people's affairs; but when Mrs. Windsor, on the following morning, walked into their shop, as she called it, "promiscuously," to buy a piece of narrow tape—thinking that if there were in all Mallington any person or persons who could gather the whole particulars of Mr. Morton's history, the Misses Martin must be the people—they proved obdurately silent, notwithstanding every hint and question she could devise. Had she asked no questions, had she given no hints of a wish to discover more of Mr. Morton, the Misses Martin might very possibly—from a desire to hear what that gentleman had been doing at Mallington House—have proved communicative themselves; but as soon as the two ladies perceived that Mrs. Windsor was on the search for information, they resolved not to give it; for there was war between Mrs. Charlton and the Misses Martin—civil war it might, indeed, be called, for it was more real than apparent, and conducted with all politeness. Mrs. Charlton had triumphed over the Misses Martin—she had married the rich widower—she had surrounded herself with wealth and splendor—she had been raised into the first position in the society of the neighborhood, in spite of all the Misses Martins' inuendos and slanders—and she had set up a rival in a shop, which had soon consigned theirs, if not to total decay, to the solitary and solemn declension of faded prints and soiled linens and articles of all kinds, excellent in themselves, but not attractive to the eye. These were things not to be forgotten by the Misses Martin, and, as I have said, they remained obdurately silent, although they had settled the whole affairs of Mr. Edmond Morton an hour or more before Mrs. Windsor appeared.

But Mrs. Windsor was a skillful general, and, by a well-conceived manœuvre, she turned their flank. There was a neighbor of the Misses Martin just three doors off. He was a bookseller and stationer, well to do in the world—an elderly bachelor, a very respectable man. He differed from the church of England in several of his religious notions, and occasionally preached his own doctrines himself to a select congregation; but, nevertheless, he was just the sort of man to be very high in the esteem of the Misses Martin, who, though they belonged to the church of England, had no objection to marry any one—only nobody asked them. But Mr. Sowerby was, as I have said, a bachelor, and he was fond of news; so that Mrs. Windsor, remembering well that the Misses Martin were in the habit, one or the other, of running into Mr. Sowerby's shop eight-and-forty times each day—that is to say once every quarter of an hour while it was open—conceived that ere the period of her visit they must, by an inevitable necessity, have told that gentleman all that they had gathered of Mr. Morton. The moment, therefore, that the tape was bought and paid for, she turned her steps to Mr. Sowerby's and asked for some note paper. The worthy master of the shop was delighted to see her, and began at once by telling her that it was a pleasant day, but warm, very warm. As Mrs. Windsor had discovered this interesting fact before, she assented without any long consideration, and then went on to say that the night before had been very warm likewise, to which Mr. Sowerby agreed; but then Mrs. Windsor proceeded to relate how warm she had found it as she walked up from the bottom of the hill, and ended, "I declare I thought I should have dropped just as I was passing Miss Charlton and the young gentleman she brought up with her from the rectory."

"Well now," cried Mr. Sowerby, "that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mrs. Windsor. It is very odd you should mention it, isn't it? Let me shut the door," and, stretching over the counter, he pushed it to.

"Well," he said in continuation, "I saw Miss Charlton and the young gentleman and Dr. Western go up the village together, for I was standing at my door, and I wondered who he could be—the young man I mean; but when I found out who he is and all about him, I said to myself, says I, 'that is no bird for Miss Charlton's money, and if Mrs. Windsor should chance to look in, I'll just give her a hint—it is but kind and neighborly.'"

"I'm very much obliged indeed, Mr. Sowerby," replied the housekeeper; "I did not much like the look of him myself, and I said when I saw him, 'he seems but a half-and-half sort of a gentleman after all,' but then I could not say anything to my mistress, because I had got nothing to go upon."

"Well, then, I'll tell you all about it," said Mr. Sowerby. "He's no more than an artist, take my word for it, Mrs. Windsor—and you know my word is good for a thousand pounds at any time—take my word for it he is no more than an artist, going about the country sketching. "But how did you find it out?" asked Mrs. Windsor; "I know you are a shrewd one, Mr. Sowerby—not easy to take you in."

Mr. Sowerby laughed and shook his head with a look as wise as that of the Athenian fowl, saying, "No, no; but I'll tell you all about it. Last night when the boy brought in my beer for supper from the Bagpipes, I asked him what was the name of the gentleman who had come by the coach. He could not tell a word about it, only that boots said there was E.M. marked upon his umbrella. Well, I could make nothing of that but I told the boy to find out and let me know, and I gave him a penny for himself, Mrs. Windsor; so this morning—for gold is the key to everything, Mrs. Windsor, gold is the key to everything—he brought me word that the gentleman's name is Edmond Morton, for a letter had come for him by post. Well, that was something gained, but I could get no farther, till just about an hour ago in comes Mathilda Martin—and you know how she talks Well, she did run on enough to deafen one; but she told me that their girl, going across the

park to carry a gown piece that the old housekeeper at the hall had bought yesterday, saw this Mr. Morton in the park as early as seven o'clock this morning; and that when she came back, about half an hour after, she chanced upon him again sitting under a tree, with a large book on his knee, drawing away as hard as he could draw—taking a picture, in fact, of the old place."

"But many a gentleman draws now-a-days," answered the housekeeper; "our young lady draws quite beautiful—you would almost think they were real houses and trees."

"Well, you shall hear—you shall hear, Mrs. Windsor," continued the stationer, nodding his head with the solemnity of Jove, though the curls of his wig shed no ambrosial odors around. "As soon as I heard what Mathilda Martin told me, says I, 'Oh, ho! Edmond Morton! I think I have heard that name before;' and reaching up there to the shelf just behind you, Mrs. Windsor, I took down that long book—no, not that one—the one with the blue back, gilt, and lettered—and there I saw—just look into the title—'Sketches in England and Wales, by Thomas Morton, R.A.' Well, you know what a giddy thing Mathilda Martin is, and she immediately fancied that this young man must be the very Thomas Morton, R.A., and that the boy must have made a mistake about the first name. 'But,' says I, 'look at the date, Miss Mathilda;' and there it stood, sure enough, twenty years ago. Now this young man can't be more than five-and-twenty, I should think; and it is not likely he should publish sketches in England and Wales when he was five years old, unless he were a phenomenon. 'No, no, Miss Martin,' I says, 'he is that old Morton's son—he had a son, I know, and his name was Edmond, I am very sure; so you see he is following his father's trade, but I should not think he will make so good a hand of it.'"

"You are quite right, Mr. Sowerby," replied Mrs. Windsor; "and I will tell Mrs. Charlton all about it, and how you found it out, for I think it is very clever;" and after a little more gossip, Mrs. Windsor left the shop with a well-pleased smile, saying to herself, "This will be quite the thing, I fancy."

As soon as she reached Mallington House, she sought her mistress, who was in her dressing-room, and reported progress. Mrs. Charlton smiled likewise, and drew in her eyes a little; but the next moment she looked grave, and said, "It must be all nonsense, Windsor; I do not believe a word of it. Pray tell the people that I think it is all nonsense."

"I will, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor, and was going; but her mistress called her back, and added, "Make further inquiries, Windsor, but more quietly, you understand—I wish to hear about it, but without seeming to know."

"Very well, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor, and she fulfilled her lady's orders with due discretion, discovering further confirmation of Mr. Sowerby's views. But, to the surprise of all Mallington, the more strong became the presumption that Mr. Morton was an artist, the more marked became Mrs. Charlton's attentions towards him; and Dr. Western observed, with some wonder, that both that evening, during dinner and afterwards, and on an excursion planned by the lady next day, Mrs. Charlton threw Louisa almost entirely upon Mr. Morton, while she endeavored to monopolize the rector to herself, so that he mentally inquired, "Hang it, the good lady can't want to marry me, surely," but Mrs. Windsor, knew her mistress better, and watched the game that was playing with some interest.

Mr. Morton did not understand it at all, but found it, as far as it went, not at all unpleasant. With a lovely girl upon his arm, in that very sweet stage of acquaintanceship when first impressions of esteem are warming into intimacy, where each with the other is like the intelligent traveler wandering through a fresh country, and discovering new beauties at every step, where conversation is neither oppressed by deep feelings, nor restrained by strangeness; but all the doors of thought are open, and the heart itself every now and then peeps out to see the sunny world without—it is a pleasant thing—a very pleasant thing indeed, to walk through fair scenes with a fair being like Louisa Charlton, and to listen to a sweet musical voice, and to read a world of fairy tales in bright young eyes, all the brighter for friendly words and kind companionship. Very pleasant indeed. But, perhaps, the reader may ask if it is not somewhat dangerous, too; I can but answer, "That is as it may be."

CHAPTER IX.

In the early morning—and how sweet early morning is, let the tired citizen say, who, after long months of weary toil in the money-getting places of the world, escapes for a short time to taste better pleasures amidst the works of the almighty architect—in the early morning of a summer's day, with the dew still upon the grass, and the light wind destined to die away, like youthful graces, in the sun's meridian light, Edmond Morton walked out of the little inn at which he had taken up his abode, and bent his steps over the bridge to the fine old park which I have noticed in the commencement of this work.

The maids of the inn were just up, and busy, in manifold curl-papers and unwashed faces, setting rooms to rights; and even the boots himself—the most matutinal of all bipeds, except chanticleer—was not by any means sufficiently awakened to be as brisk and active as at all ordinary hours he showed himself. Mrs. Pluckrose was still—I should say in the arms of Morpheus, were there not something indecorous in the figure—but sound asleep; and walking out, with clothes that had been brushed and boots that had been blacked the night before, Mr. Morton gave no trouble to, and attracted little attention from, any one. On the old stone bridge of three irregular arches—very irregular indeed they were, for each differed from the other in point of shape as well as size—he paused and gazed for a minute or two into the stream, on the bosom of which numerous dabchicks and water hens were swimming about, undoubtedly thinking that no man with a gun would feel inclined to annoy them so early in the morning. They might have found themselves mistaken; but certainly in regard to

Edmond Morton they were in the right, for he did not feel disposed to do them any harm; and they appeared to understand it well; for as he looked over the parapet upon the water, though they turned up towards him the shrewd inquiring eye, they did not hurry off to their sedgy lurking places, as they would have done at a later hour, nor dive down in eager haste to escape the anticipated shot. He was not bloodily disposed, indeed; and yet there was a stout old trout, who had escaped many perils, and grown to aldermanic bulk, to hang, head against stream, at the tail of a pleasant ripple, that did move a little in his bosom the tiger that is more or less in the hearts of all men. He thought it would be a pleasant thing on a fine May morning to bring that fellow to the landing-place; but neither rod nor line had he with him at the moment, and even if he had, it was getting somewhat late in the year to trifle with trouts, so that the tyrant of the stream would have been safe.

Now heaven only knows what connection there was between the sight of that trout and so different a being as Louisa Charlton. The mind rarely jumps, however, though it runs up many a ladder with surprising swiftness; and there are general links—or, to pursue the metaphor, steps of association—between each thought that presents itself and another; and therefore undoubtedly—whether it was that he thought it would be agreeable to withdraw that fair girl from all that surrounded her, and carry her away with him, as he had proposed to do with the trout; or whether angling for a pretty wife was a sport he found pleasure in; or whether anything else in the wide expanse of possibility linked the two together, certain it is that the next thought which presented itself to his imagination was Louisa Charlton. It served him all across the bridge, and up to the park gates, which lay at the end of a short avenue, of not more than two hundred yards in length. But there, just as he was about to pull the cucumber-shaped handle of an old bell that hung beside the wrought-iron trellis work, he paused and looked at the windows of the lodge, saying to himself "It is needless to rouse the good old dame before her hour."

The dimity curtains were closely drawn across the lattice; and taking that indication in good part, he walked back to the bridge again, and gazed once more into the stream. The trout was still there, just where he left it; but Morton did not see it at all, for he had now got something else to think of; and he went on with Louisa Charlton very pleasantly, as if he were taking a sunny walk with her through the fairy land of fancy.

In about ten minutes he turned round his head towards the gates, and saw the old dame who kept the lodge open the casement and hook it back—her summer morning's first task—and sauntering gently on, he now rang the bell.

"Oh! is it you, sir?" said the good lady, who had seen him there more than once before, putting out her head; "I will come in a minute;" and after she had fastened her gown and put on her pockets, in the same fashion that her mother wore them—and she was an old woman—she came to the gates and unlocked them with a curtsey, saying as she did so, "The other gate up the stream is always open—ay, and must be so, for some one broke the lock off—a mischievous young rogue he must have been—and ever since my lord's death the bailiff says he has no orders."

"And pray who is your lord now, my good lady?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Ay, sir, that is hard to say," answered Dame Witherton; "an old gentleman, I have heard tell, of the name of Wilmot—a parson, it seems, and very fond of money."

"He ought to spend some here to put the house in better order," answered Morton. "It is truly a pity to see so fine a place as this might be, if well kept up, falling into decay."

"Ay, that it is, indeed," answered the old woman with a sigh. "I remember it quite a different thing; but even Edmonds, the park-keeper, is falling out of heart. He can't get the workpeople paid, and is obliged to discharge them, poor man; though it breaks his heart to see the gravel walks getting weedy, and the trees all straggling, and the people stealing the game. But he cannot pay men himself—that is impossible. It is bad enough for him, with a family, to live here without his own wages; and work night and day for people that don't say 'Thank you.'"

"Quite enough, indeed, and too much, I should suppose," replied Mr. Morton; "but I suppose this Edmonds is fond of the place."

"Ay, that he is," answered Dame Witherton, "it is all his delight, sir — his hobby, as Dr. Western calls it—and he could not go away for his very life. Why, I remember him — Lord bless you, sir—a little curly-headed boy, born in that very cottage where he now lives, for his father, poor Tim Edmonds, was park-keeper before him."

"And where does he live, my good dame," asked the visitor at Mallington.

"Bless you, sir—why, don't you know?" exclaimed the lady of the lodge, as if every one who had twice entered the gates of the park was bound to be as well aware of all the secrets hid in its recesses as herself. "Why, you have seen that pretty house just hidden from the hall by the tall trees in front. That's where John Edmonds lives."

"I will walk up and see him," answered Morton. "I want to have a ramble all over the park from one end to the other."

"Then he is just the man to show it you," rejoined the old lady; "for there is not a rabbit has a burrow in the place but he knows all the ins and outs of it."

Fully relying upon the accuracy of her statements, Edmond Morton walked on to seek out the house of the park-keeper, which he was not long in accomplishing, for, to say the truth, he had not dealt fairly with the good old woman, having clearly understood before the conversation began, which was the dwelling of John Edmonds; but, having a sort of cynical belief that there is nothing so pleasant to "withered eld" as to tell a story its own way, he had let her go on—nay, had encouraged her so to do, without giving a hint of the stores of information he possessed. Those stores were, indeed, derived from no occult sciences which he possessed, nor from secret communications with any one; but having wandered about the park some days before, he had remarked a nice-looking tidy

house, amongst the trees, out of sight of the windows of the hall, and had said to himself, "That must be the park-keeper's, I suppose."

Thither, however, he now bent his steps, and at the end of about a quarter of an hour, perceived the lodge amongst the trees. Everything was neat about it; and the evidences of man's careful spirit gave the place a cheerful look, though it was actually somewhat decayed, and one of the chimneys had a strong inclination to fall. The door had no bell, but as Morton had a very great disinclination to intrude upon any one, high or low, he knocked before he entered. A voice said, "Come in," and accordingly Mr. Morton did as he was bid.

The interior presented a scene somewhat difficult to describe; for it had so many relations with antecedents, to the feelings of those who bore a part in it, that all its interest lay in things that were gone. Abstracted from those, it was but the house of an English peasant, at meal times — one not ill to do, either. At a round oaken table, in the midst of a low-roofed thick-raftered chamber, which had five pots of flowers in each small-paned casement, were seated John Edmonds, his wife, a son of about ten years old, and a daughter of somewhat more than double that term. There had been three children between the two; but the sicknesses of childhood had reduced them to that number; and those that were lost had stored memory with regrets which rendered those that remained doubly dear to the park-keeper and his wife.

Edmonds himself was still a hale, well-looking, stout man of fifty, long limbed and active, clothed in a green coat, somewhat the worse for wear, with yellow buttons adorned with a rusty fox, corduroy breeches, and leathern gaiters up to his knees. A checked handkerchief was round his neck, quite clean, like the collar of his shirt, but with a hole in the corner. There were other holes not shown; but the time had been, not long ago, when he would not have worn a handkerchief with a hole in it on any account. His countenance was somewhat moody and irritable, neither by feature nor by habitual expression, but by temporary causes; but as he saw a stranger it instantly cleared. His wife was a plainly but very neatly dressed woman, about three years younger than himself, with considerable traces still remaining of beauty, worn away by daily toil and constant exposure to sun and wind. The boy was a stout, rosy urchin, very like his father, with a merry round face, black eyes, and curly hair. The daughter was one of those sweet flowers sometimes seen in cottage windows, which instantly make one think that they ought to have some better shelter against the wintry wind and burning sun. Her features were fine and delicate; her hair beautiful, and shining like new-spun silk; her eyes full of tender and confiding light; her complexion warm yet soft; and her form full both of youthful grace and womanly contour. Small hands, small feet, small lips, all were as symmetrical as if the blood of whole races of patricians had flowed in her veins; and the beautiful shape of her neck and throat, the fine setting-on of the head, with the few natural curls that escaped from where the hair was *mined* up, gave a classical look to her bust, which might well call the eye of the connoisseur to admire, and wonder how such loveliness found shelter in an English cottage. Her dress was very plain, and even coarse, but neat and clean. The time had been when it had been a matter of fatherly vanity or love, to deck that fair form in garments more becoming; but that time had passed, and Lucy Edmonds did not give them a sigh. Her father did, however.

The fare before them was plain but good, and though it had once been better, none of them cared much about that; but two or three of the lozenges in the casement had been broken, and were filled up with paper neatly cut and pasted in, and that was a sad eyesore to the park-keeper. In other days he would have paid the replacing of the missing glass from his own pocket, if his lord had not done it; but now he could not afford the expense, and he felt the want of neatness bitterly. At that moment he felt it more than ever, when he beheld a stranger. So long as no eyes but his own saw it, he could away with it, though he often looked at the broken panes with a rueful countenance; but that another eye should mark them grieved him, and he had recourse to a little artifice to hide them as much as possible.

No sooner did he perceive who it was that entered than, rising, he gave the young gentleman "good morning," and taking a bundle from a chair, which he placed for his visitor with its back to the lattice, he laid the bundle on the window sill, and returned to his seat. His wife understood well enough what it all meant, and while Morton seated himself frankly, and entered into conversation with her husband, she rose quietly and arranged the things in the window better than Edmonds had done in his haste, putting a large geranium, with broad round leaves, a little on one side, so as to cover entirely one of the two patches, while the bundle hid the other.

"Good morning, Mr. Edmonds," said Morton, in reply to the park-keeper's salutation. "I beg your pardon for breaking in upon you at this hour, but I am fond of an early walk, and"—

"Don't mention it, sir," said Edmonds, interrupting him, but not rudely; "very happy to see you. Is there anything I can do for you, sir? I have seen you taking your walk before now, and looking about. I am always glad to see any one that takes notice of the park; it was a mighty pretty place once, but it is getting a little out of order now, for want of hands."

"Why, I wish, with your permission, to walk all over it," answered Morton, "and should feel very much obliged if you would accompany me. I do not know whether you are aware that there is some talk of the place being sold, and a friend of mine is thinking of buying it."

This was evidently news to poor Edmonds; and though, for a moment, a good many visions of a nice family purchasing the hall, and of the park being put into good order again, and of all the gravel walks being in trim array, and of the lady's walk being rolled out twice a week, and of himself being retained as head park-keeper, came before his eyes; yet he did not feel altogether so comfortable as he ought

to have been, for there is more of the spirit of clanship in all faithful servants than we know of, and there was something in the idea of Mallington Hall being sold out of the family of Mallington that grated harshly upon his mind.

"I did not know that it could be sold, sir," he answered, "but I have seen so many things I never thought to see, that this does not surprise me. However, sir, I am quite ready to walk with you this moment."

"No, no, finish your breakfast, Mr. Edmonds," replied Morton; "do not let me disturb you. I am in no hurry;" and entering into conversation first with one and then with another, in a kindly tone, frank, but not too familiar, cheerful, but not jocular, the young gentleman was soon upon good terms with the whole family. He even took a slice of brown bread, just to keep the good man in countenance while he concluded his meal, and munched away heartily with the rest.

In about five minutes, Edmonds and his visitor were upon their feet, and walking out into the park. Up one alley and down another the young gentleman was led, round the walks, across the lees and lawns, through the wilderness—not the least afraid of wetting his feet—to the obelisk on the hill behind the house.

Much to the satisfaction of the park-keeper, Mr. Morton observed everything with the eye of taste, admired the natural beauties of the place, and again and again expressed his regret at seeing it running wild. At first his companion was well pleased to hear his lamentations over the neglect; but as Morton repeated them several times, he felt as if there were some covert reproach to himself in his words, and he replied "Well, sir, it is a pity, surely—a very great pity; but I cannot help it. In my lord's time I had seven pair of hands under me in this park, besides the three gamekeepers who lived outside, and who used to do a turn now and then in the spring and summer; but now there is not a soul to help me, and I myself have no call to do anything, for I am no man's servant now; only I can't bear to see it all going to ruin, so wherever it seems most needed I work away. But I can't keep things right altogether any how, all by myself."

"That is quite impossible," said the young gentleman; "but yet it is a terrible pity, indeed, to see so much pains and labor, and so much good taste, as have been employed upon the place, altogether thrown away and lost for want of attention. Why, whoever buys the property, if it go on at this rate, will have to spend many hundreds of pounds to put it right again."

"That he will, sir," answered Edmonds. "Before six months be over it will be quite a wilderness; for I must look out for something to do myself. Here, my lord has been dead a good bit more than a year, and I have had but one month's wages from that time. I cannot go on so, sir. All my earnings are going fast enough, I can tell you."

"Well!" exclaimed Morton, as if in a sudden fit of enthusiasm, "I declare I will not see it fall into such a state. I will tell you what, Edmonds—I will lend a hand."

"You, sir!" cried the park-keeper, looking at him with a smile. "Lord bless you, you could do little enough. Not that I mean to say you are not a strong man, very; for you are just the sort of made person who would get through a good deal, but you have never been used to such sort of work, I'll warrant."

The young gentleman laughed merrily. "No, no; you mistake me, Edmonds," he said. "I am not going to take your place over your head. I should have said I will lend the money, not lend a hand. Then, if my friend does not buy the place, why I suppose I must have it myself—that's all."

"Ay, sir; I thought there was something of that," replied Edmonds, shrewdly. "Gentlemen do not come down to look at places for other people, unless they be auctioneers, and such like. Well, I am glad, if it must go, that a gentleman should have it, who seems to like it and value it, and cares about such things."

"But remember, Edmonds," said the young gentleman, putting his finger on his lips, "not a word about this to a living soul, unless it be good Dr. Western—not to your wife or daughter, even; for the matter is not yet quite settled. But now to business, Edmonds," and he took out a pocket-book. "You must get four or five hands—not more; for the matter may go off yet, and then, you know, I should be a loser."

"Five good hands, at twelve shillings a week, sir, will make a strange change in no time," answered the park-keeper, "and we have many a poor fellow about here that is now out of work since my lord died."

"Ay, the loss of one wealthy man, in a place like this, is a misfortune indeed," said Morton. "Then there are your own wages, Edmonds!"

"Why, I used to have seventy pounds a year, and the house and garden, sir," observed the park-keeper, "but now—"

"Well, call it one pound ten a week," rejoined Morton; "that will make four pounds ten. There are twenty pounds, which will pay all for the next month; and if I should be away when it is done, speak to Dr. Western. He will settle with you. But remember! not a word to any one else."

"No, no, sir; I will be as mum as a mouse," replied the park-keeper; "but what am I to say if people ask me?"

"Oh! merely that you have your orders and your money, and that is all you care about," replied Morton.

"Well, sir, I am sure I am very much obliged, indeed," said the man, taking the money. "I know Dr. Western very well—a kind, good gentleman he is. When my poor boy Willy died, he was with him twice every day—that he was."

"He *is* a good man," answered the young gentleman, "and he spoke to me about you, Edmonds, and gave you a high character. But now I should like to see the house, if we can manage it without letting the folks know what it is for."

"Oh! dear, yes, sir," said the park-keeper, "that is easily done," and leading the way down, he had soon introduced his companion to the old housekeeper, and the three walked over every room of the Hall together.

Here and there Mr. Morton stopped and examined everything closely. He looked at the old pictures of the Mallington family. He gazed round the deserted drawing-room with feelings which every one must have known, when standing where gay multitudes of happy hearts, long cold, have once tasted the bright hours of life; but he paused long in the library, took down several books and examined them, seeming especially interested in a manuscript volume, which bore upon its back "History of the Mallington family."

While he was thus employed, the housekeeper and Edmonds stood at the window and looked out. Some of their observations caught the gentleman's ear, and he suddenly turned round, when through the casement he perceived a young man in a shooting jacket, crossing the park, at a couple of hundred yards distance. He was a tall, powerful, handsome youth, and Mr. Morton inquired "Who is that?"

"Why that is Mr. Alfred Latimer, sir," answered the park-keeper, "the son of Mrs. Charlton, on the hill. It's a pity he goes on so, for I do not think he is so bad at heart after all; and he has always been very kind and civil to me ever since I looked over his shooting a pheasant or two when he was a boy."

"Ah! he is a bad one," said the old housekeeper; "you always took his part, Edmonds, but he is a bad one, and you'll find that out some day. Would you like to look at the kitchens, sir?"

"No, I thank you," replied Morton; "now Mr. Edmonds, I will go;" and walking out with his guide he took leave of him, adding, ere they parted, "I could wish the house taken better care of. They seem to have been cutting off the leaden pipes at the corners."

"Ay, that was done by a pack of blackguards, last winter," answered Edmonds.

"They will commit further depredations if they be not checked," replied Morton. "I wish we could have the place better protected, for I am likely to take it just as it stands; but we will think of that hereafter.—Good day."

CHAPTER X.

Instead of turning his steps to his own house, Edmonds, the head park-keeper, who had in former days not only acted in that capacity but as head gamekeeper also; and had, moreover, superintended the arrangement of the gardens —for he was a sort of Gilpin in low life—stood upon the terrace before the house for some minutes, as if he were enjoying the beauties of the prospect. The housekeeper, too, remained at the door without closing it, looking after Mr. Morton as he walked away. Now, it is a very difficult thing to be looked at as one walks away gracefully. If we are conscious that people are staring at our backs, the slightest portion of vanity in the world will lift us up on our toes with a spring; the slightest portion of pride will make our shoulders as stiff as a board; the slightest portion of *mauvaise honte* will make us bend our heads, and walk awkwardly for fear of swaggering. But Morton, whether he was unaware that any one was gazing after him, or whether he was neither vain, proud, nor bashful, went on with quiet ease; and Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, admired his back very much.

"That's a gentleman, whoever he is, Edmonds," she said at length, after having passed about two minutes in contemplation.

Edmonds started and turned round; but he agreed heartily in her commendation, saying, "Yes, that he is, indeed, Mrs. Chalke; we seldom see such a one in these parts."

"I wonder who he is," rejoined the old lady; "do you know, Edmonds?"

"No, that I don't," answered the park-keeper. "Now I think of it, I did not even recollect to ask his name. But Dr. Western knows, Mrs. Chalke; for he talked a good deal about the rector, and said he was an excellent man."

"And so he is," replied the good old lady; but—" and the old lady went on to communicate to Edmonds all her fears and apprehensions regarding her stay at Mallington Hall with none but one housemaid, whom she was obliged to keep herself. "I declare," she said, "that whatever comes of it, I won't stay another winter here in this way. I am sure I was well nigh frightened out of my life last winter; and if the people who cut off the pipes and tried to find a way in at the back door had known that there was such a quantity of plate in the house, they would have broken in to a certainty; that they would. But they all think that my lord took the plate to London with him the last time he was down; and so he did take the plateau, and the two great soup tureens, and one set of dishes; but, nevertheless, there's enough here in the plate-room to tempt those vagabonds down at the Clove Tree, and if they were to find it out I should be a dead woman.

"Well, before the long nights come," said Edmonds, "I will think what can be done, and if we can't manage better, I will come up here and sleep myself. But I must go away now, Mrs. Chalke, for I want to speak with Blackmore about the garden. Something must be done to get it in order, that's clear. Why, it's quite a wilderness."

"Ay, that it is," answered Mrs. Chalke, "but who is to pay for doing it, Edmonds?"

"Why, I don't know," answered Edmonds, "but I dare say some one will, if it's done. Whoever the place comes to ought. Good day, Mrs. Chalke," and he walked away.

Taking his way through the park towards the gate which, as the old lady at the lodge had said, always stood open, he went leisurely on, meditating with no little satisfaction upon the events of the morning. He had by this time become reconciled to the idea of Mallington Park going out of the family, and visions of a thousand pleasant changes, under the auspices of Mr. Morton, presented themselves to his imagination by the way. When he was about two-thirds through the park, he caught a glimpse of the very man he was thinking of, seated at the foot of a tree, employed with his paper and pencil in sketching the bridge, which was just seen spanning the river through an opening in the trees, with the village of Mallington well massed against the hill rising up beyond. Edmonds paused to look at him for a moment;

but, though he was within two or three hundred yards, he did not think fit to approach, notwithstanding several questions which had suggested themselves to his mind, and which he much wished to put to his new acquaintance.

"He takes a mighty delight in the place, surely," said the park-keeper to himself; "I should like to be able to draw in that way. It would be so nice to have the house all hung with pictures of the park. Why, there's Mr. Latimer coming up to him. I hope he won't be saucy, for he's just as likely to say an uncivil thing as a civil one—no, he seems to be polite enough. He's talking to him about his drawing, I dare say. Ay, there now, he's looking at it," and a moment after Morton rose, put the sketch-book in his pocket, and walked away with Alfred Latimer, at an easy and sauntering pace. In the meanwhile the park-keeper pursued his way, passed through the gate, and, following the road which ran from the bridge, along the stream under the park wall, reached, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, a small cottage built upon the bank of the river, with a little garden round it, occupying the whole space between the highway and the water. It was neatly and beautifully kept, for Blackmore, the gardener, after quitting the service of Mr. Charlton, many years before, under circumstances which the reader may recollect, had soon found another place; but at the end of two years had fallen from a tree and broken his thigh, which threw him for many months out of employment. He had then, nearly crippled by the accident, devoted himself to the cultivation of this little piece of ground, and made a scanty livelihood by selling the produce at Mallington. He always found a ready market, indeed, for what he could produce, for he was the most scientific gardener in the neighborhood, but still his means were too limited to allow of any great sale, and to keep the wolf from the door was all that he could accomplish. Another great misfortune had befallen him. His son had proved wild, intractable, and idle; and the abilities which had once made his father's heart glad, had, by inducing an overweening self-conceit, proved a bane instead of a blessing. At almost any hour of the day, from sunrise to sunset, Blackmore was to be met with in his garden, and there Edmonds now found him laboring away, in his ordinary working dress, with a sad and thoughtful countenance.

"Well, Blackmore," said the park-keeper, after the usual country salutations, "I think I have got some good news for you."

"Indeed!" said Blackmore looking up. "I shall be very glad to hear them, Mr. Edmonds, for I have got some bad news for you, and for every one else in the neighborhood."

"Ay! what is that?" demanded Edmonds. "I was in hopes it was going to turn out a lucky day."

"There's but little luck for me, any how," answered Blackmore; "but my news is that Master Alfred has come back again."

"Pooh! is that all?" exclaimed the park-keeper. "You are too harsh with that lad, Blackmore. He's not a bad youth at bottom. His mother has spoilt him, that's all. He will soon sow his wild oats, and turn out better than you think."

"He's a bad-hearted young villain," answered Blackmore sternly. "He was bad as a boy, is bad as a youth, and will be bad as a man. There's no good in him, Mr. Edmonds. He's as vain and conceited as he's vicious and violent, and that's what makes him like to associate with people below himself; because people of his own station in life won't let him lead or bully, or have all his own way. It is because he wishes to be flattered and made a miracle of, and be cock of the walk, that makes him keep company with such folks as my son and Billy Maltby, and others like them. I could forgive and forget all that he did when he was a boy, and all that his mother did too, but I can't forgive his having corrupted my lad John, and made a drunken, idle vagabond of him."

"Well, perhaps, he will behave better now," said Edmonds. "He has been away for five months, and may have improved."

"Improved!" said Blackmore, in a sullen tone. "He'll never improve. What was the first thing he did when he came back? Why, instead of going to his mother's house, like any other gentleman, he went down to the Clove Tree, and there he sat drinking and playing dice till two o'clock, this morning, so my good woman tells me. Poor thing! he's helped to break her heart, however, for our boy would never have gone on so if it had not been for him; and there he sat winning money from one or two; but losing it preciously to Bill Maltby, and, I dare say, not very fairly either. Then he went back to the inn to sleep, but Mrs. Pluckrose had had the house shut up, and would not have her people let him in, so he was forced to go home, I suppose, though they say he swore at his mother like a graceless young villain, and damned her, I know not how many times, before the whole of the raff of the Clove Tree, because he said she had grown stingy, and would not give him enough to keep him like a gentleman, or pay his debts."

"That's bad—that's very bad!" said Edmonds. "However, Blackmore, there's no use of talking about him; I shall give him a lecture when I see him, and he always listens quietly enough to what I say. What I have to tell you is, that I have got orders at last from some one, I don't know who—but as the money came with them, that's all I have to care for—to put the park in order, and I dare say the garden is meant too. Now, as poor old Wilkinson, our head man, died of his cough, last winter, I don't see why you shouldn't come up, and see to getting the garden to rights with any help you can have. Then, being on the spot, you know, you will have a chance of the place when whoever has the hall comes down."

Blackmore held out his hand to him with a glad smile, exclaiming, "Now that's kind of you, Mr. Edmonds—that's very kind of you, it's just like you, and I'll be very glad of the job, whether it goes on or not; for nothing is doing so well as it used to do, and that boy will be the ruin of me, as well as break my heart—that he has done well nigh already. Oh! Mr. Edmonds, if any one had told me of

him that I was so proud of—when I used to think, because he could do anything almost he turned his hand to, and was more like a gentleman's son than a gardener's, that he might one day be a great man and make his fortune—if any one had told me that he would one day be an idle, worthless vagabond, I would have little believed it."

"We should never try to make our children gentlemen, Blackmore," said the park-keeper. "It's a great mistake. It's only grafting a twig on a stock that won't bear it. If there's anything really above the mark in them it will come out without our help."

"Ah! it was all that Alfred Latimer," said the poor gardener; "he ruined him. When first he used to take the boy out rabbit shooting on the common, I used not to like it; but I little thought what it would come to. I remember well enough when he and I had the quarrel about the melon beds up at Mallington House, and I took him in by the arm, and his mother took his part—though the good old gentleman took mine, and found him out in all his lies—he said he would be revenged some day—and revenged he has been, indeed: but here comes John and Bill Maltby, I shan't say much to him, for if I do I may say more than I intend;" and once more shaking the park-keeper by the hand, he walked into the house.

"I'll say something to the young scamp, however," said Edmonds to himself as the gardener retreated; and, waiting calmly at the little wicket of the garden, he watched John Blackmore and his companion sauntering leisurely up with a grave fixed look that neither of them seemed particularly to like.

The first was a young man of about nineteen, with an air of vulgar finery about him, which was anything but prepossessing. He wore his light whiskers long and curling, with a good deal of shirt collar, not very clean, and round his neck a blue satin handkerchief fastened in front with a coarse paste pin. His waistcoat was of divers colors, and displayed to the best advantage a gilt guard chain, not very new. His trousers were loose and somewhat too long for their wearer, draggled and dirty about the heels; and his coat, in the extreme of a past fashion, was of a color too light not to display more signs of age than were even afforded by the antiquity of the cut.

The other man was of a very different aspect. He was, perhaps, two or three and twenty years of age, strongly built, though spare, broad in the shoulders, thin in the flanks, long in the limbs. His head was small and round as a ball, his hair cut short, but the portion which was wanting on the cranium, was made up by the superabundance upon the cheek and under the chin, where the whole exuberant growth was amply displayed by the turning down of the shirt collar over a thin black neckerchief, loosely tied round the neck. His features were small and generally well cut, the nose somewhat too short, and the underlip too thick. The quick, keen, gray eyes, under an overhanging brow, were bright and clear, and the chin prominent but well rounded. His air was free and bold; and there was a look of decision and indifferent impudence about his whole aspect, which was only *contradicted* by the sharp and inquisitive glance of the eye that seemed to mark everything fell upon, as if with a consciousness of dang[illegible] His dress was plainer than that of his comp[illegible]ion, but yet fresher, and of a more suita[illegible]le character, consisting of a round jacket of da[illegible]rk cloth, a light colored waistcoat buttoned only *in* one hole, a pair of gray trousers, very wh*i*te stockings and shoes cut low in the quarter l*i*ke those generally worn by sailors. Indeed, *his* whole appearance had somewhat of a nautical air, and he only wanted the corkscrew curls of hair on each cheek, and the peculiar walk, to pass at first sight for a seaman well to do in life.

Edmonds, as I have said, eyed them sternly as they came forward, and his fixed gaze was not pleasant to either party; but the younger of the two felt it most, and he looked down upon the ground, while the other returned the stare unabashed, though he whispered a word to his companion with a smile curling his lip, as if in contempt of the good park-keeper.

The latter, however, was not a man to be checked by either looks or speeches in any course he might think fit to pursue, and his eye never winked after it had once settled upon John Blackmore and his companion, and when they came near he said at once "Well, John, the same courses I find—what will come of it, think you?"

"What should come of it, Mr. Edmonds?" asked the youth.

"Dishonesty, beggary, wickedness, and the gallows, I should think," replied Edmonds. "Here you are emptying your poor father's pockets, breaking his heart, and ruining him with your extravagance and folly; and wasting your time, losing your character—if ever you had any—and ruining yourself body and soul with a pack of scamps and vagabonds, who first make a fool of you and then laugh at you, and will very soon kick you off to thieve, beg, or die on a dunghill."

"I mind my own affairs, Mr. Edmonds," answered John Blackmore; "and you had better mind yours, too."

"What is that, master keeper, you said about scamps and vagabonds!" demanded Billy Maltby, walking a step or two closer to Edmonds, with a look of cold daring.

"I said," replied the keeper, without moving an inch, "that he keeps company with nothing but such."

"Then you mean me amongst the rest," said Maltby, in the same tone.

"At the head of them," replied Edmonds.

"Then take that for your pains!" exclaimed the other, aiming an overhand blow at his head.

But if he was strong and scientific in the noble science of the ring, the park-keeper was stronger and no less skillful; and, instantly parrying the blow with his left hand, he returned with the right, striking his opponent so hard on the eye, that the surrounding bone seemed to crack under the stroke, and in an instant he was lying on his back on the road. He was up in a second, however, and springing at his opponent with fury, was knocked down again before he could plant a blow. Old Blackmore rushed out of his house at the sound of contention; a stout fellow, who had been one of the

under-keepers, ran up from a cottage hard by; and Maltby, with a furious oath, pulled off his coat, called for a ring, and challenged Edmonds to fight it out on the spot. The park-keeper hesitated for an instant, for the bull-dog spirit of John Bull was strong within him; but, after a brief consideration, he said, "No, I won't—I'm a father of a family, my lad, and have given over such tricks; but I'll tell you what I will do: If ever you are saucy to me again, or if ever I find you lurking about the park or in the covers, I will give you such a hiding as will save some one a deal of trouble; so take care of yourself, that's all; for you've had a taste, and only a taste; but you shall have as much as you can carry the next time. Come along with me, Wilson, I've something to say to you," and he walked away with the under-keeper, turning a deaf ear to the taunts and insults which Billy Maltby judged it expedient to pour upon him.

CHAPTER XI.

I must now beg the reader to put on his hat—for it is yet the early morning, and walking under forest trees before the dew has risen with an uncovered head is not sane—and to step back with me to the spot where Mr. Edmond Morton sat under a tree—it was an imprudent proceeding—sketching the bridge. I wonder how he could be so silly; but poets, and painters, and sportsmen, are always very foolish, and are as fond of "brushing the morning dew," as they call it, as a deer, forgetting that their shoes are not horny ones of nature's providing, but of very penetrable leather. However, there he sat sketching, till, turning his eyes a little to the right, in the direction where the keeper's house lay in its little glen, hidden by the trees, he beheld Alfred Latimer coming, with a quick and hurried pace, towards the spot where he had placed himself.

Now, like many other men, who have an overweening opinion of their own merits, Alfred Latimer was shy of people at all in his own station of life. His class is a very common one, where pride and vanity are mingled together in such portions as to exacerbate each other, and where the opinion of our own merits is not of that calm and comfortable kind which renders us perfectly sure that every man of sense will esteem and appreciate us as we do ourselves; but, on the contrary, is of the irritable and suspicious kind, which leads us to fear that our qualities will not be so readily recognised as we think they ought to be, and consequently to seek such society alone as will receive any adventitious circumstances of rank or wealth as sure claims to admiration and respect. He would not have thought of speaking to Mr. Morton first for the world; that gentleman's dress and appearance; and the high-bred air about him, would have been an impassable barrier against such a proceeding. But Morton himself had his own views and purposes; and as he saw the widow's son walking on with a shy glance towards him, he first beckoned to him; and, as Alfred Latimer did not choose to see the sign, he raised his voice and called, taking care not to rise.

"May I speak with you for a moment," he said; and the young gentleman, with a quick, but unwilling step, approached.

"Pray, can you tell me," continued Morton, pointing with his pencil to a spot in the distance, where, following the course of the valley, the eye rested on a tower which seemed that of a church, and then to his sketch, where the same object was represented in a few bold light strokes. "Pray, can you tell me what is the name of that place?" and he added, with an accurate, yet seemingly careless hand, several strokes to the drawing.

"That is called Steeple Melford," replied the young man, looking over his shoulder, and set at once at ease by the familiarity of the stranger.

"Is it a town or a village?" asked Morton, going on.

"Oh, nothing but a little village," replied Latimer, still looking at his progress. "How quick you draw."

"Habit, habit!" answered Morton; "but I think that will do," and he rose.

"Why, you do not call that finished, do you?" demanded the young gentleman; "you will never be able to make anything out of that."

"Oh, yes," replied Morton, "as you will see, if you call upon me in a day or two at the inn. It is all I want; and so now I will go back again. You reside here, I think."

As he spoke he took a step forward, and Alfred Latimer followed him, while replying "Yes, I generally do. My mother has a house at the top of the hill there, and when we are good friends I live with her—when we are not I go away."

"Why you never quarrel with your mother, do you?" said Morton, in a good-humored tone. "That's a bad plan."

"No, we don't exactly quarrel," answered Alfred Latimer; "but sometimes she does not choose to give me money enough, and then I go away, and that is sure to bring her round."

"But, perhaps, she cannot afford to give it to you," said Morton; "she may not have it to give."

"That is what she says," replied the other, "but it is all an excuse. Why, the old man left her very well off, and the guardians allow my sister Louisa twelve hundred a year, and the whole of that, except two hundred that she keeps for her dress, goes to my mother for the house, so that she could let me have more if she liked, I am sure."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Morton, thoughtfully. "We young men do not always calculate very accurately what our parents can afford. I recollect when I was your age thinking it very hard to have no more than two hundred a year allowed me at college; but I have found out since that it was all my father could then afford to allow me, and more than was convenient. I know your mother, and her establishment is expensive."

"Ay, why does she keep up such a one?" said Alfred Latimer. "It is upon that and her dress that the money goes. But she won't be without anything that she has a mind to have, and yet grumbles when I want a few pounds.

Here, she has had two or three dinner parties this last week, and pic-nics, and all sort of things, they tell me, and yet when I wrote to her to send me fifty pounds, she vowed she had not got as much in the world, and sent me ten."

"But in that case why don't you apply to some other relation or friend?" inquired his companion. "If the money is absolutely necessary to you to pay a bill, or anything of that kind, I dare say you could easily borrow it."

"Necessary enough, by Jove!" cried young Latimer, "for a fellow in London to whom I owe a small sum threatens to arrest me, so I was obliged to make myself scarce, as they call it; and, as to borrowing the money, I know no one who has got it to lend. Louisa would let me have it soon enough if she had it; but she sent me all her last quarter, except ten pounds, six weeks ago, and she will not have any more till the 29th of September, for those old screws, her guardians, are as hard as flint. None of my friends have a *sous* to bless themselves with, and my relations—a set of proud blackguards—take no notice of me because my father chose to marry against their consent—devil fly away with them!"

"You would find it a good plan, Mr. Latimer," said Morton, "to make friends amongst people who can give you assistance in whatever way you may want it; and there are many sorts of assistance much more important and valuable than such a trifle as forty or fifty pounds."

"Ah! I understand what you mean," answered Latimer, "to make acquaintance with fashionable people; but they are all so d——d stupid. They are as cold and dull as lead, and up to no fun; and I doubt much whether they would think forty or fifty pounds such a trifle as you fancy, for they are stingy enough, I can tell you."

"I have not found them so," replied Morton, "and for my own part I am always willing to lend a friend what he wants, as far as my means go; and so," he continued, pulling open the iron gate of the park, and going out first, "if your mother cannot let you have the fifty pounds you want, I will; for she has been very kind and courteous to me since I have been here; and I should like to make her any return, by assisting her son."

"Upon my life, you are an excellent fellow!" cried Alfred Latimer, who had not the slightest hesitation in regard to borrowing money wherever he could get it. "I will pay you as soon as I can; for I have my own annuity, and in the meantime I will give you my I O U."

Morton smiled, but made no reply, for his young companion's words showed that he was not altogether unaccustomed to the trade of borrowing, and confirmed him in the belief which he had entertained from the first, that the money he was about to lend would never be repaid; and yet, strange to say, he was even, perhaps, the more willing to lend it on that account. "If I can obtain a hold upon this youth," he thought, "and by the loss of a few pounds, lent him from time to time, render him in some degree bound to me by necessity, if not by gratitude, I may, perhaps, disentangle *him from his low* and vicious companions, and gradually lead him at all events into a better way of life, if not into higher and nobler thoughts. It is at all events worth the while."

Who was he thinking of when he indulged in these meditations? I suspect, dear reader, that once more Louisa Charlton had something to do with the matter; for certainly Alfred Latimer had not greatly prepossessed him in his favor; and it was hardly to be expected, however Quixotic might be his benevolence, that he should be thus studious to reclaim a dissolute youth upon the pure principles of abstract benevolence.

However that might be, he walked on, talking with his young companion, over the bridge into the little inn and up to his own rooms, where, taking the I O U which the other offered, he gave him ten five pound notes, much to Latimer's satisfaction. The borrower was quite ready to leave the lender the moment he had got the money; but Morton detained him for nearly an hour, showing him a portfolio of drawings, and engaging him to talk of various subjects, which, as his heart was opened by what he internally called "his piece of marvelous good luck," he was willing enough to do.

On most points he displayed very gross ignorance; for though he had acquired a certain knowledge of Latin and Greek, a smattering of French, and a few other accomplishments, all the more valuable part of education was wanting. Like so many others, he had acquired words rather than ideas—forms rather than substance; he spoke without understanding—argued, but did not reason—and had, in short, been instructed, but not educated. Nevertheless, Morton gained one object which he had in view: he obtained, even by his short conference, a great, even an extraordinary influence over Alfred Latimer's mind. There was something in his conversation which entertained and amused the young man, and yet, whether he would or not, commanded his respect. It was light and cheerful, easy and flowing, but not too familiar; and, at the same time, there flowed through it an under-current of strong good sense and high-toned feeling, which never obtruded, but, always apparent, had its effect with gentle and persuasive influence, which sent the youth away thoughtful and inquiring. He felt, for the first time, perhaps, that there were other things in life than those he had lived for, and things also that were worth seeking; but, alas! the education from infancy to manhood, if education it could be called, had been given; the tree had received its bent, and it was never to be changed again, though it might be blown about by any strong blast that passed over it.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was a large dinner party at Mallington House, and the drawing-room was in the usual state in which drawing-rooms are when all the expected company have arrived and yet dinner has not been announced. It is a period of long pauses, and of gentlemen slowly crossing the room to say three words to ladies at the other side; and of sundry other inventions for making

time run lightly when he is heavy afoot, and of contrivances for not seeming stupid when one is anything but vivacious. It is a period when conversation, properly so called, is impossible.

One may talk, one may speak treason, make love, or offer marriage, or any other of those things which people generally do in private places; but it is impossible to converse when one is in expectation of being interrupted the next minute. There was in the room a great variety of the human animal; Mrs. Charlton, now certainly growing the "stout lady," but still not ungraceful; Louisa Charlton, looking as lovely as one of those gleams of happiness which sometimes come across a monotonous existence, like a sudden burst of sunshine on a chill hill side, could render her fair face; a fox-hunting country baronet, a portly man, as fat in his ideas as in his person; his wife, a very fine lady indeed, and all the finer because she had not always been a fine lady; their daughter, who was what people usually call a sweet interesting girl—I can describe her no better, for although this book is written for posterity, and it is very probable that posterity (if society improves) may not define a sweet interesting girl exactly as we should at present, yet will there not be dictionaries of the dead tongue of the nineteenth century? Besides these persons, there were in the room a country gentleman, who hunted foxes during the autumn and spring, and found the rest of the year very heavy; his two sons, who trod in their father's horse's steps, and both of whom intended some day to marry Miss Charlton. There was, moreover, a widow lady of mature years, with her niece, Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and Alfred Latimer.

Mrs. Charlton had evidently not calculated upon her son's appearance when she invited the rest of the company, for the persons present, including herself, formed the ominous number of thirteen. Indeed, the movements of the worthy youth were not always easy to calculate upon; and it seemed as if he sometimes did violence to his own tastes and propensities, especially for the purpose of preventing people from knowing what he would do next. Now, for the last two years, nothing had been sufficient to prevail upon him to be present at anything like a formal dinner party in Mallington House. It was an annoyance to him; it was a restraint. His character, half shy, half haughty, scorned and hated the ceremonies and courtesies of life; but on this occasion, as soon as his mother informed him that such a meeting was to take place, he announced his intention of being present, and was one of the first in the room. As soon as the guests began to arrive he seated himself by Louisa, and talked to her for some time in a low tone. Mrs. Charlton watched them as much as circumstances would allow, with an eye glanced towards her son between every sentence and every movement; and she saw her fair step-daughter color deeply at something he said, and the moment after perceived a warm smile come upon Louisa's beautiful lip.

The next instant the fox-hunter and his two sons were ushered in; and the graceful mistress of the mansion advanced a step or two to meet the thin wind-cutting elderly man, who came forward with no slight idea of his own importance, and to welcome his two family jewels. As she passed she heard Louisa say, in a low voice, "For pity's sake, Alfred, defend me from either or both of them. I think they are the two most unpleasant young men in the whole county."

"What wretches they must be, then!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing aloud; "but I will defend you, Louisa," and the moment the elder of the youths approached to pay his respects to Miss Charlton, her step-brother addressed him in a jeering tone, but not without a touch of pride in his manner, saying "So, Mr. Middleton, you broke your fine horse's back last March, I hear."

"He broke his own back and nearly my neck," replied the young gentleman somewhat nettled.

"Ay, but it was all your own fault," answered Alfred Latimer. "If you had not pulled him in when you found yourself at the top of the bank, he would have gone down as easy as if he had been treading on a Turkey carpet; but he was resolved to go, and you were afraid to let him, and so between you he was killed and you half killed."

Louisa Charlton felt somewhat painfully that it is at times a dangerous thing to trust one's defence to a person on whom we cannot depend. She was mortified at her companion's rudeness, and though she reaped the benefit by Mr. Middleton's speedy withdrawal from a conversation so disagreeable to him, yet she could not refrain from saying a few kind and courteous words to medicate the wounds which she had been unwillingly art and part in inflicting on his own particular vanity.

"Well, Louisa, you are an odd girl!" said Alfred Latimer, as the guest moved away. "Here you declare you wish to be rid of him, and when I send him away you say all in your power to make him stay—but here comes the other brother, Edward, and there comes Mr. Morton in at the door. On my life, I have a great mind to deliver you over to Ned Middleton, and exclude the favorite."

Louisa Charlton was silent, but by no effort that she could command was she able to prevent the warm blood from once more mounting into her cheek at his words, any more than the peach or the nectarine can command its sunny side not to blush under the sun's rays.

Morton and Edward Middleton advanced almost together, and Louisa observed that Mrs. Charlton whispered a few words to the former, which were merely "Will you have the kindness, when we go to dinner, to take Louisa?" which would have puzzled her more if she had known their import than the mere appearance of a little private communication did in the abstract. He bowed his head, with a well-pleased smile, and as the young and inexperienced but clear-minded girl, by a mere casual glance, withdrawn as soon as given, marked his carriage as he crossed the room towards her, she could not help comparing his whole appearance and demeanor with those around, and singling out the gentleman—that rare and excellent thing—the gentleman by feeling and by habit, by nature as well as education, by heart as well

as by position, from those who conventionally took the title, but did not possess the character.

Alfred Latimer was in one of his happy moods. His conversation with Morton in the morning, and the relief which he had received from the embarrassment which seemed most pressing at the time, had raised his spirits and had given him confidence in himself; and not really wanting in talent, though totally wanting in discretion, principle, and self-command, he proceeded to play that part which he thought would be most pleasing to his new friend and to his mother's step-daughter, with more skill than might have been expected. It is true that he took a pleasure in annoying the neighboring gentry, who, to say the truth, possessed but little to command his respect, and who had done nothing to conciliate his regard. He had no reverence for anything or any person, though it may seem a strange assertion to make of one who generally excluded himself from society simply out of shyness. But shyness never proceeds from reverence for others; it is quite a different thing from timidity; and the object of its consideration is the estimation in which we shall be held by others, not the estimation in which others ought to be held by us.

He kept his seat, then, by the side of Louisa Charlton till Morton advanced and shook hands with her in silence, while Mr. Edward Middleton was saying something he thought very fine. Then rising and leaving his place vacant, he drew the young foxhunter aside, and inquired after his black pointer bitch, adding with a laugh, "You had better let me have her; for you do not know how to hunt her."

While he communicated this pleasant sentiment to his acquaintance, Morton took the chair he had left vacant, and Louisa gazed in his face earnestly for a moment, while he said a few words upon indifferent subjects, as if there was something of more importance on which she would fain have spoken. She answered somewhat at random, too; and Morton, with easy self-possession, which is only acquired by much mingling in the world, took advantage of the first of those little bustles which do enliven occasionally the dull ten minutes to give her the opportunity of saying anything she might think fit.

"You seem as if you had a tale to tell, Miss Charlton," he said, as Dr. Western and several others moved away to look at some fine drawings to which Mrs. Charlton called their attention."

"No, indeed," answered Louisa, with a warm smile; "but I have heard a tale which would be very gratifying to me if I had not a warning to give. Mr. Latimer, who is my half brother, you know—at least Mrs. Charlton's son—has told me your great kindness to him this morning; but—but, Mr. Morton—I do not really know how to explain myself"—

Morton gazed into her beautiful eyes for a moment with a smile, till he saw the color in her cheek begin to grow a little deeper, and then he said "Will you let me help you, Miss Charlton?"

"I am afraid you cannot," replied Louisa, "and yet I think it but right to say that which—which"—

"Well, let me try," rejoined Morton. "You know not yet how much of the seer I am; or, in other words, how much insight one honest heart has into another, and how quickly a man of the world perceives the circumstances of those with whom he mingles. You would warn me, then, my dear Miss Charlton, that the money will never be repaid."

"No, no," said Louisa; "not exactly that; for that I could insure myself, but I merely wished to hint that Alfred might trespass upon your kindness too far, and inconsiderately borrow more than he could ever repay. He is already much in debt, I am sorry to find; and I feared that you might be a loser, perhaps, of more than"—

Once more she paused, and Morton finished the sentence for her, saying "More than I can afford. You will think me a strange personage, Miss Charlton, when I tell you that I lent this money with the full knowledge, or at least belief, that it would never be repaid; and I should be quite ready to lend a much larger sum, with the same conviction, for the same object."

"Nay, why should you do that?" exclaimed Louisa Charlton.

The servant almost at the same instant announced that dinner was on the table, and Morton merely replied in a low voice, "Do you not think I would do much more to save from perdition a person nearly connected with one I love?"

Louisa's hand trembled as she took the arm which Morton offered, and her steps tottered as he led her towards the door. All the three Misters Middleton looked surprised and offended at the young stranger taking such bold possession of the heiress, and the father asked his eldest son, "Who the devil is that fellow?"

"Some painter, they say," replied the heir apparent, with a shrug of the shoulders; and he walked forward to give his arm to the baronet's daughter, the sweet interesting girl, while his father advanced to escort the baronet's wife.

Poor Louisa Charlton! going down those stairs was a sad agitating journey to her. At the first step her head whirled, and her thoughts were all in confusion; at the second, her heart beat so vehemently she thought she must have dropped; at the third, she asked herself if her ears had not deceived her; at the fourth, though she was quite certain Morton had spoken those words, she felt sure that she had mistaken their import; at the fifth, she recollected that Alfred Latimer was nearly connected with many persons whom she did not know, and that Edmond Morton might very likely love one of them; at the sixth, she had quite settled the matter to her own satisfaction, and though she did not believe one word of the hypothesis she had set up, and did believe that Morton loved her a little, and would have been very sorry to have believed that he loved any one else more, yet, as it suited her purpose, and calmed her agitation to fancy that she had mistaken him, she persuaded herself that it was so. How continually we lie to our own heart. Here below, each individual has some eight or ten millions of persons to deal with—more or

less directly—and by the best statistical tables of lying it may be calculated that, at least, one half of those eight or ten millions are trying to cheat him to the best of their ability; but the aggregate amount of lying practised on him by all the men that he knows or has to do with, is very inferior to that which he practises on himself.

By this art Louisa Charlton made herself quite comfortable for the time, and the last steps of the stairs were passed calmly and quietly. She had even recovered herself so far ere they reached the dining-room door as to say, "You are very kind; but I fear Alfred is more deeply plunged in debts and difficulties than you think."

"Perhaps they may be made a means," answered Morton, "of rescuing him from worse evils. I will try to explain how during dinner, if I have an opportunity."

The meal passed over as such things usually do. The appearance of the crops was discussed. Some of the cases at quarter sessions were talked of. There had been an earthquake about that time in the West Indies, and a pig had been born in a neighboring parish with two heads. Both proved very serviceable on the present occasion; but while the pig was upon the carpet, Morton found the moment that he was looking for, and explained to Louisa Charlton his views and his plans in regard to Alfred Latimer.

He showed her that the most fatal vice which can affect a young man of good station, the love of low society, had taken possession of Mrs. Charlton's son; and he went on to express a hope that if by rendering him pecuniary assistance, and thus forcing him frequently to associate with himself, he could obtain some influence over his mind, he might either lead him without discussion, or persuade him by reason, to abandon his low associates, and seek the company of men in his own station. He was compelled to be very brief in what he said; but everything was clear and definite, just and reasonable; with a sufficient portion of enthusiasm, subdued and studiously kept out of sight, as far as it could be, to excite admiration and regard in his fair hearer, and with sufficient tenderness of tone and manner to make her heart beat a very little, but not to agitate her enough to be at all unpleasant. Morton had been very wrong, indeed, in making his declaration of love at the door of the drawing-room; but he managed the succeeding operations better, and Louisa went away from the table thoughtful and happy; and with the fate of her young heart fixed.

The private tone in which Mr. Morton and Miss Charlton had been speaking during dinner, had not escaped observation, and some of the younger gentlemen at the table, who would have preferred enjoying the same degree of intimacy themselves, were rather inclined to be impertinent to the supposed painter. The baronet himself, and the elder Mr. Middleton, treated him coldly and proudly—condescended to address a few words to him, indeed, but affected to confine them entirely to the subject of the arts. Morton was exceedingly amused, and humored them to the top of their bent; for he had heard the report of his supposed profession, and had done his best to encourage it, taking at least a dozen more sketches than he would have otherwise done, and that in a very ostentatious manner.

Good Doctor Western, however, was destined to spoil his sport, with the gentlemen present at least; for the worthy gentleman could not make up his mind to say or imply what was untrue, even for a jest; and when Sir Simon Upplestone asked him directly who and what Mr. Morton was, adding, "People say, doctor, that he is merely a poor artist; now you know, doctor—" the rector interrupted him, for fear he should say something more disagreeable still, replying, "He is a gentleman, sir, in every respect, by birth, education, and fortune; though he certainly deserves the name of an artist, as far as drawing better than many who make it their profession can entitle him to that distinction."

Morton caught the sense of the doctor's reply, if not the exact words, and was vexed with him; and the evening, as he expected, passed very dully from that moment. Long before the guests departed, Alfred Latimer disappeared from the room; and Morton, who marked his going, entertained no doubt that he sought society more congenial to his tastes and habits.

CHAPTER XIII.

Louisa Charlton slept little during the night after the dinner party which we have just spoken of. While conversation was going on around her, and lights dazzled her eyes, and the siren songs of her step-mother, who had not yet lost one note of her sweet voice, rang in her ears, and Morton was by her side, the delusion which she practised on herself lasted with sufficient power to prevent her from examining closely the realities which she hesitated to contemplate. Let it not be supposed that she really believed that what she thought fit to fancy for the time, was true. Oh, no! As I have before said, she knew at the bottom of her heart that it was not so; but do we not sit in the box of a theatre, and see men, whom we have often beheld in homely apparel, now tricked out in gold and velvet, enacting kings and princes, with scenes around them representing forests and palaces, tented fields, and royal courts; and though we know the men and women to be very humble folks, often denied by the senseless usages of the proud cold world the very respect which genius of any kind should always command, and though we are well aware that the glittering pageantry in which they move is but thin lath and painted pasteboard, yet we find no difficulty in shutting out the undoubted truth from our own consideration, and see and hear and know nothing but what we are inclined to believe—till we have left the theatre, and reflect calmly over all that we have beheld. Thus Louisa Charlton would not know what she knew—would not believe what she actually believed—would not (contrary to all her usual habits) look the truth in the face. But as soon as she was alone and in silence, and the curtain of darkness drawn around, the communing with

her own heart began. First, what was it that Edmond Morton really meant? She could no longer deceive herself—she was loved! It was not alone the few words he had spoken before dinner, but many others—not so plain, but plain enough—which he had spoken before. It was not alone words either, but looks and tone and manner. She could not doubt it—she did not doubt it; and turning her face to her pillow with a glowing cheek, she asked herself if she did not love in return?

Oh! what a tumult then was felt in her young breast; how confused and wild seemed all her thoughts! Mind would not answer what the heart spoke clearly enough; and for many minutes she dared not admit even to herself how deeply, how wholly, how warmly she returned the affection of one whom she had not known a month. The truth, however, made itself heard at length; but then she blamed herself that it was so. There seemed something to her eyes, rash, imprudent, almost wrong, in yielding to such sensations; for she knew not that they are not dependent upon will, but are gifts, ay, bright and excellent gifts from God who made us—to be regulated, not to be resisted—to guide us to happiness, if wisely exercised. The truth, however, on this score also made itself felt ere long, and when she thought of him she loved—of how different he was from every one she had previously seen, how high, yet gentle in his bearing—how noble and generous in his words and thoughts—how graceful in person and in manner—how perfect in all the qualities which win attachment and insure respect—she almost ceased to blame herself for loving, and loving hastily.

But then came the thought that he had never yet plainly spoken his attachment to her; he had but implied that he loved—he had not said it—and, for an instant, wild fears took possession of her. She had heard that men can trifle with woman's affection. She remembered the boy and the butterfly; and the very thought of all she felt being repaid by, perhaps, desertion and ingratitude, was so terrible that she sobbed as if that sad fate had already befallen her. But then, when she remembered Edmond Morton's words on many occasions, when she thought of little traits which she had marked, and which speak the heart more than professions or set speeches, she was angry at herself for doubting him. Yet, notwithstanding that confidence in his honor, in his kindness, in his generous heart, she felt ashamed of having learned to love before her love had been distinctly asked—and that continued to trouble her through the night. Imagination—fertile in ways of tormenting, as well as in ways of blessing—filled her mind with a thousand other agitating thoughts, and kept her waking till the shrill drawing-room clock just beneath her bedroom struck three. She did not hear the next hour strike, but some time after she started up as if in fear, and saw the morning light streaming through the shutters.

Looking at her watch she found it half-past five, and rising with a mind still troubled with the thought that even yet Edmond Morton had not justified her in feeling as she felt towards him, she dressed herself without ringing for her maid, resolved to walk down in the fresh early morning, and take breakfast with Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn. She thought that their society might comfort and calm her; not that she proposed for one moment to make them sharers of the thoughts that agitated her bosom; but there is something in the conversation of the good and wise which—like those excellent remedies physicians talk of that heal wounds by giving tone and vigour to the whole constitution—sooth and medicate even the anxieties and sorrows which are not exposed to the eye. The good rector always breakfasted at an early hour, and Mrs. Charlton, on the contrary, always rose late, and frequently took her first meal in bed; so that Louisa was sure to find the family at the rectory up, and neither to be missed nor wanted at home. The morning was bright, though there were passing clouds, and she anticipated the walk through the fields at the back of the village with pleasure, for she was a child of the morning, and loved the early day. Her head ached a little, too, with a restless night, and she thought of the fresh air and the cool shade of the tall trees with eager longing; but she was obliged to wait for a time till some of the household were up, for she was dressed before half-past six. At length the sound of moving tables from below, and feet upon the stairs, told her that the housemaids at least were stirring, and, as her own habits were early, her maid soon after appeared. She was not surprised to find her young mistress up, and prepared to go out, for it had happened often before from other causes; and leaving word that she was gone down to Dr. Western's, Louisa issued forth, and walked quietly through the lanes and fields, pausing every now and then, with her cottage bonnet in her hand, to enjoy the morning breeze, and the prospect that opened here and there through the trees to the river and Mallington Park. But ever and anon, together with the sensation of enjoyment, came a certain undefined feeling of apprehension. Perhaps, it ought rather to be called anxiety; for it was not that she feared anything, but rather that she suddenly remembered, whenever she paused to taste the calm and unmingled pleasures which had been the brightness of her youth, that she loved; and that though she believed, though she was sure, that she was loved in return, yet the words had not been spoken that fully justified her in loving; and gradually she fell into a deeper fit of meditation, which led her to prolong her walk along the bank of the stream, knowing that Mrs. Evelyn would not be down before eight.

As she walked along, she met several workmen and country people returning to their cottages to breakfast; and from every one, for they all knew her, she had a kind good morning, and a respectful—often a grateful bow. At length, as she came close upon the edge of the stream, choosing the green border of turf that separated it from the road, she saw a little fisherman, some nine or ten years old, casting his line into the water. The boy turned his warm face at her step, and recognising the son of Edmonds, the park-keeper, she gave him a smile and a nod, and was walking on. The boy, however, put his hand to his hat, half swinging round to bow to the young lady, when missing his footing, after a momentary struggle to save

himself, he fell headlong into the stream. On the impulse of the moment, without pausing to consider how deep the river might be in that part, Louisa darted forward with a scream for help, and plunged in. She knew, indeed, that it was shallow above, but a mill-stream joined the little river a few yards higher up, and in a moment she felt the water circle over her head. Giddy and confused, with the green light flashing in her eyes, and the water rushing in her ears, she was rising again to the surface, when suddenly she felt a strong arm cast round her waist; and ere she well knew what had happened, was laid gently upon the grass.

"Oh, Louisa! Oh, my beloved girl!" cried the voice of Edmond Morton.

"The boy! the boy! the poor boy!" exclaimed Louisa, raising herself on her knees; and without further entreaty Morton plunged into the river again. But young Edmonds was in little danger comparatively. He knew something, though not much, of swimming, and he held fast by his fishing-rod, showing both skill and presence of mind in so employing it as to keep his head above the water. With two strokes Morton reached him, and catching him under the shoulder, soon landed him in safety. The boy shook himself like a wet dog, and seemed in no degree the worse; but Louisa was pale as death, more, indeed, with fear than anything else. To her, Morton turned then, and, supporting her tenderly on his arm, he led her gently towards the rectory; but as they went he whispered words which were better calculated to restore the quick beating of Louisa's heart than any of all the excellent inventions of the Humane Society.

CHAPTER XIV.

Her heart beat—Oh, how it beat as he led her on! She could not answer a word, for if faintness and dizziness had not taken from her the power of speech, the overwhelming sensations which his words called forth would have left her voiceless. They were all joyful, it is true, and in anticipation she might have thought that such words as she now heard must be calming, tranquillizing, re-assuring; and yet, while they made her very happy, they showed her how much she had doubted, how much she had dreaded—they showed her, more than all, how much she loved. Even that was enough to agitate and overpower her, and for several minutes she seemed as it were in a dream. She could hardly believe that all which had occurred—nay, all which was occurring, was a reality. The drowning boy, the plunge into the stream, the waters closing over her head, the sudden and unexpected rescue, the words of earnest and passionate love—all seemed parts of some wild strange vision; and twice she turned faintly round, and gazed in Morton's face as if to assure herself that it was all true indeed.

The languid fall of her eyelids, the heavy pressure of her hand upon his arm, the feebleness of her step as he supported her onward—all made her companion conclude that she was scarcely able to proceed; and as they came to a spot where a rustic bench had been placed upon the bank of the stream, between two tall elms, he led her to it, and, kneeling at her feet held her hand in his, gazing up into her face with looks of tenderness and apprehension.

"Speak to me, my Louisa," he said, "speak to me but one word to tell me you are better! Oh! you do not know what it is, Louisa, to see the being you most love on earth nearly perish before your eyes! You know not how one longs to hear the dear voice again! You cannot tell, you cannot comprehend what are my feelings towards you this moment, just saved from death."

"Not now, Morton, not now," answered Louisa at length: "I do comprehend, I do know, but do not agitate me now."

"I will not," he said, pressing his lips upon her hand, "I will not utter another word of love. I have been wrong—I have been unkind. I should have chosen a fitter season; but it burst forth without my will. I will be so selfish no more."

"Selfish!" exclaimed Louisa, the tears rising in her eyes. "You selfish! Oh, no, you are all that is generous and kind."

She said no more, but Morton was content, as well he might be, for he knew her who spoke, and was aware that those words could not be light ones. He might be anxious, indeed, to hear more—to tell the tale of love fully, and to win the kind reply—but he really felt what he had said, that it was ungenerous, for his own happiness, to add anything to her emotions at such a moment; and turning from the topic of his love, he sought, tenderly and wisely, to soothe and calm her; and knowing well where the great source of all mental strength, the only fountain of true tranquillity and confidence, is to be found, he said, "For how much have we to thank God, Louisa, that one who was able to save you should be wandering accidentally by the river at this early hour. How much comfort, how much joy do those lose who attribute—I may say madly—every event of life to accident or some blind necessity. What a vast and happy conviction it is to believe that your deliverance from such imminent danger is the work of an all-wise and all-merciful being, full of goodness and love."

"It is, indeed," said Louisa; "and that you should be the person, too," she added, thoughtfully, but she did not end the sentence, feeling that she was approaching that upon which she feared to touch. Not, indeed, that her heart at all wavered; not that she was doubtful; not that she was apprehensive. She loved with the first full confiding affection of woman's nature; she loved the only man whom she had ever met with that seemed in her eyes worthy of her love; and she had no hesitation in the present, no dread for the future. But yet there was a something that made her shrink from the avowal of all she felt. Were I writing for women alone, it would be unnecessary to add a syllable, for all have felt, or will feel, as she felt; but these are sensations little understood by men. *We* seldom, very seldom, know the emotions too powerful for speech, for contemplation, almost for endurance; and more seldom still, when we do experience them, are they with us those of joy. Rarely, too—oh, how rarely! especially when the early and light timidity of youth is past, and we are capable of feeling the

deeper and stronger passions of the heart—rarely have we any of that reluctant dread of owning even to ourselves the sensations that master us, that anxious striving to turn away our thoughts from those things thus busy in our bosoms, and to conceal them from all others. But women—all women worthy of the name have been affected as Louisa Charlton was at that moment; all women have hesitated to unveil their heart even to him who possessed it most entirely—ay, more to him, perhaps, than to any other.

Morton pressed her not to say more, however, and after some few words to while away a moment of repose, he asked, "Can you go on now, Louisa; or shall I run to Dr. Western's and bring some conveyance for you? I fear to let you sit here longer, wet and agitated as you are."

"Oh, no, no!" she answered; "do not leave me. I shall be better in a moment."

But even as she spoke they were joined by another, a perfect stranger to both; but one who seemed not inclined to be long a stranger in any society into which he might be thrown. He was a slim man of about five or six and thirty, with a profusion of dark hair and whisker, curled in the most exquisite manner, with a sweet and simpering countenance, and a complexion peculiarly delicate and clear: in short, a pretty, a very pretty, man. He wore a blue coat, rather pale in the hue, with gilt buttons, a yellow waistcoat, and a blue satin handkerchief round his neck, spotted with amber flowers. The rest of his dress consisted of very wide trousers, then in fashion, of a lavender shade of grey, and boots which might have served as mirrors to his beauties, so brilliantly were they blacked and polished. His air was perfectly jaunty and self-satisfied, and as he walked along the bank of the river, before he perceived Louisa and her lover, he rose upon the tips of his toes, as if his elevated opinion of himself required some external demonstration.

As soon as he cast his eyes upon the young lady, however, and perceived from the very evident signs displayed by her dripping garments and disheveled hair that some accident had happened, he approached with a hurried step, exclaiming, "Goodness, ma'am!—Goodness me! You must have tumbled into the water—you are not drowned, I hope. Gracious heaven, what a mercy! But your complexion will be spoilt if you sit in the sun all wet. I dare say you are faint, too—let me recommend you some of the unparalleled Droitwich smelling salts. They have been known to bring a man to life who had lain for dead eight and forty hours;" and, regardless of some impatience in Morton's look and some surprise and reluctance in Louisa's, he brought forth from his pocket, first a corked and sealed bottle, then a small steel corkscrew, and having opened the precious vial, held it to her nose till she gently removed it, saying that she was better, and did not require such a restorative.

"Pray hold it yourself, ma'am," he cried. "I know I am clumsy; it will revive you in a moment—I am quite sure it will;" and, not to seem ungrateful, Louisa took it at his request. But no sooner had she done so, than his hand dived into his pocket again; and forth he brought another bottle, longer, thinner, and wrapped up in paper covered over with talismanic signs. "Let me call your attention to this article, ma'am," he said, "and yours, too, sir, for it is equally important and efficacious to gentlemen and ladies. This is Mrs. Grimsditch's vegetable anti-corrugent dew of jonquille, a sovereign preservative against wrinkles, sun-burning, freckles, moles, discolorations, heat spots, scars, or any other of the great enemies of beauty. It softens, refreshes, nourishes, polishes, and blanches the skin, gives an agreeable coolness to the complexion, against which the sun of India itself cannot contend; and"—

"The lady does not require it, sir," said Morton, somewhat sharply; "and at all events, this is not a moment in which she can attend to its virtues."

"Nay, sir, no offence, I hope;" said their undesired companion. "I did but wish to do anything in my poor power to serve the lady; and as to not requiring it, every one requires it: the young and beautiful to preserve their loveliness, and others who are somewhat faded to restore the charms they have lost."

Morton felt inclined to knock him down; but he remembered the barber of Bagdad, and took patience while the other went on. "I did but wish to offer my poor services, sir, either to the lady or yourself, and seeing you both in a—"

"The only service, sir, you can render us," said the young gentleman, interrupting him, as a happy thought crossed his mind, "is to run as fast as you can along that path, past the church about half a mile, on to the rectory; and, ringing at the door, to beg Dr. Western to send his carriage, saying that this lady, his ward, has met with a little accident, and—"

"Oh, no—no—you will alarm them!" cried Louisa.

But the stranger, without attending to her, set off good-humoredly at full speed towards the rectory; and Louisa turned to Morton with the first smile that had brightened her face that morning, saying, "Let us go; I can go now, and that strange man will frighten our good friends."

"He seems an impertinent puppy," answered Morton, "though a good-humored one. But are you really able to walk, dearest Louisa?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "he has done me good, do you know; for he has made me laugh, when I felt more inclined to cry."

"To cry!" said her lover, drawing her arm through his, as she rose to proceed.

There was both surprise and sadness in his tone; and, fearful that she had grieved him, or even, perhaps, made him doubt what her feelings were towards him—and though she shrunk, as I have said, from telling her heart's secret, she too well knew the pain of doubt to inflict it on one she loved—Louisa answered, "Yes, Morton, to weep; but do you not know that we women as often weep when we are happy as when we are sorrowful?—and I am very happy—happy in all that has occurred—happy in my deliverance, and that you effected it."

The warm blood glowed in her cheek as she spoke, and the last words were uttered with downcast eyes, and in a low tone. They were somewhat similar to those she had before spoken, but the repetition of them was very pleasant to her lover's ear, for they made him feel

that the predominant feeling in her heart at that moment was satisfaction at having been saved by him.

"It was, indeed, most fortunate, my Louisa!" he said, as they walked slowly on, "that I was passing at the time; and yet it was a mere accident, brought about by repentance for a fault I committed last night."

"Indeed!" cried Louisa, with a look of surprise, "I saw no fault."

"And yet I was guilty of a great one towards you, dearest girl," replied her lover; "the thought of it broke my rest, and made me rise at daybreak, and go out to wander about till I could go up to the house and repair it. I felt that I was wrong, Louisa, to speak words of love at such a moment as I did last night, when I could tell nothing, explain nothing, and you could make no reply. I feared that I might have agitated, perhaps pained you, and that, whether my hopes were false or true, I might have disturbed your repose. Nay, do not tremble, dear one! I will say nought to move you more at present. You know all now—you understand me fully; and I—I do trust that I understand you. But of one thing be sure, my Louisa, that I would never have ventured to seek your love, if by station and fortune I were not in a position to justify me in so doing."

"And do you imagine, Morton," asked Louisa, with a look almost reproachful, "that station or fortune would make any difference in my regard? It is true I am not a romantic person, and I know that competence is necessary to happiness, but where it is to be found on one side it is sufficient. My dear father taught me to value other things more than wealth or rank—not to undervalue them, but to look upon honor and virtue, and talent, as more worthy possessions—and I have not forgotten his lessons."

"I am sure you have not, my Louisa," replied her lover; "and of you I entertained no doubt; but there are friends and guardians to be thought of too, dear girl, and they judge alone by the customs and conventionalities of society. The poor artist, which the good people here, it seems, give me out to be, would be naturally, perhaps not improperly, rejected as the suitor to the wealthy heiress; while the man of fortune, to whom her riches are no object, would be accepted by the wise men who have her happiness in trust, though the one might be worthy of her, the other not."

"It seems to me very strange and very wrong that it should be so," replied Louisa, thoughtfully; "for, to the one her fortune might be beneficial, enabling him to pursue a high and bright career, to cultivate his abilities, and to advance the very arts which are a glory and a benefit to his country; while in the hands of the other it would be but of little service to himself or his fellow-creatures."

"But, alas! it is the natural tendency of wealth to accumulate in few hands," answered Morton, "and every society encourages that tendency. Such is especially the case in our own land, where the aristocracy of wealth has daily been gaining ground against the aristocracy of blood. When will there be an aristocracy of virtue, I wonder, Louisa? for it is of that you and I dream, my beloved. However, it is as well in our case that, as objections might be raised against your desire by those who would think they were acting concientiously in opposing your marriage with a poor man, no valid obstacle of that kind does exist; and I tell you that such is the case at once, dear girl, not because it would make any difference in your eyes whether I were the poor artist or not, but because I think it may set your mind at ease in regard to the opposition of others."

"I must not take credit to myself," answered Louisa Charlton, "for having thought you the poor artist, Morton; for, though I did so for a few days, I was soon convinced that report was false, and yet I think Mrs. Charlton believes so still."

"Do not undeceive her, my Louisa," exclaimed Morton, eagerly; I have my own views on that point, and have encouraged the idea, though I have, of course, never asserted that it is true. Pray, do not contradict it to any one. You shall hear, whenever we have a moment or two for private conversation, every particular of my fate and history; for, from her I love I can have no concealment; but we have not time now, for here comes the good rector's carriage at full speed. In the meantime, Louisa, know me as nothing but as report gives me out; and let me see what will be the end of the game that is playing; for you, as well as I, must perceive that the conduct of some persons very near you is not altogether natural."

"You do not mean Dr. Western?" demanded Louisa, warmly.

"Oh, no," replied Morton, "he knows all about me. I mean Mrs. Charlton."

He had no time to say more, for at that moment the carriage of the worthy rector pulled up beside them, and the doctor himself got out in eager haste, followed by the stranger of the smelling-bottle and cosmetic.

"Why, what is this, my dear child?" exclaimed the worthy clergyman. "What is this, Mr. Morton? Both wet—but I see how it is—I understand it all."

"Not all, I think, my dear sir," replied the young gentleman; and he proceeded to give their friend a brief account of the accident, telling what he had himself seen of Louisa's conduct, as he was hurrying forward from the neighboring field to save the boy who had fallen into the stream.

"Ah, Louisa, Louisa!" cried the good rector, shaking his finger at her; "impulse, impulse! you women always act from impulse, and peril your ownselves without a chance of assisting others. But what has become of the poor boy? He might be drowned while Morton was assisting you."

"Oh, no!" replied Louisa's lover; "he remained struggling gallantly, and seemed to have some idea of swimming, but his fishing-rod was his best friend, for he held on fast with both his hands, and contrived to balance it very cleverly, keeping his head above water till I could return, and draw him out. He is the son of Edmonds the park-keeper, I think; and as soon as he was on dry land set to work to wind up his line as if nothing had happened."

They were by this time so near the rectory that Louisa would not get into the carriage, but walked on, still leaning on her lover's arm, and accompanied by Dr. Western, while the

man in the blue satin handkerchief coolly mounted the box of the carriage, and rode back, apparently making himself quite at home. What followed after they entered the house need not be detailed, for there is but one reasonable way of treating wet people, which was adopted; and other events call us to another scene.

CHAPTER XV.

When Louisa Charlton went out in the early morning from Mallington House, she believed that no one in the house was up but the servants. Such was not the case, however, for Alfred Latimer was already in the library with an aching head and irritated heart. On the preceding evening he had left his mother's house very soon after dinner to seek his old haunts, and to lose a considerable portion of the money he had received from Morton in the morning at play; and now he sat with his cheek resting on his hand in sullen silence, ready to quarrel with any one that might present himself. The door of the library was partly open, and he saw Louisa come down, and go out. At first he thought of following her, and rose to do so; but the moment after he sat down again, saying to himself, "No, I won't—I should only have words with her, I dare say, and I do not want to quarrel with Louisa; but I will bring my mother to reason."

What he called reason is not worth while to inquire into; for every man has a lexicon of his own, very different in its definitions from Johnson's dictionary. He then rose and walked about the room for a few minutes; and then, seeing a book upon the table, he thought that it might be better to amuse himself with any other person's ideas than his own, which at that moment were not very pleasant ones. There had just about that time appeared in England a translation of Schiller's "Robbers," not a very good one, but still conveying some of the great author's spirit and wild vigor, and that book was the one on which Alfred Latimer now laid his hand. It was an accident that decided his fate; and how often does this happen in the course of life? Let any man look back, and narrowly examine the history not only of his own acts but of his own mind and heart, and he will be almost sure to find that some small and seemingly pitiful circumstance, some event of which he took little notice at the time, has been the key that unlocked one out of the thousand doors of fate, and gave him exit upon the road that he was to pursue forever.

He read—at first with inattention, almost with disgust—then with interest—then with eager sympathy—and every dark and fiery picture seemed to imprint itself upon his heart and brain. The wild, the stirring eloquence of the poet seemed to address itself directly to him; every moral influence was lost, every exciting vision treasured up. He longed for a wild and free existence—for deeds of adventure and intense passion; virtue, honor, respectability, what were they to him? names—cold, tame, unmeaning names. He took no resolution, he formed no scheme, indeed; but the impression was given: to cast off all restraint, to follow out the passions of his own heart, only more boldly, more rashly. There was a higher, a more intense tone yielded to his character, but nothing was changed. He had hitherto been led—his aspiration was now to lead; but it was in the same course. He had hitherto been willful in his own conduct, he was now eager to work his will on others; but the end and object was unchanged. He had sought excitement in all that he had done: he sought excitement still, but of a more intense and vehement character. He sat with that book in his hand for longer—far longer than he had ever been known to read before, and he only laid it down when the clock struck nine; and he rose, saying to himself, "It is time for her to rise. She shall find that I will not be trifled with any more;" and, ringing the bell sharply, he told the servant who appeared at its loud summons to send his mother's maid up to her room with a message to the purpose that he wished to speak with her immediately. The man retired to obey his orders; but nearly half an hour elapsed without any one appearing, and Alfred Latimer's impatient spirit wrought turbulently within him at the delay. He walked about the room—he looked out of the window—he took up a book, and laid it down again—he muttered most unfilial objurgations against his mother, and sneered at her habits of self-indulgence—till, at length, working himself up into a fit of passion, he hurried out of the library, and was mounting the stairs, when he met the maid coming down to give him notice that Mrs. Charlton awaited him in her dressing-room. Without ceremony he walked in, with his impatient spirit chafed; and the sight of the fair widow, in an elegant dressing-gown and coquetish cap, did not at all tend to soothe him.

"In heaven's name, what is the matter, Alfred?" demanded Mrs. Charlton, as soon as he entered; "something must have gone wrong, or I am sure you would not have disturbed me at such an early hour"—

"As nearly ten o'clock!" asked Alfred Latimer. "Well, you are quite right; something has gone wrong—everything has gone wrong; and I must have it put right. You know I asked you for fifty pounds yesterday"—

"And I told you, my dear boy, that I had not got it to give," answered Mrs. Charlton, in a soothing tone. "You know, my dear Alfred, that if I had it, you should have it at once."

"You have plenty of money to give parties with, and fine wines, and all sorts of things from London; and to keep horses and carriages, and servants enough to do nothing," replied her dutiful and affectionate child.

"Alfred! Alfred!" cried his mother, "I never thought I should have heard my son, for whom I have sacrificed so much, speak such words. You know quite well the horses and carriages are Louisa's, not mine. Almost all the servants are hers; and does my own son grudge me the comforts of my home, and even the respectable appearance which I am obliged to keep up! This is sad indeed!" and Mrs. Charlton wiped away a tear.

"This is all very good, mother," replied Alfred, "but necessity has no law, and money must be found, for money I must have."

"If I could have found it," said Mrs. Charl-

ton, "you should have had it. Do you think if I could have procured it, I would have put off my journey to London, when I had set my heart upon going; but every farthing I had, but just enough for the expenses of the house, I was obliged to pay, because those people, the Marsons, chose to fail, and force me to pay the horrid bill I had there. Four hundred pounds at one blow. Only wait till Louisa is of age, or till I have carried out what I have in view with regard to her, and you shall have as much as you can desire."

"I cannot wait, and will not wait," replied Alfred Latimer, fiercely. "I have bills to pay as well as you, and they must be paid, too. Why should you not sell, or pawn, some of all your smart jewels. They would soon raise the money; and you are a widow now, and don't want them."

Now Mrs. Charlton was fond of jewels, and had accumulated no inconsiderable store; but still she thought that if the sum required was but fifty pounds, she could part with some, which she would scarcely miss, for her dear boy's sake. "You are unkind, Alfred," she said, "but to show you that I would do anything I can to help you, I will raise the fifty pounds upon some of the trinkets poor Mr. Charlton gave me."

"Fifty pounds!" cried her son. "That would have done yesterday, but it will not do to-day. I have many bills to pay that cannot be put off. One man threatens to arrest me, and another has actually taken out a writ. Now I will be free of all this without further delay. I will have my debts paid—I will have something over, to start upon—and then—"

"But what is the amount?" demanded the lady in consternation.

"A thousand pounds will do, I think," replied Alfred Latimer, coolly; "I have not reckoned it up accurately; but what between Oxford and London, and this cursed place, there must be nearly nine hundred owing, and the rest will set me off again."

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, and then throwing herself back in her chair, she added, with an altered tone, "You cannot have it, Alfred."

"Indeed!" he said, with his eyes flashing fire.

"No!" she replied, decidedly. "Nor half—nor a third—nor a quarter. There—no more of it! I have told you—and so it must be. You cannot have it, and if you think to frighten me into supplying your extravagance and folly at this rate, you are mistaken. I wish you had not disturbed me out of my sleep to hear such nonsense;" and Mrs. Charlton yawned.

There was some reality in her demeanor, and a good deal that was assumed; for she was indeed incensed at her son's demand, and thought that he had taken a peremptory tone merely to alarm her, which could only be met by a cool one; but she was not quite prepared for what was to follow. His manner, too, altered; his brow knit into a heavy frown, he set his teeth close as if afraid of giving way too far to the strong passion within him, and approaching his mother's chair, he said in a low bitter tone, "So you will not sell your diamonds for the relief of your son!"

"Not one," answered Mrs. Charlton.

"Well, then, you shall never see him again," said the young man.

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Charlton, "you know better;" but without another word he turned to the door, and went out, closing it quietly behind him.

Mrs. Charlton was somewhat alarmed; for though she had often seen fits of violent passion in Alfred Latimer, she had never beheld any effort to repress the expression of his rage. If he had cursed and sworn she could have felt quite easy: if he had banged the dressing-room door as he retired, it would have been a relief. But the stern low tone, the shut teeth, the quiet exit, had something awful in them; and after pausing for a few minutes in consideration, she rose and rang her bell. Before the maid could appear she heard a horse's feet over the gravel, and, looking out, saw her son riding away from the house on a horse that was always kept for him at Mallington; and when her abigail entered, Mrs. Charlton merely said "Do my hair. Nonsense, he will return soon enough," she added to herself.

In the meanwhile Alfred Latimer rode on down the village, and approached the road that ran along by the bank of the stream; but as he was in the act of turning his horse's head as if to follow that path, he suddenly pulled up; thought for a moment; and then, crossing the bridge, approached the park gates. There, he dismounted, tied his beast to the iron bars, and walked with a rapid step in the direction of the park-keeper's house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a shady grove in Mallington Park, where the trees were tall and thin in the stem, having been suffered to run up close together; and, as ambition appears even to extend to vegetable life, wherever such is the case, each seems to struggle to overtop the other, and get a greater portion of the sunshine than is its due. There was no underwood, except here and there a bush of holly, in which occasionally a stout old cock pheasant would take up his abode, and the wind sighed at liberty through the bolls of the beeches. It was a pleasant place for contemplation on a summer's day, for it was full of calm shade, and if there were any air stirring it was sure to find its way there and breathe more freely under the cool green boughs. Many a winding path, too, had been cut through the grove, wandering in and out amongst the trees, and leaving sufficient space for two persons to walk abreast, but not more; and occasionally a sudden peep of the distant country had been afforded by taking down a tree, which was lost again in a moment as one passed on, like one of those bright fancies that cross the path of thought for an instant, but fade ere we can grasp them.

In this grove, about the hour of ten or a little after, on the day that saw the accident which but for Morton's presence must have terminated the career of Louisa Charlton, two persons were walking on slowly together along the paths in earnest conversation. Hither and

thither they went from one walk to another, but never issued beyond the cover of the trees. They went hand in hand, too, and one spoke eagerly and rapidly, while the other replied little but by sighs. They were Alfred Latimer and Lucy, the fair young daughter of the park-keeper Edmonds—a dangerous companionship for her. He seemed pressing her vehemently to some step which she was unwilling to take, and ever and anon she raised her eyes, full of tears, to his, and answered, "No, Alfred; no, I cannot. Oh, do not ask me, Mr. Latimer. It would break my father's heart if I were to leave him without telling him where I am going."

"And you will break mine if you refuse, Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer; "you can write to him to-morrow, and tell him you are with me, and that we are going to be married as soon as ever we can be."

But Lucy shook her head mournfully, saying, "He will not believe that—he will not believe that."

"And you doubt it too, Lucy!" cried Alfred Latimer vehemently; "you doubt my word—you think I would break my oath! You do not love me, Lucy, that is very clear. Nay, do not cry now; you will make your eyes red, and every one will see."

Lucy Edmonds wiped the tears away, and replied in a low voice, "You know I love you—you know it too well, or you would not ask me to do what is wrong."

"But it is not wrong," answered Alfred Latimer; "I tell you that I have had a quarrel with my mother, so that I cannot stay any longer here; or we would be married at once; and yet you refuse, though you have promised to love me always and to marry me when I ask you—yet you refuse to go with me and fulfil your promise as soon as it can be done."

"Oh, no," said Lucy; "I only refuse to go with you without my father's knowledge. You know, Alfred, it would be very wicked—it would be very wrong indeed, and I should never be happy after."

"And so you will really make me unhappy for ever, Lucy?" asked the young gentleman; "for you will never see me more, after I have once gone away. I have sworn that I will not return, and I always keep my word. Come, Lucy, come—go back quietly to the house; get some few things ready, and meet me in two hours at the other side of the park," and bending down his head he kissed her.

"I cannot, I cannot," answered Lucy Edmonds, weeping. "Without my father's leave I cannot come."

Alfred Latimer's cheek was somewhat red, and even to her he could not repress the quick and angry flash of his eye at anything like opposition. Yet he strove to soothe and persuade, but before he could utter many words, issuing suddenly from one of the side paths, Lucy's father himself stood before them. The good man's brow was stern and dark, and his lip quivering with many mingled emotions.

Poor Lucy trembled in every limb, and turned as pale as death; but Alfred Latimer, though he colored highly, lifted his head with a haughty toss and a laugh, saying something *the* meaning of which was not very clear.

"Let go my daughter's hand, sir," said Edmonds, after gazing at him for an instant; "and never do you set your foot in this park again."

"Indeed!" cried Alfred Latimer with a sneer. "Methinks I shall require to be warned off by some better authority than Master Edmonds, formerly Lord Mallington's park-keeper—if you come to that, what business have you in this park yourself!"

"I have business enough and authority enough for my purpose," replied Edmonds, taking his daughter's hand, and drawing her to him, "and that you will find, sir, if ever you come here again. I knew you to be bad enough, long ago, but I did not think you were so base as to seek to ruin this poor girl."

The young gentleman gazed at him for an instant with a fierce look, and then turned his eyes to Lucy, who stood by her father, with her limbs shaking and her face drowned in tears. That sight seemed to move him, and he said "I did not seek to ruin her. It is not true. I intended to marry her—ay, immediately."

"False! false!" cried Edmonds. "Don't you think every father in the land has heard such stories. You told her you would marry her I don't doubt, but when you had once got her in your power it would have been a different tale."

"No, it would not," replied Alfred Latimer; "I would have married her, and I will."

"No, that you shall not," replied Edmonds sternly. "You are no husband for my daughter, sir; keep in your own station; marry in your own station. So shall she, please God; and I will tell you what, Mr. Latimer, I would a great deal rather see her the wife of an honest laborer than the wife of a dishonest gentleman. I don't mean to say you are so—that I know nothing about; but I do know that you would not make her happy, and so you should not have her, even if all your fine speeches were true. That is done and settled. So, as I said before, do not let me see you here again. Come along, Lucy; come with me," and drawing her away, he turned his steps towards his own house, leaving Alfred Latimer standing in the grove, with his face working with all the unbridled passions that disappointment raised to fury in his heart.

At a quick pace Edmonds hurried on in silence, with his eyes gazing out before him, but his mind busy upon any other thing than the scene on which they lighted. He noticed not, he did not seem to perceive that the trembling limbs of his daughter could hardly bear her on, and that he dragged her along with him, rather than supported her, as she hung upon his arm.

But when they came to a little clump of trees behind the garden at the back of the house he suddenly stopped, and turning to Lucy, he said; "I will not tell your mother, my child, for it would make her wretched."

"Oh, father, I did not intend to do any wrong," replied Lucy Edmonds, with the tears streaming down her face; "I would not have gone with him. Indeed I would not."

"I know it, Lucy love," replied her father, throwing his arms round her, and pressing her to his breast. "I heard a good deal as I came

up the walk, Lucy, and I know that though you have been a silly girl to listen to him at all, yet it was not in your heart to do any wrong—the more base he for wishing to make you. But there is one thing, Lucy," he continued, gazing at her earnestly, "there is one thing you must promise me upon your word, and as you would have God's grace not to do wrong—you must promise me never willingly to see or speak with this young man any more."

"Oh, father," replied Lucy Edmonds, "he loves me—indeed, indeed he does. And I—I"—

"You think you love him," answered her father; "perhaps you really do, and if so I am very sorry for it, Lucy, for his marriage with you is not even to be thought of. I would not give you to him, my girl, if he were the richest and the highest man in the land."

"But perhaps you may change, father," said Lucy—"perhaps he may change."

"When he does I may, and then I will tell you," answered Edmonds; "but in the meantime I must have your promise, Lucy, never to see him or speak with him, willingly at least, without my consent and knowledge—Lucy, you would not surely disobey me?"

"Oh no, father, no," replied Lucy Edmonds; "I will do as you bid me in all things, and I promise you that I will not see or speak with him without your knowledge and consent. You know a great deal better than I do—but yet I am sure he loves me."

Edmonds shook his head with a sad and painful smile. "So thinks every woman," replied he, "of the man that ruins her. If she does not, she is worse than he is. But come, my child; and keep your promise, and that promise will keep you safe. Wipe your eyes, or go and walk in the garden for a while. Your mother has had one sad fright this morning, and though she is well accustomed to bear up under sorrows and cares, yet there is no need she should have too many at once, Lucy."

"Oh, what has happened?" cried Lucy, drying her own tears, and looking eagerly in her father's face.

"Why your brother fell into the river, and would have been drowned if Mr. Morton, the gentleman who came up to the cottage the other day, had not plunged in and got him out," replied Edmonds; and then added, in a somewhat bitter tone, "Ay, he is a gentleman, indeed; but this young fellow"—

He did not finish the sentence, but Lucy Edmonds cast down her eyes, with a cheek glowing like fire. It was her own heart accused her, and she asked herself, "Have I been listening to tales of love, without my parents' knowledge, from the lips of one whom they disapprove, while sorrow and care have come so near their dwelling? I will do so no more," and as she thus thought she raised her eyes to her father's face again, saying aloud, "I will go to my mother at once. I am very sorry that I was wrong, and I will tell her, too, all that has happened, but not now, father. I will tell her to-night or to-morrow. Indeed, it will be better, for then if I should be in any difficulty, and you not near, she can tell me what I ought to do."

"That's a good girl," replied her father, laying his hand upon her shoulder and kissing her brow; "act this way always, Lucy, and you will be in no danger. To-day you have been in more than you know of;" and taking her hand, he led her into the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

For at least five minutes after the park-keeper and his daughter had left him, Alfred Latimer remained standing in the grove, giving way to the vehemence of his passion, muttering vain curses and rash and angry threats against the man who had interfered only to save his own child. "I will have her," he said at length; "I will have her in spite of him; and I will have revenge, too—curse me, if I won't;" and, stamping on the ground, and shaking his fist, he walked slowly away towards the lodge. His eyes were bent down, and, in bitter meditation, he saw little or nothing that passed around him. He marked not the deer as they bounded away out of the fern; he took no notice of the hare that started from its form almost at his feet, and scudded away across the upland, pausing here and there with uplifted ears to listen for the sounds of pursuit. When he reached the gates, he opened them, and went out without noticing that two men were standing at the corner of the park wall; and, unfastening his horse, he had got his foot in the stirrup when one of the two watchers ran forward and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying "Alfred Latimer, Esquire, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young gentleman, turning first red and then pale "Who the devil are you?"

"Only an officer of the sheriff of Middlesex, sir," replied the man, "with a writ against you, backed by the sheriff of the county, for a trifle you owe to Mr. Jones of Piccadilly. Don't doubt but you'll soon be able to settle the matter, so we had better go back to your house, where I have just been paying my respects."

Alfred Latimer gazed at him with a look of hesitation for a moment, but gradually his face assumed a more determined and a fiercer aspect, and he replied, "No; I will not go back to the house to beg of my own mother. I'd rather go to jail."

"Oh, sir, I've got nice apartments; quite at your service, sir," replied the officer. "Airy situation, sir, looking upon the river. Do you travel by coach, sir, or would you like to have a shay?"

"I travel on horseback," cried Alfred Latimer, springing into the saddle, and striking his horse with the spurs. The bailiff made a snatch at the rein, but missed it, and the horse dashed on, hitting him on the shoulder with its chest and knocking him back upon the road.

"Stop him! stop him!" shouted the officer to his follower; but long ere the other man came up, the young gentleman was far upon the road, and, galloping on at full speed, was soon hidden by the angle of the park wall.

"I shall be followed," thought the young man, who, unaccustomed to such proceedings, saw in imagination the sheriff's officers pursuing him, like a hunted hare, with a whole troop of mounted constables to back them. "I shall

be followed! I will take to Wenlock Wood. Then let them catch me if they can." Thus thinking, he spurred forward, till passing the cottage of Blackmore, the gardener, and the mill beyond, he came to the end of the park wall on that side, and looking round to see if there were any one on the road to indicate the path he had taken to his fancied pursuers, he turned up a narrow sandy path, which ran over the hill between Mallington Park and some corn-fields. It soon led into a green lane, overhung by thick shrubs and bushes, and along this he spurred at a rapid pace, till the banks opened out, and gave him egress upon a wild and desolate-looking common, with a thick wood about half a mile to the right.

At the mouth of the lane, Alfred Latimer pulled up his horse for a moment and listened; but, whether from excited imagination or not, he felt sure that he heard the sound of horses' feet, and, spurring on again across the common —often obliged to turn to avoid this great mass of bushes, or that rock or large clump of trees —he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood, and, without drawing a rein, turned round to look behind him. He now plainly perceived three or four men on horseback at the other side of the common; but they did not seem to discover him, if of him they were in pursuit, for they were riding on in a different direction from that which he himself was following; and, pushing his horse forward down a narrow cart-road, he had soon passed the outer belt of planting, where the trees were younger but closer together, and reached a wilder part of the wood, where tall immemorial oaks, with young saplings scattered between, rose far apart from each other, some still green and flourishing, some in various states of decay. The ground from which they sprung was rugged and uneven, in some places covered with high fern, in some rounded with masses of thick brushwood. Here appeared a deep pit, with the little shining pond in the bottom; here rose a tall rock or a high bank, bearing ashes and beeches on the top; and ever and anon a piece of green sward appeared in the midst, affording free footing for the horse. To look upon it, it seemed at first sight an inextricable maze, through which no chance traveler could find his way, but to the eyes of Alfred Latimer the whole scene was familiar, for thither had he often resorted from the days of his boyhood, exploring its recesses with dog and gun, although, to say sooth, being within one of the manors of the Earl of Mallington, he had no right to exercise there his propensities for the chase.

Cutting as straight across as the various obstacles would permit towards the highest bank which the scene displayed, he skirted it along to a spot where a number of old oaks had congregated themselves under the bank, concealing its rugged face from the view. The trees above stretched forth their branches to those below, and several clumps of a younger growth stood forward before the rest, making the mass appear, at a little distance, one close and impenetrable thicket. So it would have seemed, indeed, to any one riding, even so closely by the side of the trees as Alfred Latimer, if the eye were the only guide on the occasion; for though the wood sometimes came forward in bold prominence, sometimes retreated, leaving a deep glen or glade between the two nearest points, yet still at the bottom appeared a thick woody screen hiding the crag. To Alfred Latimer, however, the place was, as I have said, familiar, and he rode along for about a third of a mile without pause or examination, except, indeed, by a quick and furtive glance behind, to see whether his pursuers had yet appeared.

No one was seen, however, and in the end, he drew his rein just at the mouth or entrance of one of the glades I have mentioned, gazing round on every side. Then, dismounting, he took the beast's bridle on his arm, and led him down amongst the trees, apparently to the very closest and thickest part; but just at the end a little path was to be discovered on the right, so small that the entrance was not easily discernible amongst the tangled brambles and thorns, which in that place rose high up the bolls of the trees. Alfred Latimer, however, knew the precise spot by an old holly which stood forward, as if to protect and conceal the mouth of the path; and, leading his horse round, he pulled him unwillingly into the little road, the horse resisting, from time to time, as if it doubted the safety of the way it was taking, and its master bestowing several fierce cuts upon its flank, to prove that he knew better than it. The path soon led to a more open space behind the screen of oaks; and, satisfied that he was hidden from all observing eyes, the young gentleman proceeded more patiently between the trees and the high craggy bank till he reached the mouth of a deep cavern—whether the work of nature or of art who can now say? Many such, however, are to be found in various parts of England, some well known to the geologist and the wanderer in search of the picturesque; others unrecorded by tourist and traveler, and only familiar to the midnight assassin of game, and the still more free speculator in the property of others.

Without fear or hesitation, however, Alfred Latimer led his horse in, who, fancying it, apparently, a newly-invented kind of stable, followed very willingly under the rocky arch; and still holding the bridle over his arm, the young gentleman seated himself upon a large stone, saying aloud with a laugh, "Now let them catch me if they can, the scoundrels."

He then turned his ear to listen, but no sound was heard except the whispering of the wind through the trees; and satisfied that he had deceived his pursuers, if there were any, he proposed to remain an hour or two where he was, and then, making his way through the wood to a village about three miles distant, to pursue his course towards London, where he thought he would sell his horse, and with the money thus provided, and what remained of the sum he had borrowed from Morton, embark for the continent. It was a pleasant and a joyous scheme to his rash mind; visions of wild adventure crowded upon him; dreams of pleasure, not very pure or high, presented themselves to his mind's eye, as he sat and meditated; and there seemed but one drawback to the plan. Had Lucy Edmonds been with him it would have been complete; for he loved her with as much love as he was capable of. It was all corporeal, indeed: it was her beauty, her grace, that he

thought of; but still it was, in some sort, love, for out of a thousand as fair he would have chosen her as his companion; and might have been constant to her for a time, till passion had sated itself, and burnt out its own flame. We must not pause to picture all the sensations that he felt as he sat there and thought of her. The eager desire to possess her, in spite of all considerations, and all obstacles; the wild schemes that suggested themselves to his mind; or the fierce and angry yearning for vengeance upon her father. For that father's feelings or duties he had no thought—no consideration. It was enough that he had stepped in to thwart and disappoint him—to snatch the promised joy from his hand. That alone was an offence not to be forgiven by his proud and vehement spirit; but when he recollected the stern and bitter words the park-keeper had used—the almost scornful rejection of his proposal to condescend so far as to marry a poor peasant's daughter, his heart felt all on fire with impotent rage, and again he clenched his hand and stamped his foot upon the ground, till his horse started back, and nearly pulled the bridle from his arm.

The young man caught it fast, however, and angrily struck the poor beast a blow in the face with his clenched fist, exclaiming, "Will you, too?"

As he did so he thought he heard a rustle in the farther part of the cavern, and turning round he gazed into the depth with some trepidation. He knew that it was of considerable extent, for he had explored it more than once, and what with a turn about thirty feet from the mouth, it might run into the cliff some fifty or sixty yards. But the darkness of the interior was so profound at that time of day, when the sun was over the bank, and the thick trees before the mouth produced a deeper gloom, that he could see nothing. The next instant, however, a voice from within exclaimed, "You seem mightily put out, Master Latimer. What is the matter?"

The voice was followed by the sound of steps, but it was not till the person who had spoken had come forward that Alfred Latimer could see anything through the darkness. He then perceived advancing towards him a short, square-looking figure, which gradually assumed the appearance of a man dressed in a sailor's jacket and trousers, with a striped shirt, and no waistcoat. A black handkerchief was twisted lightly round the neck, and the bushy black whiskers extending under the chin, and almost covering the throat, at first gave him the appearance of having another handkerchief bound round his jaws. His head was covered with strong curling dark hair, and his face was bronzed with exposure to sun and wind, which gave an additional look of fierceness to a countenance naturally stern and forbidding.

At first the young gentleman did not recognize the personage who seemed so familiar with his own name; but after a moment's consideration, he exclaimed, "Ah! is that you, Jack Williams? Why, it is so long since you have been here, and the place is so dark, I did not know you. You have not shown yourself since that night when we shot the pheasants in the park, and were obliged to run for it."

"That would not have made me run far," answered Williams; "but I had other matters on hand, Mister Latimer. I have been here more than once since, however, but you were away. What's in the wind now, sir, that you are hiding here? Tell me if you like—don't tell me if you don't like. Only if you want help, here's your man."

"Why, I have had a quarrel with my good mother, Jack," replied Alfred Latimer. "She keeps me shorter of money than ever; and I have determined to leave her, and seek my fortune where I can."

"I hope you have brought some stock in trade with you," answered the other; "for fortune can't be bought and sold without fortune, as I have found out long ago."

"No, indeed," answered the young gentleman, who was restrained by certain doubts and misgivings as to his old acquaintance's habits, from acknowledging that he had money about him. "I have got nothing but a few shillings and my horse; but that I intend to sell as soon as I can find a market."

"Ah—well—you are not up to things yet, I see," replied Williams. "I would not have come out of such a house as that if I had been you without bringing away enough to live for a year or two, at least. But what are you hiding for?—are you afraid she will send after you? Why you must be of age by this time."

"Oh, no, it is not that," said Latimer, who, on reflection, saw that the tale of his adventure with the bailiffs would but tend to confirm the representation he had made of the state of his purse. "She would not even give me enough to keep me out of prison, and just as I was at the park gates, a fellow came up and tapped me on the shoulder. But I jumped on my horse and rode over him."

"Well done! well done!" cried Williams, slapping him on the shoulder; "on my life, you will turn out a capital fellow. Just at the park gates, eh? I suppose you had been up to bid good-by to the pretty little girl there. Why the devil did you not bring her with you? A man is always the better for having a woman with him; but I suppose it was want of money, Master Alfred. If that's the case, speak out. You were kind to me once, and one good turn deserves another. So, as I've got a little prize-money here, if a ten-pound note will help you, it's quite at your service, sir. You can pay me when you can, you know, and no hurry; and we can send a message to pretty Lucy to join you where you like."

The face of Alfred Latimer had turned various colors while his companion spoke; for he had imagined that his pursuit of Lucy Edmonds had been concealed from all eyes till that morning, and at first he was by no means pleased to find that it was known and commented upon by others; but as thought hurried him rapidly on, the idea suggested itself to his mind that perchance he might make the services of such men as the one who now spoke to him, of use in attaining the objects that floated vaguely before his imagination. He formed no distinct scheme, it is true, but dim and obscure fancies of carrying off the poor girl from her home came across his brain. He knew she loved him, and believed that she would easily forgive some

little force, which might spare her the struggle between duty and affection. He left the plan, then, to be arranged at an after period, and replied, "No, no, Williams—you are a good fellow;" and he grasped his hand; "but I will not take your little money from you, however much I may want it. I will sell my horse, which is worth fifty pounds anywhere, and I think I can get some more from a friend. But it was not want of money stopped Lucy and I. It was that—as the devil would have it—up came her father just as we were talking about it; and he found out all, and took her away. He has made her promise, I dare say, by this time, not to go."

"Such promises are soon broken," answered Jack Williams, with a laugh.

"Ay, so they are," said Alfred Latimer; "but I have a scheme in my head, if I can get some good fellows who don't stand upon trifles to help me. When I have got together a little money, so as to be sure that she and I will have enough to go where we like, I will tell you more of it."

"You may count upon me, sir," replied the other, "I will lend a hand, whatever it is. But no harm must come to the girl."

"But how did you know anything about the affair?" asked Alfred Latimer, willing to change the subject for a time, till he had matured his plans; "I thought I had kept it very close."

"Ay, ay," rejoined Williams, smiling, "but I have been hereabouts for a fortnight; and there have been more eyes in Mallington Park than Edmonds thinks of. But what is your plan, sir? I am no bad hand at scheming, and you are a young one. Two heads are better than one, too, they say."

"Why, I have not yet quite made up my mind," replied Alfred Latimer; "and it requires to be thought of well. Lucy is willing enough to come, and would have been far away with me by this time if her father had not come up; but now he will talk to her, and preach to her, and forbid her to see me any more, though I offered him to marry her at once."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed Williams in great surprise. "Why the man must be a fool!"

"Ay—but he threw in my teeth that I was fonder of bold, wild fellows, who have some courage and some spirit," answered the young gentleman, "than of a set of puling coxcombs, such as one meets in society, and a great deal more of such cant. Now, I dare say, Lucy will be watched and looked after, and persuaded not to come out to see me."

"Oh! we will soon manage that, sir," said Jack Williams, "if he won't let her come, why I would go and take her, if I were you. If you mean to marry her, the fool of a father should be forced to what is good for her and him too!"

"Hark!" said Latimer, in a low voice. "There are steps coming near."

"I dare say," answered the other, "it is Bill Maltby; I expect him soon, and if it be any one else, I will break his head. But you get further back into the shade—you can take your horse into the turning."

"I know, I know," answered Alfred Latimer; and retreating as quietly as he could towards the back of the cavern, he stopped where he judged from what he had observed of Jack Williams's approach, that neither he nor his horse could be seen, and thence watched the mouth of the den, at which his companion stood with his broad, bull-like chest.

"There, for the first time, a question suggested itself to the young man's mind, somewhat difficult to solve, but not very pleasant to leave in doubt. What was Jack Williams's motive for lying concealed in Wenlock Wood! He had been in former days anything but famous either for good conduct or timidity in the commission of evil. One of the most notorious poachers in the country, though the son of a respectable farmer in the neighborhood, he had filled the whole country round with his exploits, and had only escaped punishment by mingled boldness and skill. Once, indeed, so the tale went, he had been detected in the act and taken, after desperate resistance; but he was at that time a mere lad, and his father's entreaties to the owner of the game, who happened to be his own landlord, had saved the son from the consequences of his offence, though only on the condition that he should be sent to sea. To sea he accordingly went, and returned after a short time, with his moral health, at least, not at all improved by his marine excursion. All these things and many more not very creditable to his friend, Alfred Latimer remembered; but he had no time to carry his speculation as to the cause of his present concealment very far before the steps he had heard sounded close to the cave, and another figure darkened the mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As Alfred Latimer stood in the shadow of the cave, he could see without being seen; and he very soon perceived that the visitor was no other than his dissolute companion Bill Maltby. An unusual degree of eagerness appeared in Maltby's manner as he first met Williams, but their voices soon dropped almost to a whisper, though their words were as rapid as ever. Knowing both parties well, however, Latimer did not think it necessary to use much ceremony in joining them, and coming forward again, with the feet of his horse announcing his approach, he advanced to the spot where they were standing, catching a few words which Williams uttered in a louder tone.

"No, no," the man said, "he is not up to that yet. He will be one day, when he learns a little better."

By this time the young gentleman was close to them; and turning round, as if he had previously forgotten his proximity, and had been talking of some one else, Williams proceeded, "Ah, Mr. Latimer! You see I have got a companion, Bill. But I think he is frightened about nothing;" and he proceeded to relate to the other the story of Alfred Latimer's adventure with the bailiffs.

"Pooh!" said Malthy, "I saw the two fellows drinking at the Bagpipes, and waiting for the coach to return to London. You can go back quite well now, if you like, Latimor, for the old

Blue always passes at eleven, and it is well nigh one now."

"He is not going back at all just yet," answered Williams, speaking for his young companion; "but you can go on in safety if you like, sir, for you hear what Bill says."

"I am sure they followed me part of the way," said Latimer, "and I saw some people riding on the common."

Bill Maltby laughed. "So did I," he said; "I saw Squire Middleton and his two sons and the keeper on their ponies. But I saw the two fellows who came down last night drinking a glass of brandy-and-water in the coffee-room of the Bagpipes, and one of them told me they were waiting for the coach. So you can go now quite well, Mr. Latimer; there's no risk in the world."

It needed no great penetration on the part of Alfred Latimer to see that his two companions wished to get rid of him; a very unpleasant perception it is, which is almost sure to prick upon some tender point; but vanity does not always resent the injury in the same manner. Sometimes she takes herself off in silent indignation, sometimes she stays out of pure perverseness, and uses that as the most obvious way of avenging herself. In the case of Alfred Latimer she had very nearly persuaded him to remain where he was, and curiosity added her voice, for the young gentleman longed to see what scheme his two companions had to execute, very well understanding that they were about something which they thought, to use Jack Williams's expression, "he was not up to." Now, Alfred Latimer had a strong inclination to prove to them that he was "up to anything," and his vanity was equally mortified at being found one too many, and at being judged unequal to any undertaking. He paused not to consider whether it was the wickedness and the folly, or the daring and the skill, to which they considered him incompetent.

Nevertheless several motives induced him to beat his retreat. They were two to one, and not persons to be lightly quarrelled with. He proposed also to employ them afterwards, and it was not worth while to have any disagreement with them then. The town, too, towards which his steps were bent was at a considerable distance, and he wished to reach London as early as possible on the following day. Deciding upon his course, then, but resolving to show the two men with whom he spoke at some future period that he was not one to be daunted by trifles, but perhaps might lead while they were obliged to follow, he led his horse out of the cave, and walked on with the bridle over his arm, between the old trees and the high clifty bank. The man Williams accompanied him, giving Bill Maltby a sign to stay behind, and when they had got a sufficient distance to be out of earshot, he said in a civil and kindly tone, "Well, Mr. Latimer, when you have settled your business, and like to go on with that little affair of pretty Lucy Edmonds, you have nothing to do but to come and let me know. I did not speak of it before Bill Maltby there, for there's no use in telling him anything about it till the time comes, even if we do then; but you see, as it's very likely that I sha'nt be just where I am now when you come back, you must ask Bill where I am, for he'll know. I'll help you as far as I can, you may be sure."

Thus saying, he held out his hand, and without any consideration of all with which that hand might be stained—and probably the spots upon it were not few—Alfred Latimer took it, and with that grasp received the contagion of a foul mental disease mortal to the better life of the heart. He then rode on upon his way, and Jack Williams returned to his companion in the cave, whose first question was, "What have you done the young cove out of, Jack?"

"I've done him out of nothing," answered the other, in a grave tone, for he was one of those men who, though carried as it were by an irresistible impulse along an evil course to one bad act after another, yet feel throughout the whole the gloom and sadness of crime upon them, who have not that levity of spirit which gives a temporary sunshine to some of the wicked, but who, with a cold and stern determination, follow the way they have laid out for themselves with the shadow of their fate always upon them. "I have done him out of nothing, Bill," he said, "first, because I did not want; and next because he has devilish little to be done out of."

"Why didn't you want?" asked Bill Maltby; "he had money enough last night, and it's no bad joke to clean out such a gull as that."

"He's not so much a gull as you think," answered Williams. "He wants a little experience or so, but that will come; and there's a good deal of determined devil in him, I can tell you, as you'll find out one day. Then as to money, he said he had got very little, and you can't tell how he may have spent it, since you saw him last night. But if he had had the Mint in his breeches pocket, I wouldn't have put my hand in—first, because he's always been civil and kind to me; and next because he's one of us in some sort already, and will be more so before long."

"Ay, ay, so you think," said Bill Maltby; "but you'll find yourself twisted there. His mother will give him money enough when she finds he's resolute with her, and then he'll see us all at the devil; so you had better make hay while the sun shines, Jack. I will, for one, and get out of him all that I can."

Williams looked at him with a grim smile. "You are mistaken, Bill," he said; "there are some roads on which if you take but two or three steps, you never can go back again, do what you will, and ours is one. This lad has already got his feet upon it, and he has got something now in hand that will carry him on further than he thinks; so there's no going back for him. But let us talk about this other job. When did you say the fellow would pass by?"

"Why, I told him to meet me over at Sturton at three," answered his companion, "and that I would get him a good sale for his stuff; so he'll pass here about two, or a little after. Now you see, Jack, we must settle what's to be done, for I suppose you won't like to finish him exactly?"

"No," said Williams, thoughtfully; "no, not unless he shows fight. Then, when one's blood is up, no one can tell what may happen. But what of that? I don't see what difference that

makes. The law says it's all the same whether you relieve a fellow of the superfluous and let him go, or cut his pipe and stop his whistling. One's hanged for it all the same if one's found out."

"Ay, but I'll tell you what difference it makes in this matter," said Bill Maltby. "You see if you intended to do the thing out and out, I'd better stay with you and lend a hand; but if you only mean to cut the canister, I had better go on to Sturton, and speak to the fellows there about taking some of his stuff. Then I can meet him, and be quite civil to him and sorry for what has happened."

"Ay, ay, Bill, take care of yourself," replied Jack Williams. "There, don't look cross at me; I think you are quite right. There is no use of putting two heads into a noose when one will do. What has he got about him? can you tell?"

"A cool hundred, I should think," replied Billy Maltby. "I saw him flash a five-pound note of the Huntingdon bank; so I just gave him a hint as a friend that he had better get them changed, for that there was a talk of that money shop going. I thought flimsies wouldn't suit our purpose so well as the heavy, and, besides, I wanted to know how much he had got, and fancied such a hint might make him speak. It didn't though; but afterwards he said he had sold for a hundred at Huntingdon and Kimbolton three or four days ago, and then he had heard nothing against the bank. He thanked me, however, for my advice, and said he would get all he had changed before he went further."

"He seems to be no fool, then," said Williams, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, he is, and no, he is not," answered Billy Maltby. "He seems quite a ninny in some things, and shrewd enough in others."

"A sort of man to remember the cut of one's jib well, eh!" asked Jack Williams, "and to swear to it stoutly afterwards, I dare say."

Maltby nodded his head, and his companion mused for several minutes without making any further observation. His next words, however, showed upon what his thoughts had turned, for at length he said, abruptly, "no! I won't do for him; it's not come to that yet, Bill; but I'll take care he shan't see me. You go on to Sturton, and have all ready there, and leave the rest to me. You are quite sure of the way he will come?"

"Quite, unless the devil puts his foot in it," answered Bill Maltby; "for I told him of the red post, and of the three roads, and that if he went either to the right or to the left he would lose himself to a certainty. So he said he would take care—that he was fond of a country walk above all things, but did not want to be one of the babes in the wood."

The scoundrel laughed gaily at his own conceit; and Jack Williams smiled as far as he was capable of smiling. Some further conversation then took place, and at length the younger man took his departure for the little town, humming a slang song as he went as carelessly as if the dark weight of sin and crime rested not on his heart—no thought of punishment here or hereafter troubled the enjoyment of the hour.

His companion displayed a different aspect; *for, going a little further into* the cave, he seated himself, with his long sinewy arms crossed upon his broad chest, and with his eyes bent upon the ground, and his brow gathered into a frown, remained in dark and seemingly gloomy thought for the next half hour. What was it that troubled him? Was it remorse, or apprehension? Did conscience speak? Was her voice at length heard, or did he look forward to the dark result, even in this world, of the deeds in which he was engaged? Did he calculate nicely the chances of the losing game he was playing? Did he think how seldom any evil act remains unpunished—how rarely one foul deed does not lead to deeds still fouler—how impossible it is for any man to say "This shall be the last!" No. If remorse was felt, it was but as a shadow—impalpable, assuming no definite form—vague, vast, and gloomy, but undefined. He knew not well why, he cared not to inquire, but the sun seemed to have gone out for him, and all was gray. He remembered how, when he was a little boy, and had sported in the neighboring fields and woods, all nature had had charms for him, and every object a delight. The singing of the birds had been sweet music, the breath of the fresh air the finest of perfumes, a new flower or a piece of painted glass a treasure, and everything to a healthy frame and an uncorrupted mind had been full of beauty and enjoyment. But the light had passed away, the bird-song jarred upon his ear, the air seemed sultry as it came near him, the flowers were trampled unheeded under foot. In the fierce burst of animal passion, in the keen excitement of strife, of revelry, or of play, were to be found the feverish pleasures which formed all that was left to him. He knew not how it was or why, but he felt that it was so, and he felt it with regret; for memory told him, and told him true, that in the past he had left behind jewels that the present had nothing to equal, and which the future could never restore—the jewels of the heart.

He pondered not much upon such things it is true, he did not wish to think of them, but still that cloud hung above him, shadowing all his thoughts. He turned his mind to the adventure before him; he laid out his plan; he determined on his conduct—not with any consecutive train of ideas, for his mind wandered to a thousand other considerations—but, pursuing a devious and uncertain course, still returned to the object in view, and then darted off to something new again. Yet over the whole was the cloud and the shadow, and all was gloomy and stern.

At length, rising quietly, he said, "It is time to be jogging, the fellow can't be long first—I may as well have a pistol in case of need. I will take all the things with me, and go round by the back of the park, so as to come into Mallington the other way;" and going into the recesses of the cave he put a brace of pistols into his pocket, a powder flask, a small bar of iron like a marline spike, and wrapped up a pair of thick boots in a bundle with some clothes, and then taking a heavy stick formed of a sapling oak, with the rounded root at the end, he thrust it through the tie of the handkerchief, which contained his goods and chattels, laid it on his shoulder, and walked out of the cave.

With a slow step, and looking round him on every side—for those even habituated to the

commission of crime can never free themselves altogether from the consciousness of being watched—watched by the Almighty eye, if not by that of man—he advanced, forcing his way through the trees, till he reached the side of a small path, which ran from Mallington to Sturton. There was a horse-road on the other side of the wood, and a cart-road by the bank of the river, but this was one of those short cuts worn by the habitual feet which had passed from time immemorial—every day some one, but rarely more than one or two, so that the grass had time to grow and flourish; and very often, especially in the spring time, the brambles would shoot across and strive to interrupt the way, as if to reclaim it to wild nature. There the man looked round him again on every side, and examined every corner of the brushwood and every tree. It was evident that he was seeking for a hiding place, but it was with difficulty he found one which suited his purpose. At length, however, he pitched upon a spot where, underneath a tall tree, had grown up some high bushes, flanking the path. Behind them was a nook, which concealed him from any one coming from Mallington, while to the right it was free from all obstacles which might have impeded the use of his arm, except a small branch shooting out from one of the hawthorns, which he cut away with his knife. He then threw the bough into the wood behind him, and took up his position, sitting on the ground with his head leaning easily against the trunk of the tall tree. To have seen him, any one might have supposed that there was a heart at ease—a mind unconscious of any burden, so quiet and unconcerned was the attitude into which his limbs had fallen. But was it so, indeed? Oh, no! Even when conscience is altogether silent, evil carries its own punishment about with it. The doubt—the apprehension—the agitation of thought that precedes the act—the burning excitement when it is committed—the pallid satiety of the intervals—the parched aridity of the heart till a new crime supplies a fresh draught of the same fiery stream which but regenerates the thirst it is intended to assuage—all, all are the slow commencement of that hell to which the wicked go down more slowly though more surely than they think. He lay and listened for the coming footfalls, and moodily—more moodily than before—he pondered over the past and the present. Yet he thought not to forbear. Why should he forbear? he asked himself. His lot was drawn, his fate sealed, his road chosen. There was no returning; and in the course he was upon, it was but weakness or cowardice to draw back from any action he had determined upon. Such was his gloomy philosophy, and he was not one to vacillate. Nevertheless, when a thrush sitting on the tree above his head began to pour forth its afternoon song, there was something in the sound that seemed to touch him. It was like the voice of an angel calling to him in pity to forbear; and whatever were his thoughts, he murmured "I will not hit him hard."

The bird continued to sing for a moment or two, and as if to divert his mind from its appeal, he looked around, while the fresh air breathed upon his cheek, and the light and shade of the green leaves danced before his eyes. "This is a pleasant place," he thought; "one could lie here all day." The very idea was a pleasant and refreshing thing, like a fountain to the wanderer in the desert; but he would not rest upon it either; and he carelessly plucked a flower that grew near, looking into the blue petals, and gazing, though without thought of its wonders, upon the marvellous economy within. "How beautiful these wild flowers are," he said to himself again. "My poor sister Mary, that used to love them so, was like one of them—poor thing!—Pooh! I am a fool," and he cast the flower away.

Heaven only knows had he gone on and listened to the voice which strove to make itself heard, what might have been the result. But the hour of mercy had passed by; he had turned three times from the appeal that might have saved him; and almost as the flower fell from his hand, the bird ceased its song, and took wing from the branch above. There was a foot-step coming near; and rising up he looked through the branches upon the path. There was a gaily dressed man—he whom we have described as coming upon Morton and Louisa Charlton as they sat by the stream—walking slowly forward with a sauntering and self-conceited air, looking now and then at the wood scenery around, and now and then turning his eyes to a memorandum book, which he held in one hand, while with a pencil in the other, he wrote something on the page. On he came step by step; twice he paused and wrote; and then he advanced again, all unconscious of the danger near.

Williams grasped the thick stick he had brought with him, the bundle had been cast down long before. He set his teeth, compressed his lips, and hardly breathed. His heart beat, though he would have stilled its beatings; his temples throbbed, though in moments of greater danger his bosom had been calm, his brain cool. It was not fear, it was not doubt that was upon him—it was the troubled expectation of crime.

Two or three more steps, and the wayfarer was close to him; he passed the tall tree and the low bushes, and then a thundering blow upon the head dashed down his hat upon his brow, and laid him on the ground. The bludgeon was raised again to strike him as he lay, but he was silent and motionless—so still that his very tranquillity seemed to plead for mercy.

"I hit him harder than I intended," said his assailant, running round the bushes, and gazing upon him without venturing to move his victim. Then, bending down his head, he listened. "He breathes! he is but stunned," and quickly putting his hands into the traveler's pockets, he drew out a heavy purse crammed well nigh full of gold; there was a pocket-book also, with some bank notes in it, but that he threw down again, and, satisfied with his first prize, gazed round him for a moment. All was still; and he heard the chirping of the grasshopper. Then darting back behind the bushes, he snatched up his bundle; but before he went, returned to take another look at what he had done. He bent down his head again; but now he could hear no breath; and with a quick step he hurried away up the path for about a couple of hundred yards, then turned into the wood again,

and pursuing a circuitous course came out upon the common at the back of Mallington Park, some two miles from the scene of his crime, and quite on the other side. At this time, indeed, it appeared as if he were rather going to, than coming from the spot where the deed had been committed; but there was close by a small country road leading down, under the park wall, to Mallington, and scarcely had his feet entered upon it when he beheld two laboring men walking on before him.

His first impulse was to quit it again, but a second thought made him quicken his pace and come up with them. He knew neither, but one gave him good day as he went, and entering into conversation he proceeded in their company till they reached the bank of the river. There the course of his two companions led them to the right, while his went to the left, for he had already told them that he was going to Mallington, and leaving them he walked stoutly on till they were out of sight; then seating himself by the bank, he took off his shoes and stockings and washed his feet in the river, looked round to ensure that he was not observed, and taking the thick boots out of his bundle put a stone in each of the light sailor's pumps, and cast them into the water; then once more shouldering his stick he walked on till he reached the little town.

CHAPTER XIX.

We must now return for awhile, dear reader, to notice what took place in the wood where Williams had left his victim, as we have seen. The man lay, apparently quite still, where he had fallen, with his head partly turned on one side and his hat beaten down till it reached his eyebrows. The back of the hat, indeed, was quite knocked in, for there the blow had fallen, and it was given with tremendous force. His eyes were closed, too, when his assailant walked away, and his hand remained extended, with the little memorandum-book fallen from it on the grass. But as soon as the retreating footsteps became somewhat faint, the eyelids were slightly raised, then fully lifted, and he gazed down the path which the robber had taken. Williams was still in sight, but was lost the moment after behind the trees; and the traveler lifted his head a little and listened. Then raising himself slowly on his arm, he sat up, and put his hand to his brow, pushing off his hat. A stream of blood from the back of his head, where one of the knotted points of the stick had cut the skin, followed and trickled down his neck, while his eyes rolled somewhat dizzily, and he leaned his cheek upon his hand, as if to give time for his shaken brain to grow steady again. He uttered not a word, however, for several minutes, but once or twice put his left hand up to the spot where he had received the blow, and seemed to feel if there were any serious injury done to the skull. He then rose, first getting on his knees; but he soon sat down again, with a faint look; and, after a little, crawling to the spot where his pocket-book lay, he took it up, and looked over the contents.

"*of the notes* had been taken, and he murmured, "Thank God, it is no worse! He has got all the guineas, though—the villain!—but I must get back home some how, and have my head looked to. It's a bad knock, but I think the skull is safe. I wish I could have got a good look at him. It was not that young fellow, Maltby, as he called himself—that's clear enough, though I fancied so at first. I wonder if I can walk now;" and, rising once more, he kept his feet better, and looked about him.

Gradually as he recovered from the first effects of the blow, and his ideas became more clear and collected, he began to feel a stronger desire to punish his assailant, and to think of the means of doing so. Though a fop of the lower school, and as vain as a nightingale—the reader will perhaps demand apology for this insult to its favorite bird; but let any one in countries where nightingales are plenty, sit, or stand if he likes it better, and watch one singing on a bough, and he will acknowledge the justice of the accusation—though as vain as a nightingale, then, Mr. Tobias Gibbs was by no means a coward; and if Williams had met him face to face, although the latter was by far the stronger man of the two, a severe contest would certainly have taken place ere Mr. Gibbs parted with the money of his employers; for that respectable gentleman was the country traveler for a large and wealthy wholesale perfumery house in London. Nevertheless as he knew not by whom he had been attacked, nor how many confederates might be near, he hesitated a little as to his proceedings, and was standing deliberating upon the next step, when an approaching footfall, and the sound of a light air of the day whistled clear and merrily as if proceeding from the lips of some easy-hearted peasant, made him turn round and look the other way. A moment after a man, whom he had seen the evening before at Mallington selling some fruit to Mrs. Pluckrose at the inn, appeared through the trees, walking quietly homeward. He had an honest face—that incomparable gift of nature—but not being of the most observant character in the world, and being engaged with the thoughts of carrots, turnips, greengages, *et cetera*, which to him were as important as the budget at the Treasury, he was passing by Mr. Gibbs with no other remark than "Good afternoon, sir," not taking the slightest notice of that gentleman's broken head, crushed hat, or fallen memorandum-book.

"Stay a moment, my good fellow," said the traveler, considering his countenance and feeling himself re-assured by his aspect—"I wish you would help me a little, or, at least, let me walk home to Mallington with you, for I have been knocked down."

"Lauk a mercy, sir, so you have!" cried the man, looking at his head, "and you are all a-bleeding. Why, who the deuce did you find to quarrel with in Wenlock Wood!"

"Nobody!" replied Mr. Tobias Gibbs, "nor did any one quarrel with me."

"They must ha' been poachers, then," said the peasant, interrupting him.

Now, Mr. Gibbs did not see the premises from which this corollary could be deduced; but as he knew it to be false, he did not attempt to refute it logically, and contented himself with replying, "Worse, my good friend—a great

deal worse—for he has first broken my head, and then taken my purse!"

"Whew!" whistled the countryman, looking around; "how many of them were there?"

"Only one that I saw," answered the traveler, and he went on to relate how he had been walking along, when he received a blow upon the head from behind; how he had fallen, sick and half-stunned, but had clearly felt his pockets rifled, and had revived enough to know that the man went into the bushes again, came back and looked at him, and then walked away."

"What sort of a fellow was he?" asked his new friend. "I know most all the people about these parts."

"I can hardly tell," answered Mr. Gibbs, "for I only got sight of him just as he was going through the trees yonder, and then only saw his head and shoulders. He seemed a tall, stout man, though; but he was gone in a minute."

"Well, the best thing for you, master," said the peasant, "is to take hold of my arm, and toddle back to Mallington, to have your head looked to. It's a bad knock as ever I see."

"Oh, that is nothing," answered Mr. Tobias Gibbs. "A few dressings of Grimsditch's famous vulnerary salve will set that to rights in two days, and then by rubbing in the genuine Balm of Trinidad for three or four nights, the hair will be restored by magic. But the matter now is to find out some traces of the man that did it. He may have dropped something—forgotten something—for such fellows are always in a twitter, they say—and at all events we shall find his footmarks somewhere."

"That's true upon my say so," answered the countryman, "and if you go afore Dr. Western, he'll ask you all manner of questions.—Ay, the fellow must have lodged in there till you came up," he continued, pointing to the bushes where Williams had concealed himself. "Don't you see, he's cut a stick out of that thorn? That's what broke your head, depend on't."

But on entering the sort of den afforded by the trees they found the branch which had been detached by the robber to give room for his arm to strike. The ground on which he had been reclining still bore the impress of his person; but no other trace was to be found there; for the weather had been hot and dry, and the grass was short, showing no mark of the foot that trod it. On coming out again, however, close to where the traveler had fallen, was a footmark in the sandy part of the path, showing the print of a light and neatly-formed shoe, without a heel, while Mr. Gibbs's boot had left another impression easily to be distinguished from the first. They looked around in vain for other marks, till following the path a little farther they found in the sand at the side a fresh print turned towards the spot from whence the blow had been aimed.

"Ay, he came this way across from those trees and the bank," said the countryman. "I should not wonder if he had been harbouring all night in Gammer Mudge's hole."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Gibbs, in surprise.

"Why a great hole of a place in the bank," said his companion; "a sort of cave like, where they say one Gammer Mudge, a witch of those times, lived till she was ninety-nine year old; and then the devil came to fetch her."

"It was high time!" replied the traveler. "But there is another mark."

"Ay, and here's a horse's feet, too," said the countryman. "There has been more of them than one. Stay a bit, I'll cut two good stout sticks;" and, fixing upon some sapling oaks, he furnished himself and his companion with the only weapons that could be provided.

They then traced the steps both of a man and horse back through the trees to the mouth of the cave, which they approached with extreme caution. The aspect of the place did not at all prepossess Mr. Gibbs with any favorable idea of its tenants; and it was some time before either he or his companion liked to venture in; for there was a projection on one side, which might well have sheltered behind it one or two men, and beyond yawned the dark chasm, the depth of which neither of them knew. At length, however, they mustered resolution sufficient to advance a few steps into the cave; but their search proved no further availing than by discovering the charred wood and ashes of an extinguished fire, by the side of which were lying the bones of a fowl of some kind and a broken porter bottle.

"Ay," said the peasant when he saw these vestiges of a feast; "they are some of those damned gipsies—that's clear enough."

Mr. Gibbs coincided in this view, for the poor gipsies are sure, in all country neighborhoods, to come in for their share of suspicion; and a name has hanged many a poor dog that was as innocent as ever lived. "I dare say the fellow was a gipsy," said Mr. Gibbs, "for he had black hair, that I saw."

"Ay, and I have been thinking," said his companion, who did not want shrewdness, "that he must have known you or some one was a-coming, for he had been lying there in the bushes for a good while—that's clear enough—and then, what could he cut away that branch for, unless it were to have a fair whack at your head? If he had made a stick of it, that would have been another affair—but you see, master, he did nothing but cut it off out of the way, and throw it down."

"That's true! that's very true!" exclaimed the traveler, "I did not think of that."

"Did any one know as you were going along here?" asked the countryman.

"Yes, one young gentleman who called himself Maltby," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Ay! as bad a lad as any in the place," answered the countryman; "I'll tell you about him as we go along—but, after all, it could not be he who did it himself, for I saw him an hour or more ago walking about in Sturton, and seeming as if he were looking for some one."

"I promised to meet him there at three," said the traveler. "No, it could not be he—that is clear. But I shan't go on now, however."

"No, I wouldn't advise you," replied the other. "What do you think of going on into the cave?"

"No, I thank you," answered Gibbs quickly, "we've found out all we can, I think, and had better get back to Mallington. So this Maltby is a bad fellow?"

"He is a bad 'un," answered the countryman; and they turned their steps along the path homeward.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington, one of those parties which used constantly to take place amongst small communities like that of the place we speak of between twenty and thirty years ago, where the limited sphere of the society produced that fusion of ranks and classes which many people wish to see further extended. If the surgeon and the lawyer had refused to meet the shopkeeper and the farmer, they would have lived almost alone; they could not have enjoyed their rubber. If the shopkeeper and the farmer had excluded the lawyer's clerk or the surgeon's assistant, they could have made up but one card table. The necessities of the case sometimes carried the condescension further, and when the Earl of Mallington was down at the hall, the fashionable appearance of his *gentleman*, and the superior knowledge of great life displayed by that personage, as well as certain little considerations of his influence with his lord, caused him occasionally to receive a note of invitation, which he sometimes treated with contempt, sometimes condescended to accept, as the maggot moved. Then, again, the great expense of Mallington House, and the power of Mrs. Windsor within its walls, rendered her favor worth courting; and Mr. Brown ventured to solicit the honor of her company to one of his *soirées*. The Misses Martin and several others turned up their noses at the housekeeper, and wondered that Mr. Brown could do such a thing; but it was soon found that Mr. Brown's shop gained by the proceeding, and Mr. Green and Miss White and Mrs. Yellowly, together with Messieurs and Mesdames East, West, North, and South, followed his example.

It might be a curious question whether this fusion of classes produced any remarkable improvement, indeed, in the Mallington society. They all met, and they all played at cards, and they all drank tea and eat cakes and bread and butter, it is true; but they all tore one another to pieces with their tongues, if not with their teeth; and, as in most other societies, the grand, though secret, object of meeting seemed to be for every pair to say some ill-natured thing to each other of a third, whose back was turned. *Persiflage*—the gross vulgarity of the great and smart—was, indeed, wanting; for they had no idea of what is called mincing matters. They did not covertly laugh at their neighbors, and in a civil tone either bring out any little fault, or say cutting things with the sweetest look imaginable: no, but they abused each other to their heart's content; sometimes—nay, generally, in secret; but occasionally, when the blood was up, and the tricks and honors were against them, with all the open licence of the card table; for many an odd trick turns up there, reader, besides that which is formed of four pieces of painted pasteboard.

It is true that their abuse was not always confined to each other, but was occasionally scattered about with a liberal hand upon their superiors in station or wealth. Thus, when the name of Mrs. Charlton was mentioned, though she was always called a dear sweet creature, quite a lady, and a great number of many other pleasant names in the presence and within the cognizance of Mrs. Windsor, one whispered to another that she was going on at a fine rate, that she would soon get through all she had, and more, too; that she was dreadfully in debt, and that she would not easily get another old gentleman to marry her and pay her bills for her. During the life of the Earl of Mallington he had come in for his share, but it was in a different way, for his position and his habits removed him so far from the good people of the town (on whose existence and sentiments he never bestowed a thought) that they regarded him with a kind of awe. People will finger very awful things, however, and the great idol of Juggernaut itself would not escape scratching if its worshippers could get at it. The people of Mallington, therefore, though they did not venture to talk about any debts on his lordship's part, for he had none, did not scruple to affirm sometimes that he was mad, sometimes that he had committed some terrible crime which had driven him melancholy.

The person of all the neighborhood, however, who was most curiously treated by the small tongues of the place, was Dr. Western. During the first two years of his incumbency he had been railed at in the bitterest manner: he was a purse-proud, haughty priest, a pharisee, a wolf in sheep's clothing, everything that is bad; and the dissenting minister of Mallington—for even poor little Mallington had its share of dissent—aided not a little to cry down the rector; but a strange change had gradually crept over the opinions of the people of the place, and nobody now said a word against Dr. Western, for, in spite of human nature, and the assistance given to it by the devil in resisting all good influences, real excellence and the true practice of Christian virtues will have their effect. Dr. Western knew his flock well, was quite aware of their faults and their failings, laughed at their follies when they were small, reproved and grieved for them when they were great, but was never harsh in his condemnation, or bitter in his satire. He was always ready to aid, to direct, to reclaim, to give hope and consolation, to receive repentance, and to encourage a return to right; he was always performing himself that which he preached to others, and his private fortune as well as his position as a magistrate gave him the opportunity of doing much good, as well as correcting much evil.

It may be asked why such qualities and such circumstances did not produce an earlier effect, but that is very easily explained. Dr. Western's predecessor had been a pluralist, to use an abominably corrupt term, and he had never resided at Mallington. The curate whom he appointed, with a very small salary, was a man of inferior birth and manners, of no higher education than was sufficient to creep unperceived into a black gown, no resources within himself, and that sort of gregarious propensity which leads many a man to seek society very unbefitting from the mere want of any other. He was one at all the card parties of Mallington, hand and glove with every one in the place, took his tea snugly with the Miss Martins, and was even known to smoke a pipe and squeeze a lemon at the Bagpipes. Such things did really take place, dear reader, less than five-and-twenty years ago. Dr. Western, however, had different habits, and as every new thing is judged by its antecedents,

his conduct at first gave anything but satisfaction to the people of Mallington. Nevertheless, in course of time, they began to understand, to appreciate, to respect, to reverence, and the worst amongst them in the end did not venture to say that a man whose whole course for fifteen or sixteen years had been consistent in every good and wise thought was aught but what he seemed.

To return from this long digression, however, there was a snug little tea and card party at Mallington, and the conversation of the worthies assembled had received a zest and a fillip from various events which had taken place that morning. What a happy and fortunate thing it is for certain classes of society that there are vices and wickedness, accidents, misfortunes, and sorrows, in this good world that we inhabit! What would Mr. Tomkins, and Miss Jenkins, and Mrs. Watkins, and a great number of other people do if it were not for that column in the newspapers which used in former days to be headed "Accidents and Offences!" They would be obliged to remain absolutely silent for one half of their lives; their very thoughts, too, would be still; they would have nothing to talk about or think about; they would lose the two greatest enjoyments of human life—commiseration and horror; they could never shudder at the thought of the man who had had his throat cut on the common, and then go comfortably to bed, after seeing that the door was bolted; they could never blush at Mrs. B—— having run away with Mr. A——, and stroke their chin in the consciousness of not having eloped with anybody. So it is, however, that about a third of the world—I am very moderate in my calculations—pasture their vanity and their selfishness in the wide field of other men's turpitude or misfortune. What a day, then, had it been for Mallington which presented them with the three startling and exciting occurrences of Miss Charlton having fallen into the river, and been drawn out by Mr. Morton; of Alfred Latimer having been tapped on the shoulder by a bailiff, having knocked him down, and galloped away; and, more than all, of an assault and highway robbery having been committed in Wenlock Wood, with the deposition of the injured man, and the examination of witnesses before Dr. Western. If they had imported a pipe of port, and drank it all that night—nay, if a puncheon of neat Cogniac had given spirit to the conversation of the card party, they could not have been more excited or more gratified. Miss Mathilda Martin was quite in a twitter of delight, and Miss Martin, senior displayed that grave and sententious air which was no less a sign of her internal satisfaction.

"Were you present, Mr. Wheeler?" asked Miss Mathilda, to a thin vinegar-nosed man, opposite to her, who officiated as clerk of the parish. "La, how I should like to have been there."

"Yes, ma'am, it was a very interesting scene," said Mr. Wheeler, in a solemn nasal tone, for he had been clerk so long that his whole conversation was impregnated with "Amen." "A very interesting scene indeed! Why, we hav'nt had a murder or a highway robbery in this neighborhood for more than thirty years. The last was when the pedlar was murdered."

"Oh, that was a long time ago; nobody cares about that now," said Miss Martin; "but do tell us all about this business, Wheeler. Was the man much hurt?"

"I can tell you more about that than he can, Miss Martin," said Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, turning round from the other table, "for I dressed the gentleman's head. It was a bad contused wound on the back part of the cranium, with an aperture in length about half an inch, through which the skull was discernible. There was no fracture, however, nor any depression of the bone, and though some concussion of the cerebellum—"

"Why bless my heart, Mr. Nethersole," said Mrs. Gibbins, who was his partner at cards. "Why I declare you have trumped my ace—I wish you would mind what you are about. I declare you never play up to one, whatever one leads."

"My dear madam, I am very sorry," said the surgeon. "I thought—"

"But who was examined, Mr. Wheeler," said Miss Mathilda, while Mr. Nethersole proceeded to make his apology in due form.

"Oh, a good many people, ma'am," replied the clerk. "First, the deponent deposed that having made an appointment with young Maltby, to meet him at Sturton—"

"Ay, then it was young Maltby that did it," said Miss Martin; "that's clear enough. Don't we all know young Maltby?"

"No, he couldn't have done it," said Mr. Wheeler, "for it was proved by Garbet that Maltby was in Sturton at the time waiting for this very Mr. Gibbs. The man who was most suspected was Jack Williams. I dare say you recollect Jack Williams, Miss Martin?"

"To be sure I do," replied the lady; "the nasty vermin owed me four-and-ninepence for neck-handkerchiefs when he went away, but I would have given double the money to see him out of the place, so as he never came back again—that I would."

"Well, he has come back again, sure enough, now," answered Mr. Wheeler, "for I saw him with my own eyes brought up before Dr. Western upon suspicion because he had just come into the town, and changed a five-pound note."

"Well, but they let him off, I heard say!" exclaimed an old lady, with a voice even shriller than Miss Martin's. "I do think that was very foolish of the doctor, anyhow. He might have commanded him for further examination, as they say in the newspapers, and that would have kept him out of harm's way."

"The doctor knows what he's about, Mrs. Green—the doctor knows what he's about," said Mr. Wheeler, with additional solemnity, for the clerk always looked upon himself as part and parcel of the parson; and in calling the rector foolish he felt that his own wisdom was assailed by Mrs. Green. "Don't you suppose, madam," he continued, "that you can tell Dr. Western what he ought to do. Why what did he do? He set Jack Williams up, and made Mr. Gibbs look at him. Now Mr Gibbs is a very respectable man—a very respectable man, indeed, Mrs. Green, who would not swear to anything that isn't true. So after he had looked at Jack before and behind, and on one side and on

t'other, he said he'd rather not swear, though the back of the head was somewhat like. But the doctor didn't give it up for all that, for he made Garbet describe all the particulars of the footmarks they had found about it in the wood close by where it was done, and he swore that it was the print of a neat-made shoe, without a heel, and no nails in it. Then, Jack Williams had on a pair of thick boots, with nails all round, and two men who had walked with him part of the road came forward, and swore that he had overtaken them coming quite a different way. So what could the doctor do? One of them was Wilson the tanner's man."

"I'd have committed him for misprision," said Miss Martin. "Didn't he get out of the jail at Sturton? There's always a way of catching these fellows if one has a mind, but the doctor's getting old, and is too kind to them by half."

This observation would have drawn an angry reply upon her head, but Mrs. Green at that moment judiciously remarked, "Three by cards and two by honors, Mr. Wheeler," and this being a matter of much greater importance, the clerk asked to see the last trick.

The conversation was then directed to another branch of "the adventures of a day" by Miss Mathilda Martin observing, "Well, it is funny that Miss Louisa should have fallen into the water the very same day."

Now, though it is very probable that not a single person in the room, if they had been questioned, could have pointed out the funny connection which Miss Martin, junior, perceived between the accident which had occurred to Miss Charlton in the morning, and the robbery in Wenlock Wood, yet they all followed the cry like a pack of young hounds, and every one had their observation upon the wonderful fact of Mr. Morton having been the person to help the young lady out of the water.

"Ay, I see what will come of it, clear enough," said Miss Mathilda with a titter.

"It's a great shame if it does," rejoined her elder sister. "Here's a fellow who comes down without any one knowing him, and puts up at such an inn as the Bagpipes, and spends no money in the place. I'm sure he's never changed half a crown with us. It would not surprise me at all if he were of the same gang with you know who. They always have some smart-looking person amongst them. I'm sure what Mrs. Charlton's about I can't think."

"She's minding her own affairs, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor, over her shoulder, with a tender and significant smile.

"Well I hope she is," answered Miss Martin, tossing her head, "but every one doesn't think she's minding them very well; and I hope, if so be as such is the case, nobody will be hurt by it but herself, ma'am"

"You won't, Miss Martin," said Mrs. Windsor sharply; and, exasperated by this little altercation, they fell upon the cards, and played away most bitterly.

However, when the game was over, the rubber done, and the great majority of the party were sipping a little negus, Mr. Brown, the proprietor of the new shop which Mrs. Charlton had aided to establish in the village, drew Mrs. Windsor aside, and held a whispering conference with her for two or three minutes. No one heard the whole of what was said; but Mathilda Martin, who sidled up as near to them as she could, and leaned sentimentally over the back of her chair, caught a few words from the adverse dealer to the following effect—"Well, I should take it as a great favor, Mrs. Windsor, if it were only a part—it's upwards of five hundred pounds now."

"Well, I'll do my best; but it's of no use," replied Mrs. Windsor— "but it's of no use, I can tell you, until quarterday;" and then perceiving the near approximation to Miss Mathilda's ear, she walked away.

CHAPTER XXI.

Up two pair of stairs, in a small house upon the Kentish side of the river Thames, to which dwelling you entered by a door between an old iron-shop and a rag-warehouse, there was a front room with bars over the windows. The passage by which the foot of the stairs was reached was long and narrow; and besides the outer door, was an inner sort of wicket, which was kept always locked. A step or two farther in than the wicket was the door of a small room on the left-hand side, usually containing a turn-up bedstead—an old man, shaved once a fortnight—a young woman, washed not much oftener—and three small children, who generally went without ablution. All the accessories were sallow and sickly; the passage was of no color but that of dirt, and the fragments of a piece of oilcloth which had once carpeted it only served to make the visitor stumble and well nigh break his neck. The staircase was very narrow, like the passage, and there was a coating of some thick black matter upon the rail of the banisters which had probably been left there by the pressure of many miserable hands.

The room I have mentioned was of a tolerable size, and it, too, had the rags of a carpet over the floor. There were also five chairs, each in a crippled state, more or less, with shattered backs and arms, but sound enough in the legs; and a large old square sofa, covered with chintz, unwashed since the flood, and only wanting one castor, afforded sufficient sitting room for three or four persons.

The chamber, however, at the time I speak of, was only tenanted by two; the one occupying the sofa, just before the table, the other placed on a chair by its side, with his arm leaning upon the mahogany, and his head upon his hand, with his whole figure cast back in a sort of reckless daring attitude, as if he felt himself perfectly at ease where he was. The expression of the other's features was very different from the careless look of his companion; it was anxious, thoughtful, annoyed, and yet displaying an effort to cast off, or seem to cast off, the load of care. He leaned back on the sofa, with his head somewhat bent forward, his brow slightly contracted, and his eyes looking out on the face of his companion from under the drooping lids with a steady and eager but thoughtful glance. The whole of the upper part of the face was firm and determined; but about the lips there was a weaker expression, not exactly timid,

but hesitating and uncertain; and yet, if one considered his countenance with the eye of a Lavater, the strongly marked jawbone and prominent chin spoke daring courage. Once too, at something the other said, the lips became compressed and rigid, the feebler expression passed away, and all that remained was the look of a quick and moveable character easily excited, and perhaps easily led.

The other was a very different personage. He was short—very short—but remarkably broad-set and powerful; his chest was deep and wide, his arms long, and his flanks thin; his brow was high and wide, but the back of the head, though somewhat concealed by a quantity of thin light hair that floated in graceful waves all over it, was as round as a ball, somewhat protuberant above and behind the ears, and large where the base was joined by the thick neck. His features were square cut but fine, the eye soft and somewhat sleepy, beneath the overhanging eyebrow, the upper lip short and beautifully chiseled, but the lower too full and the chin too prominent. The figure though muscular was spare, and the complexion was pale, as if with that sort of sickness which proceeds from intemperance of some kind, blanching the cheek and hollowing the eye without diminishing the corporeal powers, at least in its earliest stages. The hue of health was upon the cheek of the other, and there was also a great difference in the expression of their two faces. His who sat upon the sofa seemed to speak a quick, restless, impatient, and haughty disposition, somewhat tamed for the time by misfortune or disappointment. It was easily read in all his aspects—except, perhaps, when a darker shade came over it; a look of almost demoniacal fierceness, which gave one the impression of blacker things being within than at first we were willing to imagine.

The expression of the other's countenance was of reckless, heedless carelessness. There seemed no struggle between good and evil; no hesitation, regret, or care. It was full of perfect self-abandonment, and yet there was every now and then a look of keen cunning, and sarcastic scorn poured out of the pale blue eyes, like a ray of light finding its way into a dark room from some unknown source.

Between the two stood a bowl of strong brandy-punch, to which each helped himself from time to time, without filling the glass full, or drinking it off hastily; but sipping the contents quietly and leisurely, while they conversed. It was evident that they had not met to drink, but drank merely because they had met. Nevertheless, they had thus imperceptibly nearly finished the bowl, and had somewhat heated their own blood, and made their tongues flow fast.

The one tenant of the sponging-house—he who sat upon the sofa—the reader need hardly be told was Alfred Latimer; and the other who sat near him, was a prisoner whom he had found there when the clear-sighted officials of the sheriff pounced upon him and bore him off, and to whose conversation he had been indebted for several cheerful hours, which might otherwise have been passed drearily enough. But he was indebted to him for nothing else; for, sad to say, the conversation of the debtor's prison, call it by what name you will—Fleet, King's Bench, Whitecross street, or sponging-house—is full of naught but contamination and evil. Did ever man enter there who did not come forth the worse for its fatal knowledge? First comes degradation, the loss of liberty, and by one's own fault—a stain that never can be wiped away from the mind; and then comes the dark, sad companionship with every grade below ourselves in moral debasement; the initiation in all the arts of evading, shifting, plundering. Dark and sad—dark and sad is that companionship, indeed; and during ten days that Alfred Latimer had spent within those walls, one after another, as they had come and gone, the passing companions of the prison had each taught him some lesson of fraud—had each habituated his thoughts to the contemplation of some new vice. But the man who was now beside him had been his constant monitor—had first made him acquainted with the ways of the place, and had afterwards informed him of a thousand horrible antecedents, which are constantly befalling the men who end in the prison at last. He himself was an epitome of all the faults, follies, and vices—nay, I would say crimes—which can be committed in society without actual punishment; and he had arrived at that state where evil "becomes man's good," and he boasts of the wickedness he has done. The younger brother of a man of station and wealth, he had set out in life in an honorable profession, with powerful friends, and sufficient fortune, but the latter had been soon spent, and the former soon alienated. One vice followed another, and with a combination of headstrong violence and shrewd cunning, he had avenged himself upon the relations and connections who had abandoned him, both by using their names to procure the means of his own gratification, and by rendering their relationship with him a disgrace to themselves. Through many a long afternoon he had amused his young companion with tales of what he had done in former years; of the duels he had fought, and the honest men he had slain to shield himself from the consequences of other deeds; ay, and of the tricks and devices he had used to make the shot take effect, and to anticipate the fire of his adversary. It was all true, too true, and yet he boasted of it! Then he spoke of those whom he had swindled, and of all the cunning arts he had used to cheat and rob without being detected, or calling on his head the arm of the law; and many a wild adventure and narrow escape was told between, which, seasoned with wit and eloquence, for he possessed both, and gilt with jest and sophistry, for he spared neither, were full of interest to his hearer.

The effect upon the mind of Alfred Latimer was what might be expected. It was not to incline him to follow exactly the same course; for the difference between the two characters marked out a separate path for each; but it was to sweep away every vestige of principle; to make him regard wrong as right; to enable him to shake off the trammels which mere habit so often imposes on men who would be otherwise all that is bad. He went into that foul place, reckless, vehement, full of fiery passions and dangerous weaknesses, but with some hesitations and some doubts. In ten days his doubts and hesitations were gone; virtue was

his scorn, honor was a name, and pleasure of one kind or another was the only good.

He had been telling his companion his circumstances and situation; and, oh! how mercily the other laughed to hear that he had suffered himself to be refused money by a wealthy mother.

"Why, what would you have done?" demanded Alfred Latimer, somewhat ashamed of his ignorance in the eyes of his companion.

"Done!" exclaimed Captain Tankerville. "There were twenty things to be done. Just write a cheque in her name for the money she ought to have given you; or, if you did not like that, supply yourself from the jewel box, or the plate chest. We should always make our relations do what they ought to do—it is a duty we owe them. Or, if you did not like to do that, why not come up to town, and order three or four thousand pounds' worth of things in her name, from some of her complaisant tradesmen—have them sent home to your lodging, and transfer them to a fence or a pawnbroker! I could tell you a dozen ways of making fathers and mothers and brothers and uncles perform the duties of relationship against their will;" and again he laughed merrily.

While it was still ringing upon his lip, however, the door opened, and the master of the house put in his head, saying, "Mr. Latimer, here is a gentleman wishes to see you," and looking towards the door the young man beheld Mr. Morton coming forward from the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXII.

Morton looked round him with an expression of countenance not altogether easy to describe. There was pain in it and surprise; but as his eyes rather wandered over the broken chairs and tables, the tattered carpet, the dirty blinds, and all the other bits of desolation contained in the chamber he was entering, than turned with any feeling of commiseration towards its tenants, it was easy to perceive that his feelings were more general than particular; and in truth he was at that moment asking himself "Does the law of England really and truly consign miserable wretches who have contracted debts, which—often by the result of accident or misfortune—they cannot pay, to such an abode as this, to be preyed upon by a set of harpies who wring from them all that they have left! The old punishment—if ever there was such a one—of throwing a man into a pit full of serpents, was better than this."

Whatever were his reflections, however, Alfred Latimer started up to receive him with a very different air and manner from those which he usually bore. Both vice and virtue have their confidence: each man, if he be not of a very weak and nervous temperament, acquires a particular sort of courage, in whatever path he chooses to pursue, by the time he has reached a certain point; and the young prisoner had by this time become sufficiently familiarized with his situation to feel not in the least ashamed of it. The most dexterous of pickpockets is self; but he follows a very different course from other gentlemen of his profession, and under his guidance we take our faults and follies out of our own pockets, without at all perceiving the theft, and put them into other people's; and by this pleasant assistance Alfred Latimer had already laid upon his mother's shoulders the whole blame of his having found his way into a sponging-house—nay, more, of all the consequences that were to flow thence to himself and others. He know not, he had no notion what he might hereafter do in the way of wickedness; but it was already predetermined in his own mind that, whatever it was, would be Mrs. Charlton's fault, from having exposed him to the contamination of such a place and such society.

"Why the devil did she not pay the money?" he asked himself; "and then she would have saved me all this."

Thus, instead of feeling anything like shame at seeing Mr. Morton in such a place and under such circumstances, he never felt more at ease in his life, and advancing towards him, he exclaimed, in a familiar tone, "Ah, Morton! this is very kind of you, to come and see me; for I suppose you are not grabbed yourself; and so that must be your motive."

"That alone," replied the young gentleman, not refusing his proffered hand, but yet not taking it very warmly; "I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you, however, when you are at leisure."

"Oh! by-and-by will do," said Mr. Latimer; "come, sit down and take some punch."

"No, I thank you," answered Morton; "I never drink punch. But, by your good leave, I should be glad to speak with you soon, as my time is very short."

"Well, you can speak now," replied Alfred Latimer. "This is only my friend, Captain Tankerville. Captain Tankerville, my friend, Mr. Morton."

Captain Tankerville rose and bowed with a cold air, for it is wonderful how soon men much accustomed to the world contrive to separate the classes of mankind one from the other, the wheat from the chaff, and appropriate to themselves that which may serve their purposes, and none other. In an instant Captain Tankerville preceived that Morton was a man neither to be gulled nor to be led, neither to be his dupe nor his companion. Their repelling poles were instantly exerted against each other, and each felt that there could never be any attraction between them. It was not worth while either to be civil or to be rude, however, and after having received a slight inclination of the head, somewhat haughty and stern indeed, in return for his bow, Alfred's fellow-captive sat down again, resolved not to quit the field without necessity.

Morton cut the matter very short, however, saying "What I have to communicate, Latimer, must be in private; for it refers not only to your own affairs, which you might not care about entering upon before this gentleman; but to those of others, who might not judge such a course expedient. Can we not go into another room! I dare say the man of the house can show us one."

"Oh dear, no!" said Captain Tankerville, rising at this strong hint; "if I am in the way I will beat my retreat. This is Mr. Latimer's sitting-room, sir; and I will not intrude upon

you. Good evening for the present, Latimer;" and he walked towards the door. The young gentleman accompanied him so far, saying something about his conference not being long; and then returned to his friend from Mallington, who by this time had seated himself.

"Well, what news from Mallington, Morton?" asked he, ladling himself out a little of the punch that remained. "I suppose my good mother has heard of this affair—though I did not tell her. After what took place I'd have died upon prison allowance rather than have written one word to her."

"There you are very wrong," replied Morton, in a grave tone. "Whatever may be Mrs. Charlton's faults, want of affection for you is not amongst them; and it is at her request that I came to town last night, one of the creditors, who has lodged a detainer against you, having written to her on the subject, and shocked her deeply by telling her where you are."

"But has she sent the money?" demanded her excellent son. "What the devil is the use of sending you unless she has sent the money."

"That she could not do," replied Morton, feeling his cheek begin to get a little warm at the perfect heartlessness which the youth displayed; but checking the somewhat sharp words that were springing to his lips. "Mrs. Charlton, in her tenderness for you, and in the distress of mind which your situation occasioned, was induced to lay before me the state of her affairs in a manner which has proved to me, and would prove to you, the utter impossibility of her paying your debts. She has not the money; she has only her jointure, and—nay, do not interrupt me till I have done—and that I am sorry to say has been encumbered very considerably in consequence of her having kept up since Mr. Charlton's death the same establishment which existed during his life. Your debts, it seems, amount to nearly a thousand pounds, and it would require the sacrifice of several years' income for her to pay those and her own also."

Alfred Latimer leaned his head upon his hand, and moved his fingers through his hair, evidently not liking at all the idea of being left, by his mother's incapacity to supply the funds he required, a prisoner for years, if not for life. All his dreams of pleasures and adventures when he should have regained his liberty were put to flight; and after having remained for some moments in silence, he said "Well, then I suppose I must go into the Bench and get the rules."

Morton purposely made no reply; and the next instant his young companion looked up laughing, as if a new thought had struck him, exclaiming "I'll tell you what, Morton. I have a better plan than that. You get your marriage over with Louisa as soon as possible, and then lend me the money out of her fortune."

"My marriage with Miss Charlton!" said Morton, gravely, and in a tone of surprise, for he had entertained no idea that Alfred Latimer had so completely settled the matter for him in his own mind. "My dear sir, you are speaking of a matter as determined, which is very far from being so. Doubtless Miss Charlton is worthy of the affection of persons much higher in station and fortune than myself; but—"

"Pooh—pooh, nonsense, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer. "Do you suppose I have not got my eyes? You are in love with Louisa, and Louisa with you, and my mother has made up her mind that you shall marry her; but," he added, after thinking for a moment, "I should not wonder if she made you pay for it. You know Louisa when she is of age can marry any one she likes, with my mother's consent: but if that consent be not given, and she does marry, the whole property goes to my respectable parent, and I don't know her if she does not make whoever does gain her consent come down pretty roundly."

This was a ray of light to Edmond Morton, which served to illuminate at once every dark point in Mrs. Charlton's conduct towards him. The justice of her own son's suspicions struck him at once; but after a moment's thought he felt inclined to reject the very idea as basely injurious to that lady. Nevertheless he had observed much that confirmed it, and had indeed suspected some design in the encouragement he had received, which he had not been able to understand. Art seldom veils itself so completely as to pass altogether undetected, unless the passions or foibles of those on whom it is practised lend it very vigorous aid. Such had not been the case with Morton, for though no man is without some touch of vanity, his was not of that degree or kind which could make him believe that Mrs. Charlton had been so completely fascinated with his good mien or high qualities as to make him her own frequent guest, and her step-daughter's constant companion, without further inquiry, or some secret motive; but to set up her husband's child for sale to the best bidder, was something almost too gross and shameless to be believed. His countenance changed as he listened, and, without replying, he fell into a deep fit of thought.

"Come, come, Morton," said his companion, after indulging him in his reverie for a few minutes; "whatever you may have expected with Louisa, it would be well worth your while to give my mother a good sum—ay, even as much as half her fortune—and the old lady cannot well ask more, I should think. You would then get four thousand a year at least, and a very beautiful girl into the bargain—ay, and the best girl in all the world, too."

Morton listened to him to the end, and then replied quietly, but decidedly, "I think, Latimer, you mistake your mother's views, and I am quite sure that you mistake me altogether. You will find that, whatever may be my feelings, I am not one to make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand; and you may depend upon one thing—that, if she ever is my wife at all, it will be with her whole fortune, or with none. But to return to other matters. There is an easier, a more honorable way of relieving you from the difficulties that press upon you, and of delivering you speedily from this place. I informed your mother that I thought I could arrange the matter, and during this morning I have ascertained the fact."

"Ay!" said his companion, "how is that?"

"The money can be borrowed," replied Morton, "on the property which is settled upon you. My solicitor has a client who will advance it."

"Ay, at ten per cent., I suppose," said the

youth; "and eat up the whole income with interest."

"No, not so," answered Morton, "at five per cent. I would not meddle with any unfair or usurous transaction, and I have told him to have ready twelve hundred pounds, in case you like to take advantage of the proposal. Then, with all debts paid, you will have somewhat more than two hundred pounds to go on upon; and I trust that with the advantage of your mother's house, and the somewhat severe warning you have received, you will see the necessity of limiting your expenses by your income."

"Whatever I do, you are a capital fellow, Morton," replied Alfred Latimer, "and have set the matter right for me a devil of a deal better than Tankerville would have done, with all his wit. He would have had me set these creditors at defiance, take the rules and live jollily upon what I have got."

"Perhaps he might wish to help you to spend it," observed Morton, who thought that such a hint might not be thrown away.

"Take care what you say of him," exclaimed Alfred Latimer, laughing; "he is a fire-eating fellow and has shot several men upon lighter words than that."

"So I have heard," answered Morton calmly; "but I am not very much afraid of such things, and gentlemen before they fight always take care that the persons whom they so honor are those who are justified in requiring it." His tone and look were perfectly composed, but proud—almost haughty; and Alfred Latimer was a good deal struck with an air which he had never before seen his companion assume. "Were it not so," continued Morton, in a softer manner, "every blackleg and sharper would carry all questions at the pistol's muzzle, and men would be obliged to fight, or be cheated every hour. But what do you say to my suggestion? Does it meet your views?"

"Oh, of course it does," replied Latimer, "and the sooner I am out of this cursed place the better. I declare the room stinks of broken mahogany."

"Rum-punch and cigars," added Morton, with a faint smile. "However, you cannot quit it to-night, I fear. To-morrow we must get you bail for a few days; and then I will leave you to settle the rest with my solicitor, for I have business that calls me back to Mallington."

"What, you have not done sketching the whole neighborhood?" said Alfred Latimer, with a gay laugh, "but I shall join you there, as soon as all is signed, sealed, and delivered; for I have some sketches to take, too—of objects as pretty to my eyes, at least."

Morton was silent, for the words of Alfred Latimer might have more senses than one; but he could hardly venture to take them in one honorable to the speaker; for he had heard from but too good authority that at Mallington Mrs. Charlton's son showed a more marked dislike to the society of women in his own rank of life than even to that of men. "God grant," he said at length, somewhat abruptly, "that some honorable attachment may bring and fix you there. It would be the very best thing for *you*. However, I will direct my solicitor to find you bail, and will be with you about twelve to take you to his office. So good morning to you, Latimer."

They shook hands, and Morton departed, leaving Alfred Latimer standing in the middle of the room, in a deep fit of thought. What was his mind revolving so earnestly? Did he feel grateful for the kindness he received? Was he touched by the interest taken in his fate? Was he busy with good resolutions for the future? Alas! no. His first question to himself was, "Who the devil can this fellow be? He speaks as if he were the Prince of Wales. A poor painter!—I wonder my mother can be such a gull. I should not wonder if he were the son of some rich East Indian, who has smothered a Begum, and brought over her money chests. It's a capital country that India. One can do very nearly what one likes there, and knock about the black fellows at pleasure. I should like to set up sultan somewhere, and have a seraglio," and laughing at his own thoughts, he went down to the room below, and called up Tankerville to spend the rest of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In a street not far from the inns of court, though not exactly within their solemn precincts—a little more airy and cheerful than those dark recesses of the law, and not quite so much imbued with the odor of parchment and black gowns, but still smelling strong of red tape and blue bags—are numerous houses inhabited by solicitors, whose doors, like those of a place to which in some respects they bear a considerable resemblance (inasmuch as those who once get into them have a difficulty in getting out again, and are pretty well tormented while they are in) stand ever open to receive the poor sinners whom fate or folly lead to enter. One of the best houses in this street, and one of the cleanest, was number forty-three, about the middle of the row on the right hand; but yet the passage by which one entered would have puzzled Œdipus if the Sphynx had asked when it was washed; and in the midst, just beyond a large door-mat, which appeared to have been placed there to prevent people from carrying any of the dirt away with them, there was—nay, there is, for it is impossible it can have been removed—a large black stain of ink which must have been spilt nearly at the same time as the blood of David Rizzio on the floor of sad Holyrood, that storehouse of tragedies. At about ten o'clock on the morning succeeding the day of Morton's visit to Alfred Latimer, a gentleman mounted on a handsome bay horse, very glossy in the skin and full of blood and power—though by no means a catlike prancer of the parks—stopped at the door of number forty-three, and instantly a groom rode up to take his rein.

Dismounting slowly and thoughtfully he entered the passage, and walked on to a room which had a glass door, with brass rods across the panes, at the end; and opening the said door he found himself in the presence of eight or nine clerks, shut up in boxes or pens. He was not the least abashed, however, and when

the head common-law clerk advanced from the stall, with a sweet smile and a low bow, the gentleman only inquired whether Mr. Quatterly had yet arrived!

The clerk assured him that Mr. Quatterly had been there for an hour; and, without more ado, Mr. Morton, for he it was, walked up the stairs, and opened a door on the first floor to the left. Within was another door covered with green baize, impervious to wind and sound, and it also opened under the young gentleman's hand, disclosing a neat and comfortable room within, ornamented with a large table, covered over with innumerable packets of papers, all tied up and labelled; a large book-case, filled with books, in brown calf, all looking so like each other that they might have been taken for one family; and an elderly gentleman, besides sundry chairs and a lamp, the flame of which, like that on Vesta's altar, was kept ever burning by certain virgins, who lived in the penetralia of the temple. We will pass over the chairs, and of the book-case and the table we have said enough; but with regard to the elderly gentleman we must have a word or two more, for he was worthy remark to any one, and we may have to relate some of his proceedings hereafter. It is of his person, however, that we have now to speak. Mr. Quatterly, or, as his letters generally bore his style and title, Timothy Quatterly, Esquire, had passed his meridian by several years, being now fifty-eight if not fifty-nine. To see him sitting one would have said he was six feet high; to see him standing one soon perceived that he was not more than five foot seven. The upper part was large, round, and bulky; the lower part minute enough to make an almost ludicrous contrast with the rest. Nature, in fact, having been called in a hurry from South America, had brought the superstructure of an unfinished Patagonian with her, and lighting down in Lapland had clapped it on to the legs of a dwarf. This disproportion, as we shall soon have to show, affected both mind and body; but first let us look at his face, reader. See how round, and smooth, and almost soft it seems, with its rosy cheeks and its little nose. Gibbon himself, notwithstanding Madame de Deffand's terrible mistake, had never such a pair of cheeks as that; and then those merry little twinkling black eyes, with something both of high manly sagacity in them and of childlike fun, how they peep out from under the thin eyebrows. You see he is as bald too as a haddock, except just over the ears, and in the fat back of his neck, where the gray hair flows away in a pigtail. He is a stout man, too—rather too stout, inclined to be a little corpulent, yet active, too—as active as a trout. Then his clothing is somewhat peculiar; a black coat powdered on the collar, a neckerchief as white as snow—one every morning, upon my word; a white waist-coat without a speck, though somewhat yellowish, from London washing; but those drab knee-breeches, and those gray worsted stockings!—surely that is not in keeping, Mr. Quatterly. But perhaps he may consider his legs unworthy of their trunk, and treat them accordingly; or is it that from their littleness he regards them more tenderly, and wraps them in all that is warmest. That is probably the right solution of the enigma; and I declare the man has got a pair of silver buckles in his small shoes.

Such was, such is Timothy Quatterly, Esq., in outward appearance; and in mind there are peculiarities also. That large head contains a vast quantity of law, and a good deal of mirth—gay, simple, almost infantine fun. There is shrewd good sense, too, within. He is not a man to be taken in, to be cheated, bamboozled, done; and yet he is as good-humored a creature as any upon earth—ay, and benevolent too, notwithstanding his being a lawyer. In fact, he is a *lusus naturæ*; for, what with erudition, law, merriment, good-nature, kindness of heart, keenness of mind, activity, shoulders, and legs, there is quite enough of him to make two men, and very tolerable men too.

But he was somewhat wayward in his whims; and though he could occasionally show that he was possessed of wit that would have shamed many a practised compounder of smart sayings, yet he was fond of a pun—barbarously fond of a pun; and let it be remarked that we use the word barbarously discreetly, and with due reverence; for though no barbarians that have ever yet been heard of were known to love that peculiar sort of tea-and-toast witticism called a pun, being always very sedate and serious people, and much more reasonable than civilized nations, yet they have a spice of cruelty in them, and so had Mr. Quatterly; for no sooner did he discover that any pompous and magniloquent man, who fancied his grave sayings were worthy of profound attention, hated a pun, especially uttered by another man, than he set upon him, and with an overpowering torrent of the abhorred jest overwhelmed his stories, broke through his arguments, swamped his conclusions, and turned all his eloquence to farce. There was no resisting him, for resistance only increased his cruelty and his fluency. With other persons he was more moderate; and in conversation with any one who did not rouse the spirit of perversity within him, but smiled at even a stale jest, or far-fetched illustration, he would be tender-hearted, and content himself with shadowing forth his meaning, when he did not chose to speak it plainly, with many a nursery rhyme, or schoolboy joke, always brought in quaintly, and sometimes, in its very simplicity, judiciously. Thus there seemed two parts in his mind as well as in his body—one full of power, activity, and vigor, erudite, keen, perspicuous, and resolute; the other playful, gay, malicious, and full of fun, but, like his little legs, carrying all the rest lightly over various slippery and uneven paths.

Such was the gentleman in whose presence Mr. Morton now appeared, and when the latter entered the room Mr. Quatterly was sitting with the worsted stocking on his right leg crossed over the knee of the drab breeches on his left leg, his indicial digit of the dexter hand rubbing a spot upon the top of his head, which, if not more bald, was at least more polished than the rest, and, looking steadily at the shagreen case of a pair of spectacles which lay upon the table before him.

"Ah! good morning, sir; good morning," he said, as soon as he beheld Morton, whom, for various reasons to himself best known, he treated with great respect, at the same time rising

and putting a chair for him, though, as he moved about with a light step, he seemed so top-heavy that it was hardly possible not to think every moment that he would topple over.

"Be seated, my dear sir, be seated. What news of his majesty's country seat in Surrey? You saw your lost mutton, I suppose, last night. Pray, did you find him shorn to your hand, as, according to all rules—and those of the King's Bench, especially—he ought to be, though the fleece of those who get in there one would think were hardly worth plucking."

"There are always persons quite ready, my dear sir," replied Morton, with a smile, "to gather up the gleanings that more legitimate husbandmen have let fall."

"A cut at the lawyers? A cut at the lawyers, sir," cried Mr. Quatterly: "that's unkind; that's unfair. '*Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.*' It takes five years to make an attorney, hey? I know what you mean. But, pray, do not call us all husbandmen. I have nothing of the husband in me, though I think I know some one who has;—ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

There was a merriment, a joviality in his laugh that was not to be resisted; and Morton joined in somewhat more quietly, adding, as soon as the cachinnation of the lawyer would allow of his being heard—"But, my good friend, have you got the deed prepared as far as possible, for I would fain have it settled at once."

"Settled!" said the solicitor, "he is thinking of the settlements already. How these young men's wits do get inflamed with matrimony as soon as the spark is blown into a blaze—that's not a pun, mind you—it's a fine flight of imagination beautifully expressed; for though you may be a spark, and a gay spark too, yet you have not shown yourself easily fanned into the necessary state of combustion."

"But an answer, an answer, my dear sir," said Morton; "have you got these deeds, or this deed ready, as far as may be, for I much wish to carry the young man out of the temptations of London as soon as may be."

"Pooh! leave him alone, and he'll come home, and most likely bring a fat tail behind him," answered the lawyer, having recourse to one of his favorite illustrations. The temptations of London! Did ever one hear a sane man talk of such things. I never found any temptation in London. All mine have been in the country. By the way, I hope you have thought of me this year. I must have a pop at the birds, and you, or your late good father, have always provided me."

"Oh, yes!" replied Morton, "you shall have enough. Come down to me at Mallington, and I will give you enough to do."

"To draw the settlement, hey?" cried Mr. Quatterly, with a new burst of laughter; "but from what I hear, you have already bagged the best of the game there before the season, you poacher. But I'll come, and if I leave you a single cock pheasant, my name's not Quatterly. Can draw the settlements after dinner, fall asleep over them, send them up to Bell, get an opinion that nobody on earth can read, and leave a whole generation of law-suits for the benefit of my clerks and their children. Must take care of the poor boys in the office, you know. But come, I see you are impatient. Now to business. What does the young fellow say? That is the first question. I have known young dogs so fond of that kennel, that nothing would get them out of it, and there is no use of drawing deeds unless one is sure they will be signed."

"But, my dear sir, I told you I was sure," replied Morton, in a tone of vexation at the idea of the matter being no farther advanced than it was the night before; "he will sign it willingly—he was transported at the very idea."

"No, no, no—not transported yet!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "soon may be, for aught you or I know. He's on the high road, it would seem; and taking the high road is one step to transportation, if not to the gallows. He's in a sponging-house, I think you said. No fear of his not being well cleaned out then, and fit for whitewashing. Had he got any one with him?—a poor parson who had spent too much in gin-and-water, and seven children, or anything of that sort; or a maiden lady of nine-and-thirty, who had been ruined by lawyers and *sal volatile*? Those are the sort of companions that make a man transported to get out."

"No, indeed," answered Morton; "he had with him one Captain Tankerville, a very dangerous person, I believe. Was he not once brought up on suspicion of forgery?"

"Oh, the villain!" cried Mr. Quatterly; "if he's in, it is, indeed, high time to get the other out. If he carried in with him a single virtue, or a half-crown piece, that fellow will pick his pocket of it. But to set your mind at ease, I sat up last night for half an hour, and drew up a little memorandum, as good as a deed, which one of the clerks is just now writing out. It will be done before twelve, and you can pack him up in a hamper as soon as it is signed, and send him off to Mallington by the night coach, taking care to put him in head foremost, and write upon the top, 'Keep this side up!' It is his only chance of having his brain turned right again."

"But, my good friend, we must contrive to get bail for him before I can bring him here," said Morton.

"Why, bail him yourself, or bring him in the sheriff's custody," said Mr. Quatterly. "My name will make them all compliance; but, I forgot—your mystery—your mystery!—and, methinks, you forgot too. If you come with him here, you will have your name shouted from clerk to clerk to split the welkin. That will never do. Let me see;" and turning to a book with two brass clasps, he read: "Mr. Twistleton at eleven—Johnny Dunmow at three—Sir Arthur McMore at half-past. Well, I can go to him at half-past eleven, for Twistleton only wants to borrow fifteen thousand pounds on a mortgage in the moon. That's a property easily conveyed, so he will not keep me long, and then I can go to the lad myself. You can meet me there, for he might prove refractory about leaving me to settle with the creditors, and then, as in the ring, it is as well to have a backer."

"But he cannot get out without the creditors being paid, or having security," replied Morton.

"Oh, people get out wonderfully," answered Mr. Quatterly; "and as to security, there is nothing so safe as a hackney coach and a ten pound note, though one sometimes breaks down,

and the others turn out forged. However, it is as well not to bail him at all, for then he must either both sign and pay, or remain where he is, but you will never get your money, I can tell you; or, at all events, not the interest, for his mother has the property for life, and till she assigns it to him his signature is not worth one of those old buckles;" and he stretched out his foot, a little pleased at its neat appearance.

"The loss will not be great," replied Morton, in a well-satisfied tone, "and I shall be well satisfied if we succeed in rescuing him."

"And winning the fair lady," added Mr. Quatterly. "Well, Tommy Tucker turned a Turk for twopence; and, after all, it's a much more sensible thing to turn tomfool for a pretty girl; though, doubtless, the said Thomas Tucker, who turned Turk as aforesaid, looked to have a reversionary interest in certain Circassians of which his convertor was seized and possessed, as well as the mere consideration money of twopence of lawful money of Great Britain—anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary notwithstanding—and so good bye till a quarter to twelve."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Alfred Latimer and his dear new-found friend, Captain Tankerville, sat at their breakfast at about eleven o'clock, and the table was covered in a way that the drawing-room of the sponging-house seldom saw. What a curious sensation that very collocation "drawing-room—of a sponging-house" gives. Perhaps nothing on earth brings forth the painful points in any painful subject more than when some image is accidentally combined with it to which we have been accustomed to attach ideas of pleasure. The drawing-room of a sponging-house! The drawing-room of a prison! The place where we have been accustomed to spend pleasant hours, to which we retire from care and business and anxiety, to enjoy our allotted portion of relaxation with those most dear to us, in which we have seen ourselves surrounded by children and friends and happy faces—the name of that place connected with a prison!—with suffering and sorrow, and want and captivity! What a contrast in that strange combination! However, there they sat at a meal which certainly did not consist of ordinary prisoners' fare; for the money which Latimer had got for his horse was not yet gone; and with the true spirit of his class of men, he thought that as he was soon to be free, and have somewhat more than two hundred pounds in his pocket, it mattered not how speedily the sum he had was spent. He had therefore invited Captain Tankerville to breakfast, and had ordered and paid for all sorts of things—broiled ham and fish, coffee and tea, muffins and rolls, sweetmeats and honey. The cerberus of the house, at the first mention of his wants and wishes, had divined, from long experience, that the gentleman who had visited his prisoner the night before had come to announce his speedy liberation, and consequently determined to make the most of his time. He got everything that was required, therefore, with great promptitude, and charged him three times the value for all. Never were such dear eggs set down upon a table; never did York or Westphalia produce such extravagant ham; never did a fishmonger ask such a price for fish. But it was then, and is in a degree now, a part of the law of England that all its officials should have a privilege of skinning the unfortunate, and trading in the follies of the foolish. It may be a good part of the law, but I do not see the morality thereof quite clearly.

However, there they sat, laughing and talking, jesting and jeering, enjoying themselves as if folly and crime were the merriest things in the world. How different was the scene from that which I remember once having beheld when I went to visit a poor friend in one of those dens of horror and iniquity. He was a high and noble minded man of talent and imagination—unfortunate, but neither vicious nor foolish; and I never shall forget the haggard and despairing look of his countenance as he sat there solitary and silent, taken from his wife and children, deprived of the means of earning the very sum that was necessary to pay a hard creditor. What was the cause why he could not be as gay as Alfred Latimer and Captain Tankerville? It is explained in a moment. He was brought there by no fault of his own—they were. He had been arrested at the suit of a surgeon for long attendance on a sick child, which he had been unable to pay because other people could not pay him. This was his crime—none other upon earth. Thou art a hard thing, O Law of England, and in thy justice art often marvellously unjust—in thine equity iniquitous. The cunning rogue sets thee at defiance; but honest poverty is a crime that cannot escape thee.

Alfred Latimer had told his evil counsellor almost all that had taken place between him and Mr. Morton. He had not, indeed, told all, for Louisa's name had never been mentioned. There was something so pure, so sweet, so good in the very idea of the sister of his boyhood that, bad as he was, and hardened as he was growing, he shrunk from the very mention of her existence in the presence of one whom he instinctively felt to be coarse in mind and gross in habit of thought. However sweetly the cup of wickedness may be seasoned, however eagerly the thirsty lip of passion may drink it, there is always a trembling consciousness that there is poison in the draught, and although Alfred Latimer listened with a sort of fascination to his companion's tales, and yielded his whole spirit to his influence, he nevertheless felt that he was base even while he prepared to imitate him in baseness.

"So," said Captain Tankerville, with the slightest possible sneer upon his lip, "this Mr. Morton, it seems, wants to take you back and tie you to your mother's apron string again. If I were you, I wouldn't go; I'd stop here in London as soon as I had got the money, if it were only just to show them that they couldn't make a baby or a fool of me any more."

"So I should," answered Alfred Latimer, laughing, "but I have other things that draw me to Mallington besides my mother's apron string. I've got some business to do there, captain; but as soon as that is done I shall come back again."

Mr. Quatterly at the same time took his departure, saying he would soon be back, and Morton walked to the window to leave his companion to read the epistle he had just received, at his ease. The contents, whatever they were, seemed to produce a strange change in Alfred Latimer, for, after having vented an oath, and the exclamation, "That she shan't, by ——!" he began to walk up and down the room in a state of great agitation."

"I say, Morton," he continued after a pause; "that d—d coach does not start till nine, I think. Would you mind joining me in a chaise down?"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow," replied his companion, "otherwise I should be very happy."

"Ay, but I have changed my mind," said Alfred Latimer; "I shall go down to-day as soon as this fellow returns. What a time he is! Why, he could have looked over all the offices in London before this! Do you mind starting at once?"

"Oh, no," replied Morton, a little embarrassed; "I must, indeed, go home for an hour, but I will rejoin you in that time with a chaise, if you like."

"Well, do, do, there's a good fellow;" cried Alfred Latimer. "You can go and get ready at once if that's all. I and old Squatterly can settle all the rest, while you are away, and I'll pack up my things in the meanwhile."

Morton smiled almost sadly; for he could conceive no very good motive which could have operated so sudden a change in a man of Alfred Latimer's disposition; but, agreeing to his proposal, he took his departure, and left him alone. The moment he was gone the young gentleman hurried to his dirty bed-chamber, laid out the few articles of clothing he had purchased in London since his arrival, and those he had packed up at Mallington ere he left his mother's house, and placed them in a portmanteau, which he had brought from the lodgings where he had been arrested. In the meanwhile Captain Tankerville, as soon as he saw Morton depart, walked out of the room below, and into that where he had left Alfred Latimer; but not finding him there he made some inquiries of the people in the back parlor, from whom he learned that Mr. Quatterly was expected back every minute. This intelligence drove him into his own den again, where he amused himself for three-quarters of an hour by practising some very ingenious and serviceable tricks with a pack of cards.

At the end of that time, there was a knock at the street door, and he heard the voice of the sheriff's-officer speaking to his man as they entered together, almost immediately succeeded by another knock and the tones of Mr. Quatterly. The sheriff's-officer and the solicitor then walked upstairs together, and Mr. Latimer was called out of his bed-room.

Now, the officer was a very different personage from his man; a very tall, thin, neat personage, in a blue satin cravat, tied tight, and his voice was sweet and complacent. "Happy to hear it's all arranged, Mr. Latimer," he said, "I have been down to search the office, and find a few little matters lodged this morning. *Let me see*, I'll just run them up;" and, sitting down, he soon made out an account amounting to nine-hundred and seventy-five pounds, which, with costs, charges, &c., swelled the whole to about one thousand and nine.

Alfred Latimer gazed with astonishment. "Why, Tankerville told me, Mr. Quincy," he said, "that there was but two hundred."

"Ay, sir, that was the day before yesterday," replied the officer. "These have come in since," and he ran his finger down a long list at the bottom of a paper he held in his hand.

"It does not matter, you know, my dear Mr. Latimer," observed Mr. Quatterly, putting on a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. "As they were all to be paid, it is better to get it all over at once. "Save you trouble, you know, and be sooner done. There are few men who ever, like the man in the moon, come down too soon to find their way to Norwich; and you'll have more time to amuse yourself, if you do stay in London till to-morrow."

"I am going down at once, sir," said Alfred Latimer, in a sullen tone; "Mr. Morton is to bring a chaise directly."

"Ay, a sensible man, Mr. Morton," rejoined Mr. Quatterly, "a very sensible, excellent man, indeed. Few like him, sir—few like him. He has but one fault that I know of."

"And pray what may that be?" asked Alfred Latimer, dully, looking over the papers on the table.

"He hates a pun," answered the solicitor, in a serious tone. "But now, Mr. Quincy, to business."

And that business was soon settled; the bills were paid in full by Mr. Quatterly; the costs in part, for he thought fit to dock some excessive charges; and the sheriff's officer knew his character too well to make aught but faint resistance in his own case, and contented himself with Mr. Quatterly's engagement to pay the rest of the amount, if it could be legally enforced in the case of others.

When all this was settled, the worthy solicitor turned to Mr. Latimer, saying, "And now, sir, there's the chaise, I hear. Morton is the most punctual man on earth; always to the tick of the clock, and yet never goes tick either. And now, Mr. Latimer, after the little expenses of the agreement, &c., there is a sum due to you of one hundred and—let me see—call it one hundred and ninety pounds—we can settle any other little matter afterwards. Will you have it in money or a cheque?"

"All in money," answered Alfred Latimer; and Mr. Quatterly's pocket-book instantly disgorged the amount. Morton was in the room a moment after; and though there was a little anger in Alfred Latimer's heart at being frustrated in his hopes of receiving the larger sum, with which he had already built castles enough in the air to have held a whole generation, yet he was even more eager than ever to return to Mallington without a moment's delay; and as soon as it was announced that he was free, he descended the stairs, and sprang into the chaise, without giving one thought or one word to Captain Tankerville. Such are the friendships of the bad. The other saw him depart from the window, and clenching his fist, with a

fearful oath, he exclaimed, "The blackguard has bilked me; but curse me if I don't do for him some day."

CHAPTER XXV.

The conversation of Morton, as they rolled along, did Alfred Latimer more good than that of Mr. Quatterly had done. Although, as we have hitherto seen him, he had shown himself somewhat grave, for there had been many thoughts and feelings of deep interest in his heart and mind,—and deep thought, as well as deep feeling, is always grave,—yet he was by no means constitutionally a sad or sombre man. He was one of great powers of imagination; but those powers were disposed quite as often to exercise themselves on gay as on serious subjects when they presented themselves naturally, and he seldom thought it worth while to seek for anything that did not come naturally. He was not either the creature of impulse or of the moment. He was always the same; but his mind dealt with things as he found them, subjecting all to the influence of itself, but still not putting forth its strength to throw a snow ball as it would have heaved a rock; nor sporting with the tangles of Nærea's hair, as if he had been solving a problem in Euclid. There was ever, indeed, in his gayest of moods somewhat of thought, which showed that the stream ran deep beneath the ripple, and in his most serious moments somewhat of fancy, which evinced that the present cares had brighter aspirations beyond them.

In the present instance, indeed, he deviated from his ordinary course; and though from much that had passed he had received a grave —nay a sad impression, yet he strove to be cheerful, and to force his thoughts from painful realities and very dark anticipations, to the less stern and gloomy objects that the passing scene presented. And what a city is London for every suggestion that the mind of man can desire—whether for bright and cheerful, or for shadowy and desponding—with its life and activity, its eagerness, and its intense worldliness; its fierce passions, and its light absurdities; its marvelous selfishness, and its still more surprising benevolence. There never was anything—nay, not in Greece or Rome, nor even in those wide deserted eastern plains, that once were the nest of cities thronged with life—anything so wonderful as that great capital, in the strangeness of its contrasts; and yet, by what fine and beautiful gradations—by what a magical softening of semi-tints, the strong lights and the dark shades blend into each other.

For three or four miles the journey of the travelers lay through the metropolis; first through that portion called the city, where the eternal roll of wheels, and the everlasting movement of interminable crowds deafened the ear and dazzled the eye; and yet never did the result of that extraordinary combination of habit and of reason, of law and of will, of good feeling and of self-interest, which forms the great constraining bond of society, appear more conspicuous in order and propriety. There might be things to shock the eye, or to offend the ear —there might be inconveniences, quarrels, impediments; but still the human tide flowed on in cheerfulness and regularity, still one made way for another, still the savage in man's heart was overruled by the silent inert power of the multitude, and the selfish eagerness of the few gave way to the sense of the many.

After that the chaise rolled on through what is termed the more fashionable part of the town, and the very desertion of the streets at that period of the year showed that the travelers had entered a quarter where another spirit reigned. Long rows of houses with closed shutters—squares with scarcely an inhabitant remaining in them (but some old servant left to keep the mansion in order, or some woman put in by an upholsterer, with scanty payment eked out by the advantage of lodging) presented themselves as they went on. But even here were gradations marking the narrow limits of fashion. First came the streets of shops, not nearly so gay or so thronged as in a more propitious time of the year; the equipages thundering no more along the pavement, the footway uncrowded, and many of the master tradesmen themselves absent on some of those expeditions to the sea side, which have made foreigners believe that the English citizen, like the anchovy, will not keep without pickling; then, the abodes of the higher classes, utterly vacant, or if not so, with blinds drawn down, and every sign of absence, in the pitiful vanity of being afraid of doing what others do not do: then the mixed atmosphere, where the little ape the great—affecting their follies without being able to imitate their better qualities, and striving to follow them in magnificence without having the means of equalling them in expense; and lastly the suburbs, where unaspiring mediocrity goes on in humbler walks, content with envying and decrying that which they can never attain.

On all and each of these scenes Morton had something to remark, and though his companion was somewhat silent and morose, he persevered in trying to lead him to reason and to think, believing that exercise of mind is one of the best remedies for mental maladies, as exercise of the limbs is for those of the body. Nor was he altogether unsuccessful; for after having remained sullen for some time, Alfred Latimer began to converse; and if not very reasonably, yet the effect was so far good that it weaned him from the angry feelings which he had been indulging in regard to the disappointment he had experienced. His conversation, it is true, was restrained; for Morton and he had few subjects in common, and he was also unwilling to let the other behold any part of what was passing in the deeper chamber of the heart. He felt as if he were playing a game with a skilful adversary, and must not let him see his cards —that sad, that fatal mistake, which all who are carried away by their passions make, of regarding the most friendly hand that would arrest the horses that are running away with them to destruction, as that of an enemy. And Morton was certainly playing a game, but it was not against Alfred Latimer; it was against his bad passions and his evil habits; but they were those which the young man thought fit to look upon as his friends; and if it be necessary in the wide world to choose our friends well and wisely, it is still more necessary so to choose

our friends from amongst the tenants of our own hearts.

"It is strange," said Morton, as they rolled through the crowded streets of the city, "and yet beautiful as strange, that if one could trace each of the multitude that is passing by us, and examine his fate and history, we should find as a general result that the cheerful and happy face, the light and easy heart, is the property of one who has his passions and his conduct under due control."

"I do not know that at all," answered Latimer, "we find plenty of very good people who are very miserable."

"Not long, and not often," answered Morton; "of course I mean in the aggregate. It is undoubtedly true that sorrows and misfortunes do effect the best, and from that very fact one author of great talent, but no very strong religious feelings—I mean Voltaire—has drawn an inference of a future state where there shall be compensation for such suffering; he calls it unmerited suffering, but I will not use that term, for what man can say that he has not deserved punishment! but yet, when griefs and anxieties do fall upon the good, how much more easily do they bear them, with how much more resignation and calmness than the wicked."

"I do not see why that should be," answered Alfred Latimer; "if I were a good man, and I never pretend to anything of the kind, I should only be the more angry and indignant at being punished for no offence."

"That is not the usual course of human nature, Latimer," replied Morton. "We always bear chastisement that we have deserved more impatiently than that which we have not."

"But I do not see that you have any cause to judge from all these people's faces that the good are a bit happier than the bad," rejoined his companion; "look at that fellow there, coming along with such a dark, eager look, as if he would cut everybody's throat that stopped him. Now, from his dress and his manner, and from the low bow which that shopkeeper is making him, I would bet any money he is some rich merchant or man upon change, with his pockets full of gold, and everything on earth that he can desire."

"Not improbable," replied Morton; "he looks very much the sort of man you have described."

"Well, then, I am sure he does not look happy," rejoined Alfred Latimer.

"Most likely he is quite the reverse," said Morton, with a smile; "but that is quite consistent with what I said. It was, that those who are the happiest—ay, and who generally look the happiest too—are those who have their passions under due control. Now, a man may have everything on earth he can desire, as you say, and yet be rendered miserable by not having his passions under due control. For aught we know, that very merchant or banker, or whatever he is, may have the passion for wealth upon him to such an extent as to be as much or more a vice than the love of women or the dice-box is to others. I spoke of all passions, not of one or two; and one of the great mistakes that the world in general makes is to select a certain class of vices from the many as the objects of reprobation and punishment. We are full of conventionalities, which render us more tolerant to some classes of evil—ay, even to greater or more heinous crimes—than others. Some are even the objects of praise and approbation; and many, very many vices, as society is constituted, are the sure roads to worldly prosperity—but, mark, I do not say to happiness; that is a very different thing. What is a greater vice than the greed of gold? Not the honest desire of independence, not the honorable effort to rise by genius, industry, and perseverance; but I look upon that man who devotes his whole soul to the accumulation of wealth, who stints and wears down the inferior drudges who aid him in its acquisition that he may have the greater share, who refuses to open his hand or his heart to misery and want, or only undraws his purse for the world's applause—even if he commit no fraud, no deceit, to gain his ends—I look upon that man, I say, as more vicious than the libertine who frequents the abode of harlots. Yet to him the world gives its smile, which it denies to the other; but is either of them happy, Latimer? No, believe me, happiness is of a higher nature than to be attained by the mere gratification of desire."

Alfred Latimer relapsed into silence. His companion's reasoning did not convince him; for he had never formed to himself any other idea of happiness than the indulgence of passion and the satisfaction of his wishes, nor could he form any conception of it. But he had found, notwithstanding, that even where he had had the power of attaining that which he believed to be all that he wanted, it had not produced content. It had either been followed by inconvenience and punishment, or by some new thirst for some new gratification; and Morton's words served, at least, to show him that there were other sorts of happiness than any he had dreamed of, and he mused over the suggestion, assailed by thoughts to which he would not give admission.

At length, however, the observations of the solicitor came back to his memory, and he drew from them a long train of reasonings in his own mind, all tending to confirm him in the course he was determined to pursue. "It is never any use," he said suddenly, "for any man who has once taken a way for himself different from what the world call right, to seek to change it; for, as that Mr. What's-his-name remarked, no man can ever get himself into good repute again; and even were that possible, he would himself always have a hankering after the things in which he had indulged himself, which would get the better of him sooner or later."

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing; "if that were the case I am afraid half of our young men in England would only go on from bad to worse all their lives. Few in the unbridled days of youth do not commit many errors, and fall into many follies. Many, very many, even in more mature years fall before some overpowering temptation; but God forbid that either the one or the other should shut us out from all return. It is only against the man who wilfully and deliberately chooses the wrong course as that which he is determined to follow that the door can be said to be closed. For every other there is always an opportunity of retreading his steps—of abandoning evil, and seeking right. He may have to struggle against

habit as well as passion, that is true. It is a natural consequence of his faults, and, if he thinks rightly, a well-deserved punishment; but there is something to be set against that, well calculated to strengthen him to resist the influence of habit. Passion itself is tamed as he goes on in life—reason becomes mature—experience is gained, and is a great teacher. Then, as to what was said by Mr. Quatterly, if you mean him, I think you must have mistaken him. He could only allude to persons who, by some base and dishonorable action, had deprived themselves for ever of the esteem of honest men. Follies, vices, even crimes, have often been repented of, and atoned; but knavery argues a perversion both of heart and understanding, which I never yet heard of being remedied."

Alfred Latimer fell into thought again. He asked himself, perhaps, if he were in that position, and he might feel that if he had not all the symptoms of the disease, he had at least caught the infection. The reflection was not pleasant to him; but yet he indulged it till it became too oppressive to bear, and then casting it off, he roused himself to converse on anything else. He talked of the country, spoke of his eagerness to get back to Mallington, of shooting and hunting—even of the county ball. But Morton clearly saw that it was all effort, and that if amusements in which he did take pleasure had their share in the topics he discussed, the greater part were those for which he had never displayed any taste. Nevertheless, he indulged him in not pressing any graver thoughts upon his attention; not because he feared to be tedious, or to be thought a sermonizer and a bore, but because he was sure it would do no good, and only rouse a spirit of resistance against his influence which would do evil.

Thus passed the time till night began to fall. The sunset was magnificent, and they had full opportunity of observing it, for they were just then crossing a wild, elevated common, where frequent sudden and precipitous falls of the ground, at the distance of only a few yards from the high road, showed them a wide extended scene to westward, with long lines of blue shadow and bright light crossing the country, and the glowing sky of evening beyond. All in that quarter was clear, with the exception of some dark blue films drawn across the burning horizon; but to the south large rounded clouds were rising, heavy, and leaden, as if a thunderstorm were at hand. Yet ere the travelers had crossed the common, and before the sun had completely sunk, the sharp defined edges had softened off; and the clouds rapidly advancing spread half over the sky. About two miles farther on there was a change of horses, and by this time it was dark, with a few drops of rain beginning to fall. The post-boys were long in bringing out the horses, and Alfred Latimer was all impatience to get on; so that when Morton proposed to have lights, saying that the man would hardly be able to see, the young gentleman replied, "Oh, d—n it, no; do not let us wait for that. It is but ten miles to Mallington, and he ought to know his way in the dark."

On they went, then, with the rain falling fast, the sky quite covered with clouds, the sun down, and the moon far below the horizon. It was as dark as pitch; not a ray of light served to guide them, and the very road was hardly to be distinguished from the grass beside it, the drenching torrent having changed its color from a light yellow to a dark brown. The storm pelted against the windows, and rattled upon the top of the chaise, and large drops of water found their way in through the crevices, rendering even the inside no very comfortable abode. Still the postilion rode on in his jacket, either following the invariable custom of his fellows, never to put on a great coat till they are wet through; or fearing to leave his horses, one of which was somewhat unmanageable, in order to get at it. At length, going on at a furious rate for little more than an hour, they reached Mallington common, and there, apparently thinking that as they had nearly arrived at the end of their journey, it might be as well to protect himself from the storm, the driver stopped and got down.

Instantly Alfred Latimer thrust his head out of the window, demanding, "What the devil are you stopping for now? You are just at Mallington. Go on to the inn."

"I'll only just get my great coat, sir," replied the driver, and at the same moment he advanced towards the splinter-bar.

The young gentleman swore a loud oath, and whether the horses heard it and did not approve of it—or took it for an intimation to go on—or, not having any great coats to put on, did not choose to wait for another person's convenience, they started off at once, broke from a trot into a canter, and from a canter to a gallop.

Morton sat calmly back in the carriage, without moving hand or foot; but Alfred Latimer exclaimed aloud, "Confusion and the devil! they will break our necks down the hill, or have us into the river. By —— they are off the road! They will be into the gravel pit! I will jump out."

But before he could execute his purpose or Morton could beseech him to desist, the chaise received a violent jerk, then plunged forward, leaning to one side as the near fore wheel went over a bank, then rolled over and over, with a terrible crash, and at length fell on its side, and lay with something striking hard against the front panels, like the feet of a horse in agony.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Latimer!" said Morton, raising himself partly in the carriage, with great pain, for he was severely bruised. But Alfred Latimer made no reply; and, putting his arm through the broken window, his companion opened the door of the carriage and got out. The darkness was profound, the rain falling in torrents, and it was impossible to see anything but the dark outline of a steep bank, down which the chaise had rolled, the vehicle itself nearly broken to pieces, and the two horses, one lying perfectly still, the other still kicking in the traces, but more and more faintly every moment. A sound, however, was heard above, as of some one running, and Morton raised his voice and shouted aloud. At first he was not heard, for the man ran on, but he called again, and then the post-boy an-

swered from the bank above, exclaiming "Good heaven! where are you, sir!"

"Here at the bottom of the bank," answered Morton; "Mr. Latimer is much hurt. Run on as fast as possible to Mallington House, bring down several of the men, and a large chair or board, and lights. Lose not a moment; but bid them not alarm Mrs. Charlton till we ascertain the truth. Be quick! be quick!"

The man ran off again, knowing that he could render no assistance, even to his horses—the especial objects of his care—without the means of seeing where they were; and Morton remained by the side of the vehicle, judging that it would be inexpedient to make any effort to move his companion without assistance. He himself felt that though, as I have said, severely bruised, especially about the head and right shoulder, he was not seriously injured, and tying a handkerchief round his hand, which had been cut by the glass, he leaned over the chaise, and tried to discover how Latimer was lying. A moment after he heard a step, and then a voice exclaiming "Did not some one halloo out just now? Who's there?"

"We have been overturned into the pit," answered Morton. "Is there any place nearer than Mallington where we can get help, my friend? for Mr. Latimer here is much hurt, if not dead."

"The devil he is!" cried the man, who had now come near, and seemed, as far as the darkness would allow Morton to judge, to be a stout-built short man; "that's a bad job indeed. But we'll get help very soon from widow Brown's cottage; 'tis but a stone's throw. I'll be back directly."

"Bring a light," said Morton, "if you can get a lantern."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the man, and away he ran, seeming to know every step of the ground thoroughly. In five minutes, or not much more, the gentleman who remained by the chaise saw a dim spark like a will-o'-the-wisp, moving at a little distance, and then heard voices; and then, coming on through the rain, with their figures becoming more distinctly visible by the light of a horn lantern which one of them carried, he perceived two men and a woman. They did not, indeed, seem of a very prepossessing appearance, by the yellow glare that fell upon their countenances when they approached; but no aid was to be refused at such a moment; and he found that, with good forethought, one of the men had brought a large rug, such as are used in that part of the country for the bed coverings of the poorer classes, in which to move the gentleman who had been most injured.

The first thing to be done, however, was to ascertain his exact condition, and, taking the lantern from the hand of the man who carried it, Morton held it into the chaise, and by its light discovered Alfred Latimer lying just where he had fallen, with a good deal of blood about his face. His hand was still round one of the holders in the inside of the vehicle, and his companion could perceive that the fingers seemed every now and then to tighten and then relax their grasp.

While he was making these observations, *one of the men* said in a low voice to the other "That horse that's under is as dead as a stone, and this has broke his fore leg right through. It would be better to cut his throat at once."

"Here, d—n the horses! lend a hand to make this rug into a sort of hammock, to carry Mr. Latimer up to the cottage," said the other man. "Is he living or dead, sir?" he continued, addressing Morton; "let us have a look. I'll soon tell you. I've seen many a dead man in my day."

"He is living," answered Morton, "and I trust only stunned. Cut that strap which keeps the door from going further back, and then, if one goes to the top and another kneels on the side, we can lift him out without shaking him much."

The men obeyed him readily, while the woman—a tall, gaunt, hard-featured dame of sixty-five—held the lantern; and Morton, bending down into the chaise, got one arm under his companion's shoulders, lifting him gradually, while the man who was lying flat on the side of the vehicle, supported part of the weight, and the other at the top guarded his head with his hands, to prevent it striking against the wood work. He was thus speedily drawn out of the broken chaise and seated by the side, with Morton supporting his head upon his arm. He groaned twice or thrice while this was taking place, and it was now evident to all that he still breathed without much oppression.

"Now, sir, let us carry him to the cottage, and lay him flat down on a bed," said the short sailor-like man, who formed one of the party; "that's the best thing for him till the doctor can be fetched."

"It would be better to carry him home at once," replied Morton; "Mallington House cannot be far, if I judge rightly where we are."

"It's more nor a mile, and that a good un," said the woman.

"Besides, the cottage is just in the way," rejoined the man; "he can be moved after the doctor comes, if he thinks it safe. I don't think he's so much hurt, after all."

"If the house be as far as that, the cottage will be best," replied Morton; "but I thought this pit was close to Mallington!"

"You're thinking of what we call the first pit," replied the other man; "this is the third—Mother Brown's pit some people call it, don't they, mother?"

Alfred Latimer was then placed in the rug, which by this time had been gathered together with twine at the two ends, and the woman going before with the lantern, the two men carried him forward along a little path—which was scarcely traceable along the bottom of the gravel pit—to the entrance by which carts were commonly brought in. The party then issued out upon the common, but they had not reached the higher ground when two or three lights were seen coming a little to the right, and a horse's feet were heard upon the road.

"Here are the people from Mallington House," said Morton.

"Ay, and that's the doctor's horse," rejoined the woman; "I'd know his trot among a thousand—I'll give him a call;" and raising her voice to an unearthly shriek, she shouted, "Hie! Doctor, doctor! Dr. Nethersole!"

The horse's feet were checked in an instant,

aid as they paused they soon saw the worthy surgeon, who was a little in advance of the party from the house, leading his horse carefully across towards the spot where he perceived their light.

"Goodness, gracious, sir! this is a sad affair," said Mr. Nethersole, as soon as he saw Morton, with his face somewhat cut. "You seem to be much hurt yourself. But how is Mr. Latimer? Is he dead?" he continued, gazing anxiously at the burden carried by the two men.

"No," answered Morton; "he is not dead. That, at least, is certain, but he is quite insensible; though whether the injuries he has received be really serious or not I have no means of judging. These good people say there is a cottage near, where he can be taken. Will it be better to go thither or to proceed to Mallington House?"

"Oh! to the cottage—to the cottage, on every account," said Mr. Nethersole. "In the first place, in these cases no time is to be lost; and in the next place Mrs. Charlton, who is luckily out at dinner with the Markhams, would be dreadfully shocked if she arrived just as her son was being brought in in such a state."

According to Mr. Nethersole's desire, the men proceeded at once to the cottage, which lay in a little nook of the common, not a hundred yards further on; and the young gentleman having been laid on a bed in the back room of the lower story, the surgeon proceeded to examine him, while the room became gradually crowded with servants and other people from Mallington. Morton stood near while the surgeon pursued his investigation, and gave him every aid in his power while he felt the head, traced the position and line of the limbs, and ascertained that no fracture had taken place; but he could not, even while thus occupied, avoid hearing the remarks of several of the inhabitants of Mallington who had come up with the servants of the house, in regard to the general character of Mother Brown, as she was called, her son, and their associates; but, although this was quite as unprepossessing as the personal appearance of the widow herself, yet it was of course a secondary consideration to Latimer's safety.

Mr. Nethersole, after due perquisitions and a little touch of medical mystery, declared that no bones were broken, but that, though the skull was not fractured, yet he feared concussion of the brain had taken place, for which bleeding would be immediately necessary, and, after that, perfect quiet. It was quite out of the question, therefore, he said, to remove the young gentleman to Mallington, as, if done in the first instance, venesection might come too late, and if attempted afterwards, fever might be superinduced. After this oration—for when in the actual exercise of his functions, Mr. Nethersole, who was at other times somewhat taciturn in the presence of those whom he considered his superiors, became oratorical—he ordered the young gentleman to be undressed, and placed in the bed where he lay. He then bled him somewhat largely, and the effect was certainly such as he could have desired, for, as the blood flowed, Alfred Latimer drew two or three deep sighs, opened his eyes, and looked about him.

Mr. Nethersole placed his finger on his lip saying, "Not a word, my dear sir. Lie perfectly still; take no notice of anything; open not your mouth, or I will not answer for the consequences. Let the room be cleared, and open that window. Now one of the servants must stay with the young gentleman till I can return. I will sit up with him myself to watch the symptoms as they appear; but he must not be left while I am necessarily absent for an hour or an hour and a half. Here, Wilkinson, you are the very man. Sit by Mr. Latimer till I return; do not let him speak or move till I come back: and you, Widow Brown, keep the house quite quiet. No gossiping, no talking, no drinking and squabbling, remember. I know you all, you know; and I will have my orders obeyed."

Widow or Mother Brown promised compliance in a very humble tone; for Mr. Nethersole, or "the doctor," as he was called, was a very important personage with her class, being in reality a very humane man to the poor, and acting on many occasions as medical attendant, as almoner, and as father confessor, all in one, for a very small remuneration. After having given these directions, and seen the room disencumbered of the crowd, who all departed except Morton—some into the neighboring chamber, some on their way home—the surgeon again sat down by the sick man's side, felt his pulse, nodded with a well-satisfied look, and then rose, saying in an oracular tone, "The circulation greatly relieved. I will be back soon, my dear sir, and bring something to compose you. Now, Mr. Morton, if you like, we had better walk back to Mallington; I think you will need a little attention yourself, and the fewer persons round Mr. Latimer the better."

"Very well," replied Mr. Morton; and, bending down, he added "Good by, for the present, Latimer; I will see you early to-morrow."

"Why, what the devil is all this about, Morton?" asked Alfred Latimer; "I have broken my head somehow."

But Mr. Nethersole instantly interfered, holding up his finger with a grave look, and saying, "Not a word, not a word, as you value your life. Come, Mr. Morton, come; our presence but excites him," and, walking out with the young gentleman, he gave some further directions to the servant Wilkinson, and they issued forth upon the common.

Morton's first question was in regard to Mr. Nethersole's real opinion of Alfred Latimer's situation; but who ever got a direct answer from a medical man? However, he made out sufficient from the cloud of pros and cons in which the surgeon enveloped his opinion, that he did not see any very dangerous symptoms at that time, but that the young gentleman having decidedly received a slight concussion of the brain, might at any moment during the next three or four days become suddenly worse, and that he could by no means say that the result might not be fatal, though he at present saw no reason to anticipate such a catastrophe. Mr. Nethersole would then have fain ascertained exactly how the accident had occurred, remembering duly that he had an account to render to all the old ladies of Mallington. But Morton, in the first place, thought fit to satisfy himself

as to what was the state of affairs at Mallington House, inquiring whether Mr. Nethersole could tell at what hour Mrs Charlton would return, and whether there was any chance of the news being carried to her where she was dining?

"No," answered the surgeon, promptly, "the man you sent acted with great discretion, I find; for on hearing that Mrs. Charlton was out—what a sweet creature she is! don't you think so, Mr Morton!—he made two men servants come down with him to me, without going in at all, lest Miss Charlton should by some means hear of the event and be frightened out of her life."

"Then, Miss Charlton did not go with Mrs. Charlton!" asked Morton.

"No, my dear sir; she declined," answered the surgeon. "You know the young gentleman there has been rather particular in his attentions, and people do say that he is not very agreeable to the young lady—ha, ha, ha! you understand."

"Perfectly," replied Morton, drily; "but I think, Mr. Nethersole, it might be as well if I were to go in as we pass Mallington House, and give Miss Charlton the first news of Mr. Latimer's situation myself. She can afterwards break it to his mother in a more gentle manner than any man could do."

The surgeon agreed fully that such a plan was a very proper one, as he would, indeed, have pronounced any to be that Mr. Morton suggested; but perhaps, in this instance, he had some faint notion that the young gentleman might wish to have five minutes of Miss Charlton's company alone, and that she might not object to grant it; for he had remarked various looks and words at Dr. Western's, on the day after Louisa's rescue from the stream, which let him more into the secret of her heart than she either wished or imagined. Whatever were Morton's private thoughts, however—and, like the private thoughts and motives of all other men, they were, doubtless, of a very mingled character—they walked straight up to the gates of Mallington House; and there, while Mr. Nethersole was urging his young companion to come down to him as soon as his conference with Miss Charlton was over, and have his own injuries examined, all their plans were disarranged by the rush up of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, and by her instant recognition of the two gentlemen as the butler came forth with a light to open the gates in answer to their summons.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Ah, Mr. Morton, is that you?" cried Mrs. Charlton, letting down the carriage window; "come in—pray come in."

The carriage dashed on up to the house; and though the distance from the gate to the door was not more than twenty or thirty yards on that side of the mansion, the lady had descended from her vehicle, tripped into the house, and walked somewhat more slowly up stairs before Morton and Mr. Nethersole arrived. The latter gentleman, understanding that, in the changed circumstances of the case, he would not be one too many; and thinking that if Mrs. Charlton were by any chance to faint at the tidings of her son's situation, his assistance might be necessary; and, like the barber of Bagdad, having his lancet ready, and his bandages in his pocket, he judged that he might as well walk in with the young gentleman, and take his share of things to come.

Morton advanced first, however, with a grave air, and asked the butler if he had said anything to his mistress regarding the accident.

"No, sir," replied the man; "she asked why I came out to open the gates; and I only replied, because Wilkinson was out. I thought you could tell her better than I could, sir."

It was a task, however, that Morton could gladly have dispensed with, for he was neither fond of inflicting nor of witnessing pain; but, nevertheless, fortifying his mind for the undertaking, he proceeded slowly up the stairs, followed closely by Mr. Nethersole, and entered the drawing-room, the door of which Mrs. Charlton had left open behind her. That lady was standing in a graceful attitude, with her hand leaning on a table, and the tips of her still beautiful fingers a little bent back, while a sweet and courteous smile illumined her countenance, and welcomed Mr. Morton before he appeared. Louisa, who had exchanged a few words with her step-mother, was seated on a sofa, with a table and book before her, and her lovely face, too, was raised towards the door, with a look of well-pleased expectation—ay, and something more than expectation; for there was a light in her deep eyes that let one see beyond them to her heart far more than she intended; the light of Love, beaming from two as sweet lamps as ever he kindled. The moment, however, that Morton appeared, with the blood still upon his face, and his hand tied up, her cheek turned deadly pale. She spoke not a word—indeed, she could not speak, but she rose at once, and then, feeling her knees tremble, caught the arm of the sofa for support. She knew how she loved him then, if she had never fully known it before.

Mrs. Charlton, on her part, uttered a pretty little scream, very musical in its tone, and exclaimed, "Good heaven! Mr. Morton, what has happened! You have met with some accident! You are hurt!"

"Very little, my dear madam," replied the young gentleman; "indeed, scarcely at all. My face has been scratched with some broken glass, and my hand cut; but we have every reason to be most thankful that the accident was not worse, for it might well have proved fatal to myself and my companion, instead of inflicting a few wounds and bruises, which will be well in a few days."

He managed his communication skillfully, for he at once communicated that he had a companion, and that he also had been injured, without at first telling Mrs. Charlton that that companion was her son, or informing her of the extent to which he had been hurt. The sound of his voice, and the firm tone in which he spoke, comforted Louisa a good deal; but still she felt very faint, and she sat down again, not at all sure how long she could stand.

Now, Mrs. Charlton was alarmed too, for she was very quick in the combination of her ideas;

and there were three distinct facts before her, from which, after putting them together, she drew a deduction very near the truth. There was Mr. Morton hurt, and suffering from an accident; he acknowledged having a companion in misadventure; and that companion was not now with him. From all these certainties she deduced that his companion had been her son; and that he was more hurt than Mr. Morton. If that gentleman had nothing of very great importance to communicate, he would not have thus presented himself at Mallington House, she thought, till he had washed his face and hands. If her son had been able, he would have come with him. Her son was unable, and that was the important fact Morton came to communicate. All this passed through her mind in a moment, and she felt very much alarmed, as I have said; but Mrs. Charlton was not a woman to faint. It was a thing that she never did; and this was certainly not an occasion on which she would have commenced the practice. She was very fond of her son, it is true, and, as the reader has seen, she had spoiled and indulged him very greatly in youth. But it was not for his sake she had done so; it was for her own. She loved him as her right hand, or her right eye, because he was a part of herself; and, perhaps, she would sooner have lost her right hand, or her right eye, than him, if she could have done so without any pain or danger. Limb against son she would not have hesitated, I think; but if suffering—personal suffering, or risk—were thrown into the scale of mutilation, I'm afraid Alfred Latimer would have had but a poor chance.

She did not faint, therefore, or feel any inclination to do so; but yet she was anxious and frightened, and her countenance showed it.

"Speak, my dear sir! speak, Mr. Morton," she said; "you have more to tell; Alfred was with you, is it not so? Alfred is hurt? very much hurt? Tell me the truth, my dear friend. I can bear it."

The last were nearly the same words which she had used when the servant ran in to inform her that her first husband had destroyed himself; and she did bear it with wonderful philosophy.

Morton had an instinctive perception that in this instance he might speak without much farther circumlocution as far as Mrs. Charlton was concerned; but he did not forget that Louisa was in the room, and he was sure that, though she neither loved nor esteemed Alfred Latimer, she would feel even more shocked and pained by the intelligence that was to be told than his mother. He answered, then, in a manner to remove anxiety as far as possible without deviating from truth.

"He is much better, my dear Mrs. Charlton," he said; "he was apparently a good deal hurt at first, but he recovered wonderfully as soon as our skillful friend here, Mr. Nethersole, bled him. There are no bones broken, happily, though he was for a time stunned by the fall.

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Charlton; and Louisa echoed her words with truer devotion.

The surgeon advanced to play his part; for, during the short dialogue which had taken place, Morton had purposely put himself forward, fearing that Mr. Nethersole might so overload his account with medical terms that the two ladies might be left in ignorance of whether Alfred Latimer were dead or alive. That worthy gentleman now proceeded to justify his caution by explaining to Mrs. Charlton, in the darkest possible manner, the situation of her son, and what he had at first apprehended, as well as what was now to be guarded against. For aught that the mother could gather from this communication Alfred might have been a marmalade; but Morton stepped in to her help, saying, "I see you do not exactly understand Mr. Nethersole. It is merely that Latimer was at first stunned and speechless, but has now quite recovered both his speech and his senses; and though our good friend thinks it would be imprudent to remove him from the cottage to which he was at first taken, in order to give him time to recover completely, yet there is no great chance of any danger resulting from the accident. Is it not so, Mr. Nethersole?"

"Precisely, sir," replied the surgeon; and Mrs. Charlton, sinking into a chair, gazed in Morton's face, thinking what she ought to do next.

"I should very much like to go to him," she said, after a moment's pause; "but the carriage has gone away, I fear, and—"

"It rains dreadfully," said Mr. Nethersole, finishing Mrs. Charlton's sentence nearly as she would have finished it herself. "Do not think of it, my dear madam. I will stay with him all night. I propose to return immediately."

"I do not see any necessity for your going," added Morton; "for he is so much better that I doubt not a few hours will remove all chance of danger, and Mr. Nethersole particularly recommends quiet. One of your servants—Wilkinson, I think, is his name—is with your son. Mr. Nethersole will be in attendance; and if he should be worse you can be sent for."

"Thank you, Mr. Morton, thank you," said Mrs. Charlton; "you are very kind to me in every respect—kinder than any one of my own relations, I am sure. Here, you have undertaken this journey, and been in peril of your life, all on my account; and how I can ever be grateful enough I cannot tell. But pray let me hear how this accident has happened, and what it was; for I know nothing but that you have both been hurt."

"I beg pardon for interfering," said Mr. Nethersole, with a smile, "but I must really here exert my authority as a disciple of Galen. Mr. Morton is hurt, Mrs. Charlton. He does not yet know how much—we none of us know how much—for he has given himself up entirely to Mr. Latimer, and has taken no care of himself whatever."

Louisa, who, as the reader has remarked, had not spoken a word, raised her eyes to Morton's face with a look of tenderness and admiration, mingled with fear, as if imploring him, for her sake, to attend to his own safety; but Mr. Nethersole went on, "He is wet through and through, too, so that it is high time that he should go home, change his dress, and then allow me to inquire into the injuries he has received. Wounds and bruises, apparently slight at first, are often the most dangerous if not attended to. Before he gives any account of what has taken place, then, I say authoritatively, let him go home."

"Home!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in a fit of enthusiasm; "can Mr. Morton have any home in Mallington but this house, after all that he has done for its inmates. I will take no refusal, Mr. Morton; ring the bell, Louisa, my love—the yellow room will be ready in a moment."

Louisa rang without an instant's delay, and as Morton was excusing himself on account of having no change of dress there, saying that his portmanteau had been left with the chaise on the common, she joined her all-persuading voice, exclaiming, "Oh! do, Mr. Morton. Clothes can be soon got from the inn."

"Well, I must obey," answered Morton, with a smile; and as the butler entered, Mrs. Charlton exclaimed, "Tell Windsor to have the yellow room got ready for Mr. Morton directly."

"And send down to the inn for what Mr. Morton wants," added Louisa, for the first time giving any orders in her own house.

"I think your portmanteau is here, sir," said the butler. "I told the gardener to bring everything out of the chaise; for Widow Brown and her people are not to be trusted where they can pilfer."

"You are a wise and prudent man," said Mr. Nethersole; "they are, indeed, not the most honest set in the world; but have Mr. Morton's things taken up, and while the room is getting ready I can examine how far he is hurt, in the dressing room. I know it—I will show you the way."

"I am really not hurt at all," replied Morton, addressing Louisa, more than the last speaker, however. "I am an old soldier, accustomed to knocks and bruises, and not made of very fragile materials originally. But if it must be so, I submit; and if I find you up when I return, my dear madam, I will tell you how all this unfortunate affair took place."

"Up!" cried Mrs. Charlton; "why, it is only a quarter to ten yet. The truth is, those Markhams are such bores, and one hears so little of anything but dogs and horses, partridges, pheasants, and foxes, that I always order the carriage a quarter before nine, and in such a night as this one could not keep the servants out."

While Morton and Mr. Nethersole were gone Mrs. Charlton questioned the butler as to what he knew of the accident, and obtained the general facts, as far as the man knew them. The chaise had been overturned into the gravel-pit, he said, both the horses killed, and the carriage broken all to pieces; but how the post-boy had escaped he could not tell; he supposed he must have jumped off. He added many expressions of wonder that both the gentlemen had not been killed, and added that the bank was full fifty feet high. This, indeed, was an exaggeration, but it served, with the rest of the story, to make poor Louisa's heart feel cold, and her cheek to turn deadly pale. Mrs. Charlton went on questioning him, however, for nearly a quarter of an hour, not at all minding, perhaps not comprehending, the mental torture which her stepdaughter was enduring; and at the end of that time Morton returned with the blood washed from his face, his dress arranged with its usual neatness, and his fine hair waving over his forehead, brought a little more forward than ordinary, to hide a wound upon his temple, which Mr. Nethersole had just covered with black plaster.

That gentleman accompanied his new patient; but, after a few words of assurance to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa that Mr. Morton was not severely hurt, and giving a warning to him that he had better keep himself as quiet as possible for the next two days, for fear of producing feverish symptoms, he retired to visit his own house for a few minutes, and then once more cross the common in the midst of the drenching rain, to sit up through the night with Alfred Latimer. Truly the life of a country apothecary is a hard one. Repose he can never count upon for a moment; fatigue he must endure every hour; all the vicissitudes of the seasons, all the inclemency of the storm he must bear, unmurmuring, for the reward of a few shillings, eked out by the administration of much physic. The scenes, too, he must go through—the pangs he must witness, the agony, the despair, the death, the grief that he must behold, if not share! all these are without reward, and yet there is no one who is so much grudged by ungrateful human nature the pitiful recompense of his mere toil. Verily, man, thou art a very unlovable sort of beast.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole, however, to pursue his way, we must sit down with Mrs. Charlton, Mr. Morton, and Louisa in the comfortable drawing-room at Mallington, not exactly to listen to all their conversation; for the reader can very well divine how Morton explained what had occurred without our entering into the details of what he said. He was not, indeed, one of those men who love to be the hero of their own story, and to excite interest for themselves by dwelling upon each small particular of any event that has occurred to them. Nor, had he been one of those interesting gentlemen, would he on the present occasion have lingered with painful minuteness over every point of horror and dismay; for he well knew that poor Louisa had already suffered more on his account than he ever wished to inflict upon her; but he told the tale briefly, stated how the man had imprudently got down and left his horses—how they had run away; and how in a few seconds the chaise and all that it contained were dragged over into the pit.

Mrs. Charlton was greatly touched at his account of her son's condition, now that she found she should not have to go out over the common to nurse him; and she was in high good humor with Mr. Morton, expressing her gratitude again and again, for all he had done, though that gentleman, of course, did not touch upon the transactions in London till he could find an opportunity of speaking with the lady alone.

But Mrs. Charlton gave proof of her gratitude in the way which Morton could have most desired; for, after talking with him for half an hour, she rose suddenly, as if recollecting that he had had no refreshment, and, blaming herself for her negligence, declared she would go and order some supper to be instantly prepared. Now, she could quite as well have ordered it where she sat; and, therefore, it is but fair to suppose that she considered the feelings of the two lovers, which she knew them right well to be; and, giving a hint that she had two or three little things to do, she retired, bidding Louisa

let her know in her own room when supper was announced.

A faint smile came across Louisa's lip at conduct which she did not very well understand, yet which was certainly in no degree unpleasant to her; but she had soon to turn her thoughts to other and sweeter things; for Morton immediately came over, sat down on the sofa beside her, and taking her hand in his, pressed his lips upon it.

"You have been grieved and agitated, dear Louisa," he said, "but I trust that good rather than evil may result to Latimer from this accident; and I, you see, am unhurt."

"I can scarcely think it possible, even yet, Edmond," she replied, leaving him the fair small hand in his. "When I think of that awful fall, it makes my heart still beat;" and she closed her eyes for a moment as if to shut out the image which fancy presented. Morton gazed at her as she sat with the long black lashes resting on the soft pale cheek; for she had not yet recovered her color; but when she opened her eyes again, and they met that warm yet tender gaze, the rose came brightly back.

"Nay, nay, Morton," she said. "Do not look at me so—there, you are smiling at my fears; but you cannot tell what a woman's feelings are in such cases. I dare say if we were accustomed to go through dangers as you are, we should grow accustomed to them, and treat them lightly, too; but we are always left at home, with nothing to do but to ponder over the perils of those we love;" and she beat down her head for a moment, while a tear, the first she had shed, sparkled upon her eyelids. It did not roll far down her cheek, for her lover's lips brushed it away; and he soothed her tenderly with assurance that he never did, and never would expose himself to unnecessary danger.

"And yet," she answered, "I shall never see you leave me without, I dare say, conjuring up all sorts of perils; but, tell me, Edmond, what is the real state of poor Alfred; and have you contrived to disentangle him from those difficulties into which he had plunged himself."

"I have, my beloved," replied Morton, though, to say truth, he would have much preferred talking of love and all the feelings of Louisa's own dear heart. "He is now freed from all embarrassments, if he will keep himself so. I fear that will never be the case, however; for he has not only been brought up in habits of extravagance in which he has no right to indulge, but he has got a taste for vice, which must keep him always poor; but I should propose to you one thing, dear girl, which I know will be agreeable to you. The income he has now left, according to the arrangement that has been made, is so much diminished that with his habits it will never be sufficient. I can supply him for the present as far as he needs it; but it is always a humiliating thing to be under obligations to one who is nearly a stranger; and, I think, when Louisa will consent to be my wife, it may be as well for her as her own act, not only to make some addition to Mrs. Charlton's income, but also to settle such a sum upon him as will put him beyond all ordinary temptation to incur fresh debts. You may well do it in your quality of sister; and perhaps it might rouse any better feelings within him to merit your kindness."

"You are always generous and thoughtful, Edmond," replied Louisa Charlton; "and it shall be just as you please. I can only say that you go before my wishes, though, perhaps, I might not have ventured to ask you to make such a sacrifice."

"I wish to make none, dear girl," replied Morton; "this should be done before you are my wife, that it may be all your own act. Otherwise it will lose part of its effect upon him. It will be enough for me to cancel the bond he has given for the money I have furnished, and that shall be done, Louisa, on our wedding-day. I need not tell Louisa Charlton that whatever she may choose to do with any part of her fortune before our marriage, it will be well pleasing to the man she has chosen."

"I wish my poor father could have heard you, Edmond; it would have removed many of his anxieties on my account;" was Louisa's reply, and she leaned her head upon her lover's shoulder, while the tears again filled her eyes.

"Perhaps he does hear even now, dear one," said Morton; "who can tell what may be the means which the spirits of the gone have of knowing what is passing round those they loved! But—not to dwell upon so solemn a subject just now—of one thing I have always been satisfied: that wealth ought ever to be looked upon, not as a benefit conferred upon ourselves for our own gratification, but a precious trust confided to us for its due administration to others. In whatever hands it accumulates, to whomsoever it descends, it is but as a stream collected into a great reservoir to fertilize and refresh all that is around it. If, by what I propose, you can reclaim this young man—if you can even prevent him from falling into further degradation, the employment of your fortune will be noble and good; and even should the experiment altogether fail, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your part. Then, as to Mrs. Charlton, the income she possesses is not sufficient, and of course will be less when you are no longer living with her."

"It is very strange," said Louisa thoughtfully—"I mean my father's will. There are some parts of it I do not at all understand. He seemed to love her very much, and yet he leaves her with an insufficient income. I do not think he altogether relied upon her judgment, or her—her—her affection for me; and yet he"—

She paused, and Morton added, "He leaves you dependent in some degree upon her pleasure, or her caprice, you would say, my Louisa. We shall see how she attempts to exercise the authority she has received. Of one thing, however, I am sure, that the law would read that part of the will somewhat differently from what she supposes—perhaps, set it aside altogether. At all events, dear Louisa, I have your promise—rich or poor, you are mine. That is beyond the power of any one to change. Is it not so, my beloved?"

"Oh, Edmond!" said Louisa, "you know that I could only wish to possess wealth to place it in the hands of one who would use it as you would. But could you really—nay, I will not ask the question, Edmond—I know you would

take her you love, rich or poor; but what ought she to do? ought she to consent to such a thing?"

"I will give her no choice," answered Morton, pressing her to his heart. "She has given her promise—she has made no condition; and under no circumstances would she seek to retract it, I am sure. Indeed," he added, smiling, "I would not consent, if she did. She is fast bound, and cannot escape."

"I do not wish it, Edmond, I do not wish it," repeated Louisa, earnestly. "I should hardly have fortitude to cast away such happiness, even for your sake."

As she spoke the butler announced that supper was ready, and, though Morton felt the truth of the old French proverb "*qui fait l'amour soupe*," he was forced to sit down to the less pleasant meal, and make the best of a dull hour.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

After Morton and Mr. Nethersole had left Mother Brown's cottage, Alfred Latimer lay for several minutes gazing up towards the ceiling of the back room in which he had been placed—if ceiling, indeed, it could be called, where a good deal more lath was apparent than plaster, and that portion of the latter which remained was principally supported by long filaments of horsehair, which not unfrequently suffered a large mass of mortar to hang waving about in the wind over the heads of those who went to and fro beneath. A small deal table, notched at the edges like a school-boy's desk, and with "Tom Brown" cut in large capitals in two or three places, stood in the middle of the chamber, at no great distance from the bed; and on it, in a battered tin candlestick, was a solitary tallow candle with the top of the wick spreading out into sooty fungi, and the grease weltering down the sides. A tattered old chintz curtain half concealed the window; but where the sash appeared it showed many a piece of glass wanting, in one spot pasted up with brown paper, while in others the gaping aperture was stuffed up with dirty rags. To these interesting objects the young gentleman turned his eyes, after he had studied the canopy over his head for a considerable time, and then he exclaimed "D—n it! This is very strange. Why, I feel all knocked about; and where the devil I am, I can't tell. Surely that is Wilkinson. Why, what is all this? Where am I? How came I here?"

It was very evident that, as not uncommonly happens in such cases, the blow he had received on the head had obliterated all memory of the events immediately preceding. It is generally judged expedient to touch upon the subject of his state as little as possible with a patient so circumstanced; but Wilkinson, though a shrewd sensible man, had not studied the matter very deeply, and he consequently set to work, and, with a view of amusing his young master, told him all that had happened. The tale seemed to awaken Alfred Latimer's remembrance; and when he heard that he was in Mother Brown's cottage he instantly showed that his recollection was quite unimpaired, by saying in a low voice "Where are my clothes, Wilkinson? Put them here on the bed, and do not let the people get at them, for there is a good sum of money in one of the pockets. Don't lose sight of them for a minute, Wilkinson; for it would be a devil of an affair if they were to take that."

"Don't you think it would be better to send it to mistress to keep for you, sir?" asked the servant; "you see I might be called away for a minute or two."

"No, curse it! she would keep it with a vengeance," answered her dutiful and respectful son. "I should get it back as soon from them as I should from her."

"Then, why not give it to Mr. Nethersole, to take care of for you till you are well," replied the man; "it would be quite safe with him."

"Well, perhaps I may," rejoined Latimer; "that's no bad thought—but the doctor's gone, isn't he?"

Wilkinson made him understand that Mr. Nethersole would soon be back; and then remembering the caution which had been given, he warned Mr. Latimer that he ought not to speak, but to remain quiet. Alfred Latimer, however, was not a man to restrain himself in anything; and therefore he continued to ask questions and to swear at his companion, if he answered briefly, or remonstrated, till the servant's patience becoming near its end, he replied "Indeed, Mr. Latimer, I must obey the doctor's orders, and as you will not be quiet and keep silent, I will go into the other room, but I will take care no one comes in without me."

"Go to the devil, if you like," replied Alfred Latimer; "I don't want you; but snuff the candle first."

The man did as he was directed, and then left the room. The young gentleman then attempted to sit up, and drew his clothes from the foot of the bed, that he might see if his money were all safe; but the effort was too painful to be persisted in, and he lay down again with a moan. About half an hour after this Mr. Nethersole returned, and having heard from the servant in the outer room that Mr. Latimer was very unmanageable, he replied "Oh!, I will keep him quiet. I shall stay here till morning; so you can either remain or go home for an hour or two, as you like; only be back by five o'clock; for I have a case I must see."

"Well, then, sir, I would rather go home for a bit," answered Wilkinson, "I was up early this morning, and I should like a few hours' sleep."

"I wonder where my lad's to sleep," said Widow Brown, in a sullen tone. "That's his bed, in where the younker is lying; and half the things spoiled with blood."

"Oh, never you mind, Mother Brown," answered Mr. Nethersole, who knew his party well, "you'll be paid more than you spend; and as to Tom's sleeping, it is not the first time he has sat up o'nights, I fancy, and won't be the last. You've slept in worse places than this chair, Tom, hav'nt you? and the shooting season being begun, you must be in practice, or I mistake! You forget who you are talking to, Goody."

"Well, doctor," said Mother Brown with a grin, "if he have got a partridge or a pheasant now and then, you've had your share on 'em; and better stuff nor ever come out o' your shop, too."

"I know I have had a little present now and then, Mother Brown," replied Mr. Nethersole; "and I never ask where anything comes from but humbug, and that I always send back again. So don't whine to me about where Tom is to sleep. He'll do well enough, and you'll be paid. That's all you want. It's raining too hard for guns to go off, or he would'nt be here. I understand it all; but it's no business of mine; and I always mind my own business, as you well know. That's the way to be friends with every one; and you can't say I ever refused to see you when you were sick, or give you medicine either. Pay when you can, when you can't let it alone; but never attempt to palaver me, for that is what I cannot bear."

"Well, you are a good cretur," answered the beldame; "only you see that we are paid, for that Mrs. Charlton, rich as she is, is a bit of a screw, and does not pay every one as she ought."

"Oh, you'll be paid, you'll be paid!" replied the surgeon, walking into the other room; and then shutting the door, he held up his finger again to Mr. Latimer not to speak, sat down by his bed-side and felt his pulse. "A little fever," he said, as if speaking to himself. "I am afraid there has been some excitement here. In your case, Mr. Latimer, Harpocrates is as good as Hippocrates, and better; but we must make them go hand in hand—silence, my dear sir! silence! Not a single word, if you please. I am going to sit by your bed-side all night; and if you want anything, just hold up your finger. I shall divine what you want, and give it you."

"You'll be devilish clever, then," said Alfred Latimer aloud, "for I want something now"—

"Not a word! not a word!" said Mr. Nethersole, stopping both his ears; "I will not listen to a word," and approaching the table, he pulled a phial out of his pocket, poured about a third of it out into a little cup which he had brought with him, and presented it to the patient, saying, "drink that. Then turn round on your right side and try to get to sleep; that will compose you wonderfully."

"Why, I'm quite composed already," answered the other.

"You won't be soon, if you go on so," answered Mr. Nethersole, dryly, "for, in two hours you'll be in a burning fever if you talk at all; in two days you will be lying composed enough; and in less than two weeks you will go out of that door with your feet foremost."

This speech had the desired effect, though, undoubtedly, it was rather strong in language. Alfred Latimer did not at all like the prospect so unceremoniously presented to him, and drinking off the draught, he lay down as he was bid and kept silence, while Mr. Nethersole seated himself in the chair by his side, and taking a medical book out of his pocket began to read. Nine times did Mr. Nethersole snuff the candle; and then, as there was no use of snuffing it any longer, he went into the next room and got another. Mother Brown had gone to bed; her son was snoring in a chair; and when he returned the worthy surgeon found that Alfred Latimer was breathing hard too. The example he judged a good one, and as he could find nothing on which to prop his head softer than his own arms, he folded them on the table, bent down his forehead upon them, and was soon in that strange mysterious state, wherein the distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul is more plain than in any of the other phenomena of our marvelous existence.

He had gone on for some hours, and Alfred Latimer was still in a sound and comfortable sleep when the worthy surgeon was suddenly awakened by the opening of the door. He looked up, and saw the widow's son beckoning to him.

"Here's your boy, doctor, wants you quick," said the man in a low tone.

"The deuce he does," murmured the surgeon; "that Mrs. Tilson come before her time—she always does—I never saw anything like it."

It was, indeed, as he supposed; and after a brief conference with the boy at the door, he returned and looked at his patient, and then at his watch. The former was still enjoying as tranquil repose as if he had never been bruised almost to a mummy, and the latter pointed to a quarter past four.

"Wilkinson must be back in three-quarters of an hour at the farthest," said Mr. Nethersole, "and Mrs. Tilson can't wait, that's certain. No great harm can happen; for he's doing quite well, and for that matter I might just as well have been at home, and in my bed, if he had not been Mrs. Charlton's son. Here, Tom," he continued, putting his head into the next room, and speaking in a low voice to Mother Brown's son, who seemed settling himself to sleep again; "When Wilkinson returns tell him to give his young master one half of that draught; and to send to me, at Mrs. Tilson's, at Shedbury, if anything goes wrong;" and going out he mounted the horse the boy had brought, looked up to the sky, which now suffered the stars to peep out from time to time through the clouds, and rode away.

The moment he had gone Tom Brown set the bottle down upon the table, and put his forefinger to his forehead. He was a dull-looking man, with short cut black hair, like the *chevelure* of a shoe-brush; but yet there was a keen cunning light stole out of his somewhat oblique eyes when he thus set himself to consider, which had something dangerous and sinister in it.

"Three-quarters of an hour," he said, meditating, "that's well nigh an hour, may like. Howsomdever, I won't do nothing alone. I'll take advice and have help; for he might get up right, by chance, and then one would have to put him out o' pain. Nobody would know it—one knock's as good as another, and he's in such a smash 'twouldn't be seen. He said he'd a lot o' money—I heard un, and mother, too; but he didn't say how much, so who can tell. We might take a bit, and leave some upon account. Mother could hold the candle while I took the money, and Jack stood by wi' the poker, ready to stop noise."

It was a perilous moment for Alfred Latimer, who continued to sleep soundly; and the man walking to the foot of the stairs called his mother; but in so low a voice that she did not hear.

"What's the matter?" said some one in deep masculine tones. "He's not dying, is he?"

"Pooh, no!" cried Tom Brown. "Nothing like it at present; but we shall see soon. I want you, Jack Williams, and mother, too. Go and give her a shake in t'other room, and bid her come down a-tiptoe."

Jack Williams, without reply, went and woke Mother Brown, who hurried on some rags of clothes, and descended to the room where Williams and her son were already in conference. As she went down she stumbled over an iron pot which had been carelessly put at the foot of the stairs; and the pot, on being disturbed at that hour of the night, uttered a loud complaint. Alfred Latimer started, turned round, and gazed about him. The door between his room and the next had been left partly ajar, and he heard the sound of voices speaking. They were subdued; but yet many — nay, most of the words were distinct to an ear quickened by a slight degree of feverish excitement. At first, indeed, suddenly roused from sleep, he had forgotten where he was, and his whole thoughts were confused; but his mind soon cleared itself, and he heard the tongue of Mother Brown, as she was called, going pretty sharply.

"It's no use taking the flimsies," she said; "they'd be knowed and traced directly, and we should all get nabbed. But I don't see there can be any harm in seeing what yellow boys may be in his pockets. It would be spoony enough to let them go, when he'd know nothing about it. He was always a careless hand, I've heard; and he might ha' dropped 'em while they were lugging him out of the chay, or arterwards, or any how, for what he'd know."

"I'd take the flimsies, too," said her well-educated son. "If we couldn't flash them ourselves, we could get some one to do it; and if that didn't do they would be sure to be advertised and a reward offered, which we could send some fence to receive for us. So I'd take all—make a sweep out; and I know what"—

"Well, what do you know?" said a deep stern voice that Alfred Latimer instantly recognized as that of Jack Williams. "Let's hear what you know, Master Tom."

"Why I should not like to do anything to him sleeping," answered Tom Brown; "but it would not be a bad job if he woke just as we were about it, and got a quiet knock o' the head — a little would do it now, and no one the wiser."

"And I know what, too," answered Jack Williams aloud—"that none of you shall take a penny of his, or lay a finger on him. Why, confound you all, he's one of our own friends, and we should act like gentlemen to one another. He'll make as fine a fellow as ever lived one of these days, if a set of puling fools do not get hold of him, and preach the spirit out of him, making him as canting a hypocrite as any of themselves. But I don't think there's much chance of that. The lad's young, and has not had much experience; yet he is sharp enough, and I have seen signs of a bold strong heart in him and a determined spirit, fit to command. I'll have no pitiful tricks, Tom Brown; so, look you, Mr. Latimer is under my protection, and let any one take a penny from him if they dare."

The conversation did not only fall upon Alfred Latimer's ear, but sunk into his heart. The boldness with which Williams stood forward in his defence touched one of the few better points about him; and the language that he used was immediately put in strong opposition to that which Mr. Quatterly had employed. The latter had shown that, in the higher ranks of life, a reputation once even stained could never be rendered wholly pure; the latter proved that good feeling of a particular kind can be mingled with crimes and faults of a very deep die. He fancied that the door was closed upon him in one course, and that it was open in another; and that low-toned conversation which he then overheard was more injurious to every good principle than the most potent arguments could have proved, if addressed to himself directly. While he was still listening, the outer door of the cottage was heard to open, and he distinguished the voice of his mother's servant, Wilkinson. Alfred Latimer turned round, and affected to be asleep, but, in reality, he wished to meditate undisturbed over what he had just heard; a meditation more destructive to him than if the basest of the two villains had carried his worst plans into execution.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was a spot in Mallington Park where the ground, approaching the river at a point where the banks were low and the stream broad and shallow, was inundated during a great part of the spring and autumn. A number of stunted willows, growing out of long sedge and rushes, covered about four acres of land, diversified here and there by tall poplars gathered into groups of five or six planted close together. This swamp might easily have been drained; but Edmonds, the park-keeper, who loved to see every variety in the domain entrusted to his charge, had refrained from doing so; and he had also another object, for as all the gamekeepers were under his orders, he took care that his lord's table should never want any species of wild fowl that the season and country afforded, and felt a pride in being able to send up to London anything that might be required. This watery piece of ground, then, was a sort of preserve during the winter months for a great number of the duck tribe; the snipe, too, was always to be found there, and not unfrequently the bittern; for the part of the park where it was situated was one very little frequented, being beyond the spot where the road we have so often mentioned turned over the bridge. A sandy path, however, neatly kept and raised a little above the neighboring ground, wound round the marsh, taking a thousand turns and bends among the trees; and then passing through a thick copse, and over two small bridges and a ferny deer pasture, it joined the broad road that led direct from the house to the great gates.

On the evening after the accident which, with its consequences, has occupied so much of our attention, about half an hour before nightfall, the graceful and delicate figure of Lucy Edmonds was observed walking along the sandy path by the side of the swamp, which at that shady hour, with the willows, the poplars, and the long flags and rushes, catching but in few places a glimpse

of the departing day, offered a dreary and melancholy scene enough. She had a basket on her arm, as if she were carrying something home from one of the cottages, of which there were two or three within the walls; and her fair face was sad, with her eyes bent down upon the ground.

I have said that she was observed; for there was one watching her; and when she came into the part of the wood where the trees closed thickest on all sides, Jack Williams walked slowly out from amongst the nearest group of poplars, and went quietly on to meet her. Lucy started on seeing him; but it was the suddenness of his appearance that alone surprised her; and her manner clearly showed that she had seen and held communication of some kind with him before.

"Ah! Mr. Williams," she said, with a faint smile crossing her lip, and flitting away again in an instant, "I did not expect to see you here."

"No, Miss Lucy," replied the man; "but I came to meet you, for I watched you out an hour ago; and I thought you would like to hear the truth of how he is going on, poor fellow."

Lucy turned towards him with a look of apprehension. "Going on!" she cried—"Poor fellow! What do you mean, Mr. Williams? Oh! tell me, what is the matter now?"

"What, have you not heard?" asked Williams; "why, it is all over Mallington. He has met with a bad accident; but don't frighten yourself; he is better, and will do well—that is, if his spirits are kept up."

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Lucy Edmonds, with the tears in her eyes. "I wish I were dead. What accident, Mr. Williams—tell me, tell me; for though I can do no good, yet I must hear."

"Why, the matter is this, Miss Lucy," replied the man, in a kindly tone—"but don't frighten yourself—he will do very well, I tell you. But the matter is this, as I was saying—I wrote him a note, you know, telling him that your father wished you to marry young Garland; and off he set from London directly. Mr. Morton, as they call him, a gentleman who has been staying down here"—

"Oh! I know him. I know him very well," replied Lucy Edmonds; "he has been several times to see my father."

"Well, he was in the chaise with Mr. Latimer," continued Williams; "and they came on at a great rate till they reached Mallington Common, about eight o'clock last night. There the horses ran away with them, and went over the bank into Mother Brown's Pit. Mr. Morton was very little hurt, but poor Alfred was taken out speechless."

The man paused, and Lucy wrung her hands in bitter grief. "But you say he is better," she cried, after a moment's silence, "you say he is better. Oh! tell me true, Mr. Williams."

"Yes, he is better," answered her companion—"a good deal better; but I know what would make him quite well."

"And what is that?" demanded Lucy Edmonds, partly divining what his answer would be.

"If you would come and see him, Miss Lucy," said Williams, "or promise to do so to-morrow; it would do him more good than all the stuff out of Dr. Nethersole's shop."

"That is impossible," answered Lucy Edmonds, firmly; "how could I go up to Mallington House?—and besides"—

"He is not at Mallington House," replied Williams, interrupting her; "he is at Mother Brown's cottage, on the common, where he was first taken. You could come quite well, and nobody know anything of it."

"No," answered Lucy, "I promised my father that I would not see him, and I cannot—do not say a word, Mr. Williams, for nothing shall make me break my promise."

"Then you are a very silly girl," answered Williams sternly; "or else you are going to do what your father wishes, and marry young Garland. Ay, ay! Count upon a woman's love! It is no more to be leaned upon than one of those sedges. But I'll go away, and tell him to think of you, and break his heart for you, no more; for that you have got a new lover, and care no more for him."

"Oh, do not, do not be so cruel," said Lucy, weeping bitterly; "you know that what you say is not true. Tell him, if you will, not to think of me any more; for my father says he will never let him have me; so it is better that he should forget me. But do not tell him I have or can forget him, for that is false."

"Well, I will tell him what you say," replied Williams, "but he won't easily believe you love him much, if you will not come to see him even when he is lying sick. He will think that you do not wish to know how he is."

"Oh, he knows better," replied Lucy; "he knows I would give anything in the world to hear every day how he is."

"Well, I can let you know that," said Williams. "I'm sure I'd do a good deal to make you happy, Miss Lucy; and if you can come out about this place of an evening—say at this time—I will be down and tell you how he is going on as long as there is any danger, for I am lodging at Widow Brown's, and I see him very often."

"Oh, do, do," cried Lucy eagerly, "I will come whenever I can; but do not wait long for me; for my father might prevent me, or send me somewhere else, you know. But I will come whenever I can, indeed I will."

"Well, you are a good girl after all, and do love him, I believe," replied Williams.

"Oh, you know I do, too well!" answered Lucy Edmonds.

"Then you are very silly for not following your love," answered the man; "fathers have always such crotchets; and if a girl did not take her own way, no girl would ever marry the man she loves. What the devil right has your father to stop you? He's not going to marry the man. If Mr. Latimer did not mean fair by you, it would be another thing; but he has offered to marry you at once—ay, and he will marry you too, whatever your father may say, for love will have its way."

"But my promise, my promise," said Lucy, with a deep sigh.

"Nonsense about promises," answered Williams, "they never hold good long against love, Lucy Edmonds. However, I will bring you word how Alfred is going on every evening

about this time ; and you can come and hear it if you like : so now good-night, for you must not make the old folks suspicious."

Lucy bade him adieu, and, wiping the traces of tears from her eyes, walked on towards her home, little dreaming to what her promise to meet that man there might ultimately lead. Williams remained gazing after her ; and his feelings were of so strange and mixed a nature that we may well pause to look into them more closely. He gazed after Lucy Edmonds, I have said, and certainly with some admiration of her beauty ; but it was with no thought of robbing Alfred Latimer of the heart he had won, even if it had been possible ; and the only observation he made to himself was—" She's very pretty : it is a pity he should not have her." But it was not that he was without those passions which might have led him to seek to possess the fair being he thus admired ; or merely that he felt towards another in a distant land—though such was the case—that fierce eager love which often, in the most unprincipled, seems to absorb all those feelings that in less intense characters are roused by and divided amongst many ; but every one has a peculiar morality of his own ; and very often, where it is extended to the fewest possible points, it is the sternest and most inflexible upon them ; and thus the man who would not hesitate one moment to rob another of his purse, or, in case of strife, to take the life of a fellow creature like that of a dog, would have shrunk with a sense of shame from acts that thousands of well-dressed gentlemanly men look upon as the amusement of a morning. He would not have wronged one whom he regarded as a friend, nor have seduced his wife, nor taken his mistress, nor traduced his character, or betrayed his confidence. These are gentlemanly crimes, which were quite out of his station and out of his character. He had his own, indeed, black and terrible ; but these he was without.

After Lucy was gone, he sat down upon the stump of a willow, and began to ponder on the future and the present. " She will make him a sweet wife," he thought, " and, though she's very different from Margeritta, yet she will suit him. If we can get together money enough to buy a schooner out there, and set ourselves up in one of those beautiful little islands, we may carry on gloriously. I can sail the ship, and he can do many things that I can't. It's just the life to suit him. I wonder if he'll consent. If we carry off pretty Lucy by force he'll be obliged ; for he must be off as fast as possible. I have him there ; and then it will be the best thing he can do. I long to see Black Jack flying over us ; but I must not let him squander away his money with Bill Maltby and such fellows. We'll have no Bill Maltby amongst us either. He's a pitiful knave—cheats at cards and dice. We'll have bold fellows, that can fight only ; and then we'll make fine work with the turbans. But he has no notion of my plan yet ; and I had better sound him. I'll tell him some stories of what happened last year at Zante, and see how he likes it. But once we've carried her off, he must go ; and then what better could he do !"

Such were some of the thoughts of him who deserved the name of ruffian more than vil*lain ; but there* were many other ideas crossed his mind—fleeting, transitory, and strange—sensations, rather than thoughts, making a strange mixed mass of good and of evil, of coarse fierceness and many softer emotions. The bad undoubtedly greatly predominated over the good ; but still when he thought of the bright islands of the blue Ægean Sea, a feeling for natural beauty, which often acts as one of the best purifiers of the heart, but which is often present even in the most stern and savage characters, gave him a thirsty longing to revisit those scenes again, even more powerful than the eager desire for active and energetic enterprise ; and without more ado he rose, made his way to the park-wall, and, leaping over it, descended the road, crossed the river, and walked on with a rapid step to the common above Mallington. A carriage was standing at the nearest point of the road to the cottage of Widow Brown, and Williams at once recognized the liveries of Mrs. Charlton. He saw, likewise, the horse of Mr. Nethersole, fat and pursy as usual, notwithstanding some severe work during the preceding night and that day ; and, judging that his presence at the moment would not be very acceptable, he walked on over the common with a leisurely sauntering pace, still keeping within sight, but affecting to amuse himself with looking at the shrubs and bushes. He then descended into the pit, where he saw some people gathered about the spot where the chaise had fallen ; and he found that the little crowd which he had observed was occupied with the removal of the two dead horses in a cart from Mr. Markham's kennel. In one of the persons there assembled, however, he instantly recognized a gentleman whom he had no great inclination to meet—namely, Mr. Gibbs the traveler, with whom he had made a somewhat unpleasant acquaintance in Wenlock Wood ; but Williams was not one to suffer even conscience to cow him, and he gazed upon the other's face with a stern and steadfast look, more like that of an injured person than of one who had committed an injury. He was very much surprised, however, when Gibbs, who when he had last met him before Dr. Western wore anything but a well-satisfied aspect, now advanced to meet him with a pleasant smirk upon his face, saying, " Ah, Mr. Williams, I am very glad to see you."

" Indeed !" said Williams, without relaxing a feature of his face ; " that is more than I can say to you. What makes you glad to see me, pray ?"

" Because, Mr. Williams," replied the traveler, " I always like to do justice ; and though, when I last beheld you, I thought you were very like the man who knocked me down and robbed me on the other side of the water, I am now convinced that I was quite mistaken, and that you had nothing to do with it."

There were plenty of persons present to overhear this speech ; and Williams replied, dryly, " Oh, you are, are you ! Well, better late than never ; but let it teach you not to suspect innocent people again. I should like to hear, however, what it is has convinced you at last. I've neither grown taller nor shorter, have not shaved off my whiskers, nor cut off my hair."

" Ah, sir, if you would but use a little of the fine Exotic Balm of Trinidad," cried Mr. Gibbs,

"it would so improve the curl and the gloss both of your hair and your whiskers you would scarcely know yourself. I have supplied three shops in this town, and you can get it either at Mr. Shanklin's, or the Miss Martins', or Mr. Warren's—but you were asking what had convinced me? I will tell you in a moment. In the first place the man must have been a good deal taller than you; in the next place, he wore different shoes; and, in the third place, I find you changed a five pound note that very day at the inn, and another yesterday at the linendraper's. Now, no notes were taken from me; and a man is not likely to take another man's money when his own pockets are full."

"He may want to fill them fuller," answered Williams, inan in different tone, "so that's no reason, Mr. What's-your-name; but as for me, I got my pay and prize money when my ship was paid off; so I had enough of my own for the time being; but when it is all spent, if you will tell me which way you are going with a good lot of gold about you, I'll see what I can do with yours."

He spoke laughing, and Mr. Gibbs laughed, too—quite heartily. Nay, he even added, "Well, I did you injustice, Mr. Williams; I beg your pardon for it frankly, and as it is growing dark, if you will come down to the Bagpipes we will have a bowl of punch together and forget all grievances."

"I can't just now," answered Williams; "but I will to-morrow night if you like."

Mr. Gibbs agreed to this change of his proposed plan, and Williams, seeing the top of Mrs. Charlton's carriage, the sight of which he just caught over the bank, moving rapidly away, turned upon his heel and entered the cottage.

Several of the persons who had overheard this conversation stared at Mr. Gibbs; and one of them, a surly carter, who knew Jack Williams well, uttered in a murmur between his teeth—what was probably the internal opinion of all—"Well, you're a fool, if ever there was one;" but in this instance, at least, Mr. Gibbs was not such a fool as people thought. The cart moved off with the two dead horses; and the people, who had been gathered round, followed it. Mr. Gibbs remained for a moment or two behind, then stooping down, as if to tie his shoe, he pulled something out from beneath a bramble bush, scratching himself a good deal as he did so; and then climbing the bank, he paused as soon as he got into the clearer light which the higher ground afforded, examined something which he held in his hand attentively, and walked straight away to Mallington House.

CHAPTER XXX.

Mr. Morton was dressing for dinner, when a servant entered his room, saying, "There is a person below, sir, who wishes to speak with you directly upon business of importance."

"Indeed!" said Morton calmly, "did he give his name!"

"He said his name is Gibbs, sir," answered the footman, "and that he would not detain you a minute."

"I know no such person," replied the young gentleman, looking at his watch; "however, as there is time, tell him that I am dressing; but if his business be of real importance, he can see me here. If not, let him call to-morrow."

The man retired, and in two or three minutes returned, ushering in Mr. Gibbs. As soon as Morton beheld the face of his visitor, he recollected the intrusive personage whom he had seen on the bank of the river; and he regretted having given him admission at that moment, when there was a chance of conversing with Louisa alone for a short time before Mrs. Charlton came down. He resolved to cut the interview short, however; and merely bending his head, he inquired what was Mr. Gibbs's business with him.

Mr. Gibbs in return bowed low, very low, indeed; and then hemmed and bowed again, while the servant shut the door and retired.

"Well, sir," said Morton, waxing somewhat impatient.

"My name is Gibbs, sir," rejoined the other with a most agreeable smile, "and yours is Morton."

The young gentleman bowed his head.

"This pocket-book, then, I suppose, belongs to you," said Mr. Gibbs, in reply to this mute assent.

Morton started and turned around, "Yes, sir, it does," he said, "I must have dropped it in getting out of the chaise last night—it is very strange I did not miss it."

It would, indeed, have been strange, if he had not been so near Louisa Charlton; but that altered the whole case, and Morton might have dropped many a more valuable thing without missing it during the whole of that day. Mr. Gibbs placed the wetted and soiled book in its owner's hands, with another low bow, adding, in a marked and peculiar tone, "I was obliged, sir, to open it and examine the contents, to ascertain to whom it belonged."

This intimation, from some cause or other, seemed to give Morton cause for thought; but at length looking up with a light and half laughing look, he replied, "I understand what you mean, Mr. Gibbs; and all I can say is, that I must trust to your discretion, which, if it prove stable, shall not go unrewarded."

"Pray, do not mention such a thing, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs, "my discretion you may fully trust to without any reward; and, indeed, there is a subject on which I have wished to speak to you for two or three days, which will show you how discreet I can be."

"I think I must ask you to choose another time, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, looking again at his watch. "I must go down as soon as I am dressed."

"When you please, sir," answered the traveler, "but, before you are dressed, I can give you an inkling of the matter. I think you take a good deal of interest in the family of a park-keeper over the river, named Edmonds."

"I do, certainly," said Morton, "he is a very good, respectable man."

"And his daughter, I believe, sir," rejoined Mr. Gibbs.

Morton drew up his head, and looked at his companion in some surprise. "I do not understand your meaning, sir," he answered. "I

have once, or perhaps twice, seen his daughter, but I take no other interest in her than in the rest of his family. Pray explain yourself."

"Why, I thought, sir—I thought," replied Mr. Gibbs, hesitating, "I thought I saw you—I am sure it was a gentleman—speaking with her for nearly an hour about a fortnight ago—it might be a few days more or less—in the park; and he came from this house, and went back to this house; and now I thought—that is to say I suspected—I mean I imagined, that it might be interesting to him to know that she is in the custom of meeting—that is to say I am sure she has met four days ago, and to-night, too, a man named Williams, who was supposed—that is to say accused, or suspected of knocking me down and robbing me in Wenlock Wood, when I was here last."

Now, all this information was interesting to Mr. Morton; for it gave him a clue to part of Alfred Latimer's conduct—at least he thought so; and before answering, he pondered for a moment or two, uncertain how to act. He wished much to know what was the exact degree of intimacy between Alfred Latimer and Lucy Edmonds; and he doubted not in the least it was Mrs. Charlton's son who had been mistaken for himself. The facts of having seen Williams, whose name had been mentioned in his hearing, at the cottage of Widow Brown—of the man's meeting that night with Lucy—and of their preceding interview four days before, connected themselves with the letter Alfred Latimer had received, and with his eagerness to return to Mallington immediately after its delivery. In the ordinary affairs of life, as in the deep secrets of science, we often, by the leaping pole of imagination, jump at just conclusions before we can be said to have discovered them; and I believe no man ever proved a great fact which he had not first surmised. With Morton all was at present fancy—it was a conjectural collocation of circumstances; and the proof was yet to be obtained. But how? was the difficult question. To act as a spy, or to employ a spy upon any other man's actions, was not to be thought of, however great and beneficent might be the end in view. He was one of those men who think that no end justifies base means: and he resolved to inquire no further—to let matters take their course, evolve themselves as they would; and at the same time to employ the information he had received as occasion might require.

"In the first place, Mr. Gibbs," he replied, when his cogitations came to an end, "let me inform you that you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person whom you saw talking with Lucy Edmonds. I never spoke to her out of her father's house in my life, and at the time you mention was not a visitor here. May I ask how near you were to the person you supposed to be me, for you have certainly made a great mistake?"

"Oh dear, sir, I was a long way off," replied Mr. Gibbs. "I was at the top of the house, amusing myself, as I usually do, with this little instrument," and he pulled out a small telescope from his pocket. "From the window of my room," he continued, "I command the park *on one side*, and the hill up to the common on the *other, and I see all that goes on* in the place."

"I should not think it very profitable, or very worthy inquiry, sir," replied Morton; "but every man has his tastes, and, as meddling with other people's business is not one of mine, I can have nothing further to do with the matter you have mentioned—except, indeed, to say that it would be, I think, but an act of Christian charity to warn poor Edmonds that his daughter is placing herself in dangerous circumstances. That would be drawing some good from perquisitions which I cannot advise you to pursue farther."

"You mistake, sir—you mistake—allow me very respectfully to say you mistake," said Mr. Gibbs, with some warmth; "you must allow me, sir, to clear myself, although you are dressed, I see. I do not use my telescope for the purpose of prying into other people's affairs, though I can't help seeing them if they come in my way. But, sir, the truth is this: I have been knocked down, and robbed near here. We could not identify the man; but I am not only quite sure of who he is, but also that there is a gang of very bad characters here, who will some day or another do great mischief; and I am resolved to bring them to justice. I have fixed my eye upon a particular man, sir; and he shall find that he can't escape that eye. I watch him and his doings every moment I have to spare, and ere long I shall get hold of the end of the clue, though he may hide it ever so cunningly."

"That alters the case very materially, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton; "and I trust that you will succeed in your endeavors; but in regard to this poor girl it would, I think, be an act of kindness on your part to speak with her father upon the subject, and leave it to him to take such steps as he may think fit. He is, as far as I can learn, a very high-principled right-minded man, and I do not think would act harshly towards his child."

"May I ask, sir," said Mr. Gibbs, in a low tone, "whether he is acquainted or not with certain circumstances—I wish to act discreetly, sir—quite discreetly, and would not for the world betray a secret which had accidentally fallen into my possession."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibbs," said Morton; "but to answer your question: he is not aware of anything—no one, indeed, is. The matter is of no great consequence, indeed; but every man has his whim."

"Oh, certainly, sir—certainly," said Mr. Gibbs; "but I won't detain you longer, sir; and if you have any further commands for me you will find me at the inn, sir; for I have determined not to quit this place till I have got the right sow by the ear. But you cannot think, sir, what an advantage it would be to your hair if you would use Grimsditch's incomparable Balm of Trinidad. It preserves and increases the natural curl—prevents it from falling off, or turning grey—communicates to it an admirable gloss, keeps it always, whether in rain or heat, in perfect order—and whether applied to the clustering ringlets of female loveliness, or to the bolder waves that float round the forehead of masculine beauty, it is admitted on all hands to be the only thing yet discovered which can be said to gild refined gold, and render perfection still more perfect."

"Well, send me some, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, smiling; "and now indeed I must go, for I fear I am already late."

Mr. Gibbs made his bow, and retired; and Morton hastened down to the drawing-room, but was disappointed in his hope of finding Louisa alone. Mrs. Charlton was, indeed, not yet down; but Dr. Western was seated on the sofa by the side of his fair ward. Morton would willingly have seen him ten minutes later, and though he shook the good clergyman's hand warmly, yet the rector very well understood his sensations.

"Ah, my young friend," he said, with a laughing look towards Louisa, which made the color come up into her cheek. "I am very much in the way here, but I wanted to speak to you, so I came early, even at the risk of being the unfortunate third. Nay, Louisa, do not be angry with me, my dear child," he continued, seeing her rising as if she received what he had said as a hint to leave them. "You know I am the friend of both, and give my hearty consent and approval; so if you run away, I shall think that you wish to hide your arrangements from me. I have nothing to say to him that you may not hear, though, perhaps, the confidence is not quite reciprocal. Morton, have you done what you said you would?"

"No, my dear sir," replied Morton, "I have had no time. All to-day we have been in the strait waistcoat of society, and yesterday, while we were five minutes alone together, we somehow talked of other things."

"Oh! I know how quite well," answered Dr. Western; "but time!—what need of time? —one minute will do it. My dear Louisa, let me introduce a friend of mine to you;" and leading Morton up to her, with a gay look he whispered a word in her ear.

Louisa Charlton drew back, and gazed in Morton's face with an expression of surprise almost amounting to alarm. But Morton, notwithstanding the good doctor's presence, threw his arms round her, saying, "Nay, my beloved, can a name make any difference to you?"

"No," murmered Louisa, "oh, no; but this takes me very much by surprise."

"Our good friend here is wrong," said Morton, "in telling you thus, dear Louisa. Nay, he is wrong in telling you at all as yet; for all is not settled, and I wished it to be so fully before I spoke."

"It is you who are wrong, Morton," replied Dr. Western, "the parson of the parish is always right. There should be no secrets between two people circumstanced as you are. Nay, more, I have to tell you, sir, that all is settled, as I will prove to you if you will come and partake of a plain dinner with me to-morrow, at five, and then take a long walk. Louisa shall share the dinner, if she will, but not the ramble; and in the meantime, ma'am, remember that though I have taken the liberty of telling you other people's secrets, you are not to follow my bad example."

As he spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room, and found Morton, Louisa, and Dr. Western standing close together, with somewhat too evident symptoms of having been engaged in secret conclave. She made no observation, indeed; but a slight smile, somewhat sarcastic and triumphant, crossed her lip, as if she would have said, had she thought fit to speak what was passing within, "Ah, you think that I am blind; but you are playing my game, while you imagine you are playing your own." Morton marked it ere it fled; but, confident in his own rectitude, both in motive and act, he felt no embarrassment or confusion, and only asked himself in consequence of what he saw, "When will this worthy lady suffer her object to appear. She shall take her own course," he added in his own mind, "for it is well to know thoroughly a person with whom one is to be so closely connected."

Dr. Western, on his part, met the lady with a good-humored and easy smile, telling her that "he had asked Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton to dine with him on the following day, and trusted she would be of the party."

"I suppose, in propriety, I ought to be," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but really, my dear sir, I have so many accounts to look over, and different other things to do, that Louisa must do without a chaperon for once, especially when she is going to her guardian's house. Alfred tells me that you have been to see him, doctor, for which I am very much obliged."

"I thought it a duty, my dear lady," replied Dr. Western; "the accounts that reached me were so alarming that I feared I should find him very ill. There is little the matter, however, but a few bruises, as far as I could discover; and I should think you could bring him home quite safely to-morrow."

"Do you really think so?" asked Mrs. Charlton, in a tone of surprise.

"I think that the sooner he is out of that house the better," replied the rector; "the people there are amongst the worst in the parish, and I know this: I myself would sooner risk a fever than sleep there for a single night."

Before Mrs. Charlton could reply, the door was thrown open to announce dinner, and the rector, advancing, gave her his arm, while Morton followed with Louisa. What was it he whispered to her as they went down stairs? Can you not divine, reader? Then you have never been in love in all your life.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Mother Brown's cottage was certainly by no means a pleasant place—on the contrary, it was a very unpleasant place indeed, and yet thither must I once more lead the gentle reader, though I have no intention of dirtying the shoes of his imagination more than I can help in guiding him on his way.

In the outer chamber of the cottage, which, as the reader is aware, was divided into four rooms, two above and two below, and by the side of the large ill-constructed chimney, sat Tom Brown, the widow's son, with an old yellow greasy tobacco pipe in his mouth, puffing away clouds of no very fragrant smoke, and gazing vacantly into the fireplace, where, over a handful of small drift coal, apparently of not the most combustible nature in the world, stood a large iron pot, emitting an odor of turnips and

onions. There was something dull and yet fierce in the man's look: a dogged sullen brutality, more revolting to look upon than even the expression of more dangerous qualities, when lighted up by the beams of intellect and the fire of passion. He was a powerful fellow, as I have before described him; with a head immensely capacious and round behind; but so low and narrow in the forehead that his bristly hair reached within a finger's length of his eyebrows; and as he sat there, though sometimes a momentary smile would change the expression of his dull face, yet in general a heavy frown still further contracted that meaningless and animal forehead. It is not necessary to inquire what emotions produced either the frown or the smile—certain it is that they could be of no very refined kind; but their course was soon after interrupted by the entrance of Williams, who spoke with him for a moment or two by the fire, and then turned towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

"Ah!" said Tom Brown, "there he lies on his back, like a dead crow, when he is just as well as you or I, Jack. Well, I shall go and take a walk—I wonder what the devil he keeps lying there for?"

"He knows what he's about," answered Williams; "but don't you go far, Tom, for we may want you. Where's your mother?"

"Oh, she's gone down to Mallington to buy some pork," replied her son. "I shan't be further than the top of the common; but I think there may be a rabbit or two by this time;" and thus saying he walked out of the door and closed it behind him.

Jack Williams in the meantime entered the room where Alfred Latimer lay; and the moment that he appeared the young gentleman started up in his bed, without any sign of pain or sickness, exclaiming, "Well, I'm devilish glad you've come at last; I thought you'd never be here."

"Why, I had a good deal to do," said Williams, "and one can't manage obstinate people in a minute, Mr. Latimer; and a precious pig-headed set they are about Mallington—no turning them at all."

"Ay, that's what my mother said of me this morning," rejoined the young gentleman. "She was over here with the carriage, by eleven, and wanted me to go back to the house; for she and that old fool Western have been laying their heads together, and settling that this was a very bad place for me to stay in, so that, fever or no fever, I ought to be brought over to Mallington, like a sick boy from school. I wouldn't go, however; and then, just to drive me, she said she couldn't spare Wilkinson any longer."

"What did you say to that?" demanded Jack Williams.

"Why, I said I could spare him very well," answered Alfred Latimer; "and so sent him about his business, glad enough to get rid of him. I promised to come over to-morrow, however; so whatever is to be done must be done to-night."

"Oh, I've got all ready," replied Jack Williams, "if you are strong enough."

"I'm quite well," replied Alfred Latimer. "There's nothing the matter with me; but I've been thinking, Jack, how the deuce we shall get her across the water and through the village without people seeing. She will never be able to walk to the other bridge."

"To be sure not," answered Williams; "that's what has kept me such a time; for I couldn't hire a punt, all I could do. One fellow said he was sure I was going to poach the river, and he might have his boat seized. However, at last I got hold of young Blackmore, who promised to draw his father's punt in amongst the reeds there; then we can get across in the dusk, without being seen, and have her up to the cottage at Illington in no time. But mind, Mr. Latimer, you're to marry her, you know."

"Oh, ah! I'll marry her," replied Alfred Latimer; "I'll marry her, don't you be afraid."

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Williams; "for I wouldn't help you, if I thought you'd cheat her; and having given me your promise, I look to you to keep it. So, as that's settled, I've got a pack of things for you here in the bundle that will make you look as much like a gamekeeper as possible, leather leggins and all; and if you start over the back way just before dusk, you'll find me down by the water. We must get Tom Brown, however, to stay in the boat while we are in the park. It will be awkward, however, if she doesn't come, since you have promised to go home to-morrow."

"If she doesn't I won't go," replied Alfred Latimer. "It will do well enough and nobody suspect anything, while I am lying here and supposed to be ill; but if I were up at Mallington House, and going about, they'd say directly I had taken her—but she'll come, I think."

"So do I," answered Williams; "but there's Tom Brown come back; I hear his step; and we had better speak to him about it at once."

Thus saying he opened the door that led to the other room; but the man he looked for was not there, and returning to Alfred Latimer's bedside, he sat down again and pursued the conversation in which they were engaged. In about ten minutes, however, the step of Tom Brown was heard distinctly crossing the floor of the next room in haste, and the moment after he opened the door and put his head in, saying, "I say, Mr. Williams, have you been talking loud with that window open; for there's been a d—d fellow hanging about on the outside listening, or I'm mistaken."

Williams started up with a heavy brow, without any reply, and, running to the window, looked forth.

"He's gone, he's gone," said Tom Brown; "as soon as he saw me come down the hill he was off like a shot."

"Do you know him?" asked Williams.

"I'm not quite sure," answered Brown, "but I think, by the look of him, that it was that dancing-master-looking cove who got his head broke and lost his money one day."

"He may get his head broken to better purpose if he comes listening here," said Williams, and then fell into a train of thought, from which he was roused after a moment or two by Alfred Latimer exclaiming, "Why, if he has heard all, our scheme will be blown over the whole place."

"No, no," answered his companion, "he did not hear enough for that. No names were mentioned, you know; and he couldn't make

out much of it. However, Tom, you run down to the bridge, and see whether he crosses or not. If we can make sure of him till five o'clock, I'll take care of him after that. He shan't blab till the thing is done, at all events."

"You stay there till Williams comes down to you," said Alfred Latimer, "and I'll give you five shillings for your pains, Brown."

Now, people's estimation of their conscience is very different in different individuals; but, unlike the appreciation of any other thing, the less a man has of it the less value does he place upon it. What is there on earth that Tom Brown would not have done for five shillings? As to selling his soul, that was no great matter; for, notwithstanding all that Dr. Western could do, he was not quite sure whether he possessed a soul or not; and if he had, the property undoubtedly was deeply mortgaged. But he would have taken the life of another and put his own neck in jeopardy at any time for a pound, and would have risked Botany Bay, the hulks or the pillory, for any of the aliquot parts of the same sum. To watch for a man upon a bridge, therefore, was no very troublesome task; and yet, to say the truth, he would rather have stolen a sheep or a deer, or robbed a garden or a hen-roost: for in the great commerce of this world, whatever Adam Smith may say, there are a great many other kinds of circulating medium besides money; and often a man who undertakes a bad action for a small bribe, ekes out his pitiful pay with excitement. Though there was none of this, however, in the task assigned to him, he agreed to do as he was bid, and set off at once with so rapid a step that he overtook Mr. Gibbs half way down the hill, and saw him enter the inn, before he took his station on the bridge. The guard he kept was uninterrupted, for whether it was that the worthy traveler was conscious of being watched, or whether he had some other occupation which kept him within, he did not issue forth again till the figure of Jack Williams was seen walking with a slow pace, and the usual swinging gait of a sailor, down towards the side of the river. No verbal communication took place between the two, but the thumb pointed back over the right shoulder, indicated to Tom Brown that he was to go back to the cottage, and Williams, walking into the inn, asked if Mr. Gibbs was at home. The landlady, the ostler, and the barmaid, all looked at Jack Williams with a sort of shy and unpleasant aspect, which certainly was not very encouraging; but Mrs. Pluckrose replied civilly that she believed the gentleman was in, and sent to see; while Williams turned his back to the bar, looked out at the door, and twisted a cane switch which he held in his hand into a variety of curious forms.

While pausing there, he saw the carriage of Mrs. Charlton going down the hill towards the rectory, with the sweet countenance of Louisa sitting calmly beside Mr. Morton, very apparent through the windows. There might be a slight glow upon her cheek; but she did not seem at all anxious to avoid being seen thus publicly with her lover; and Williams himself, as well as the two Misses Martin, and Messrs. Crump and Dixon, looked upon the approaching wedding as a settled thing.

"Well, I declare!" cried Miss Mathilda Martin.

"Bold enough, truly," said Miss Martin; "but what could be expected with such a stepmother?"

"I think his impudence is worse than hers," rejoined Mathilda. "A poor pitiful painter, to set himself up riding in a carriage beside an heiress like that! I declare I've a great mind to write and tell the other guardian, in an anonymous kind of way, what Mrs. Charlton is encouraging and Dr. Western suffering."

"Wait a little, Matty," said her sister; "the good lady is a deep one, and we have not seen the end of it yet."

Before this interesting conversation had come to its conclusion, Mr. Williams had been introduced into the chamber of Mr. Gibbs, and a bowl of punch had been ordered, which speedily appeared. Mr. Gibbs, who paid with a degree of regularity for everything he bought which he often wished that others would imitate, drew forth a ten-pound note, and asked the maid who brought the punch to change it; and on her returning with Abraham Newland's promise-to-pay unchanged, he applied to his new companion, but without success. Williams, for some reason, declared that he had no change, though his pocket was very heavy, and the girl civilly insisting that there was no hurry, Mr. Gibbs was obliged to desist. He was courtesy itself to his guest—he plied him with punch, he talked to him incessantly, he mingled soft allusions to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad with expressions of regret at having ever been betrayed into the folly of thinking that a seafaring gentleman like Mr. John Williams could have committed a highway robbery. Then he talked of Mallington, and all the places round Mallington; and then he spoke of his young friend, Mr. Maltby, and assured his companion that he had endeavored to bring him to their little party that night, but had not been fortunate enough to find him, expressing a firm conviction that Mr. Williams would be delighted with his acquaintance.

Williams listened to him with grim gravity; nothing that Mr. Gibbs could say could move him to more than a sardonic smile; and when the worthy traveler commended Bill Maltby, he merely replied that he had known him very well when he was a youth, and asked where he "hung out" now. In short, Jack Williams was an old bird, and was not to be caught with chaff such as Mr. Gibbs threw down before him. On the Balm of Trinidad, however, he was somewhat more discursive; and when they had well nigh got to the bottom of their bowl of punch, he began to twist upon his finger the long ringlets that hung over his whiskers, and inquired particularly into the merits of that fragrant essence. It was a subject upon which Mr. Gibbs was eloquent, and he enumerated some nineteen or twenty of its admirable qualities, some of them diametrically opposed to the others, till at length Mr. Williams felt in his pocket and asked the price, producing at the same time a crown piece. The ruling passion strong in death showed Mr. Gibbs the opportunity of doing a little business, and, unable to resist, he said, "The retail price was, in truth, seven-and-sixpence, but he would pass it to his friend Mr. Williams at the wholesale rate of five shillings."

"Well, then, let us have a bottle!" exclaimed Jack Williams, giving another coxcomb twist to the corkscrew curl.

Immediately Mr. Gibbs started up from the table; and approaching a large leather-covered brass-handed case, which stood in the window, he dived into the interior thereof to bring up a bottle of the Balm of Trinidad. As he was doing so he heard the ladle rattle in the bowl, and turned his head round, when he saw Mr. Williams helping himself to some more punch.

"I've taken the liberty, Mr. Gibbs," said Jack Williams, in a slow tone, "to drink your health during your absence. Shall I fill your glass to return thanks?"

"Thank you, I'm coming back directly," said Mr. Gibbs; and, returning to the table, he presented his companion with a bottle of the fragrant balm, wrapped up in gold paper, received his crown piece, and, filling himself a glass of punch—it was well nigh the last that the bowl contained—he drank it off.

Jack Williams in the meanwhile went on sipping his own, opening the bottle of the fragrant balm, pulling out the cork, and smelling the odor with the air of a connoisseur. Mr. Gibbs then proposed another bowl, and Mr. Williams readily consented. The maid was summoned, the empty vessel carried away, and another replete with fragrant liquor speedily placed upon the table. By this time, however, the eyes of Mr. Gibbs had acquired a somewhat glassy and lackadaisical expression. He helped himself and his guest, however, and tossed off his own glass; but then his eyelids seemed to grow heavy, and in a few minutes he began to nod; upon which Jack Williams gave him a meaning smile, and taking up the bowl, half emptied it at a draught. He then sat for about half an hour longer to watch the progress of his entertainer's sleep. It was sound and apparently comfortable, and Jack Williams more than once rubbed his finger on the corner of his brow and temple, as if considering what was to be done next.

The Caliph Haroun Alraschid had a certain powder—we are informed in one of the most veracious of all possible histories—of which, when he wished to send any of his friends to sleep, he used to take a pinch and drop it into their wine or sherbet, as the case might be, and instantly they fell into a pleasant doze, during the continuance of which the aforesaid potentate used to do with them whatsoever he thought fit. Now, whether Jack Williams, in his travels in the East, had possessed himself or not of the caliph's secret, certain it is that he intended Mr. Gibbs to go to sleep, and that Mr. Gibbs dutifully complied with his desire. At length, as the sky was beginning to get a little grey, Williams rose, and taking up the worthy traveler in his arms, laid him quietly on his bed; then descending the stairs he stopped a minute at the bar, saying to Mrs. Pluckrose, "You've made that punch devilish strong, marm, and Gibbs has got as drunk as an owl."

"Good gracious me!" cried the worthy landlady, "I hope he's not noisy."

"Oh no," answered Williams, "he's fallen sound asleep, and left me to drink out the bowl; but I find my head queerish, too, and so I'll have no more of it. Good night, marm," and away he went.

Mrs. Pluckrose and the maid immediately proceeded to ascertain the facts of the case; and finding the worthy traveler stretched upon his bed, apparently in a state of drunken sleep, they left him there, only taking the precaution of putting some towels under his boots that they might not dirt the counterpane.

It was well nigh two o'clock next day before Mr. Gibbs woke; and then he was mightily sick at his stomach, and his head was aching in a very unpleasant manner. He vowed, however, that he had not been drunk at all; but this only confirmed the good landlady's belief in his inebriety of the night before, for she had remarked on more than one occasion amongst her guests, and also in the case of her dear departed lord and master, that no man is ever so convinced of having been thoroughly sober, as when he has been thoroughly tipsy.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a very pleasant little drive from Mallington House to the rectory, both for Edmond Morton and Louisa Charlton, and yet it would be very difficult to say in what its pleasantness consisted. They spoke very little, so that it could not be in conversation. They were aware that the eyes of the villagers were upon them, and therefore it was not in what is commonly called making love. Louisa felt a little awkwardness in thus first appearing with her lover alone, and therefore it was not in that ease and freedom from restraint which in itself is an enjoyment. It could only be, then, in being together, but that was something, and something very pleasant too. It connected itself by the fine links of thought with a future, when they should be always together—when heart and hand united, and yet separate, they should go along the varied paths of life, mutually enjoying the sunshine, and cheering each other in the shade.

As the picture rose up to the eye of hope, and fancy watered the flowers of the future, Louisa once or twice raised her beautiful confiding eyes to her lover's face, and read in it a promise of happiness that she felt sure would never be belied; and Morton, as if he read every thought that was passing within, and sought to confirm the happy confident dream of fancy, laid his hand gently upon hers without uttering a word, but with the silent voice of the eyes, more convincing than oaths or protestations.

When they reached the rectory, strange to say, both were more at ease in their demeanor to each other than they had been when alone. Dr. Western knew their love, and they were aware that Mrs. Evelyn knew it too, so there was no need of concealment, and there was none. They were both too bright and fine minded, indeed, to let the passion in their hearts obtrude itself upon the notice of others—but yet it was pleasant, very pleasant, so to feel, and so to act, beneath the eyes of those who knew and approved; and the quiet simple dinner at the rectory passed over in calm and pleasant conversation, natural, straight-forward, true, affording a strange contrast to the somewhat labored and artificial

sort of life which had established itself at Mallington House since Mrs. Charlton had become its mistress.

As soon as dinner was over, Dr. Western proposed to his young friend that they should set out upon their walk; and having taken their hats and sticks, they issued forth from the rectory, and bent their steps towards the bridge. It was a calm and placid evening, with the sun already low behind the trees, though where the woody screen fell away in parts, the glowing sky beyond showed that the orb of day was still above the horizon. The river lay calm and flooded with light, beneath them, as they passed over towards the gates of the park, and as they paused for a moment to gaze down upon the reflection of the banks in the water, they saw a boat pushed across from one side of the stream to the other, above half a mile lower down. There was nothing, however, to attract their attention in the appearance of the boat, and after a few words on the beauty of the scene, they pursued their way through the gates up towards the hall. Their conversation as they went seemed grave and earnest: more than once the clergyman and his companion stopped; and the outstretched finger and eager look showed that the subject discussed was one of interest to both. At length, however, when within about five hundred yards of the house, they turned from their course, and bent their steps towards the park-keeper's cottage, which they reached just as the sun set. Opening the door, without ceremony, Dr. Western led the way in, and looked around; but the only person the little room contained was Mrs. Edmonds, busily engaged in preparing supper for her husband and children. She smiled and courtesyed on seeing the rector; and, in reply to his question, said that Edmonds was up at the hall, having gone to speak with Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, in regard to some men who had been seen prowling about. Dr. Western sat down for a minute or two, and inquired in a careless tone for his young friends, Lucy and John.

"Oh, John is tending the fowls," replied the mother; "and Lucy has gone down with a few eggs to poor Janet Hazlewood: she is late this evening. I wish she would come back."

"She should be in before dark, Mrs. Edmonds," said Dr. Western, in a grave tone; "and as you say that there are strange men about the place, if you would take my advice, you would send her brother with her for a day or two, whenever she goes out."

"I will, sir," replied the park-keeper's wife.

She looked earnestly in the rector's face, as if there were questions she would fain have asked; but either from timidity, or some vague apprehension, she did not put them; and soon after Dr. Western and his young companion bade her good evening, and walked back towards the hall. It was now nearly dark, and a twinkling star was here and there appearing in the sky, when suddenly Morton stopped, and said, "I thought I heard a scream."

"I heard a jay in the wood," replied Dr. Western; but nevertheless they waited and listened. No other sound, however, broke the silence of the air, and, after pausing for a few moments, they followed the path to the house. The great door of the hall was opened for them by Edmonds himself; but although they had been down to his house to seek him, neither of the two gentlemen seemed to have any particular matter to communicate, for they merely told him to bring them a light into the library, and turned their steps thither themselves.

"I will see him to-morrow," said Dr. Western, "and tell him privately, when I can admonish him a little; for though an excellent man, there is a certain degree of sternness about him which might drive the poor child to further imprudence, if not to evil."

A minute after Edmonds entered with a light, and merely saying to Morton in a respectful tone that he would wait till that gentleman was at leisure, for he wished to speak with him for a moment, the park-keeper retired and shut the door. The dim light of the tallow candle which had been brought penetrated with difficulty the obscurity of the large old fashioned room, and glared faintly upon the backs of innumerable volumes on the shelves. Dr. Western, however, walked direct to one corner of the library, and took down a thick quarto on which was inscribed the words "History of ——shire."

"Oh, I have seen that, my dear sir," said Morton, with a smile; "I looked all through it before I left London, but it throws no light upon that part of the subject."

"What an impatient thing is youth," replied the worthy clergyman, "and how it jumps to conclusions!" and laying down the book upon the long table, he opened it and turned over several pages. Besides the printed matter which it contained, there was now displayed upon the broad margin numerous annotations, written in a small clear hand, and each signed by a single name. Between the leaves, too, were several scraps of written paper, some of which Morton barely looked at and passed over; but at one he paused, and read the whole contents with great attention, and then, turning to Dr. Western, he shook him by the hand, saying, "This is all that could be desired, indeed! How, in the name of good fortune, did you discover it, my dear sir?"

"By a very simple process," replied Dr. Western; "my predecessor at Mallington was a great antiquarian and genealogist. At his death I bought his books, and amongst the rest there fell into my hands a manuscript account of this part of the country. On looking in that, to see if I could find a clue to what you wanted to obtain, I met with numerous references to this book, and especially to the notes and memoranda of Lord Mallington, after this fashion; 'In history of ——shire, Mallington Park Library: the earl's MS. illustrations.' I came up yesterday morning, and very soon satisfied myself that here was the information required."

"I must have a copy of this!" said Morton; who, like many another man, had fallen into a fit of musing upon a very different subject, while listening to an explanation which he had himself desired. "I suppose that it would be hardly justifiable to take the original."

"I do not see why," replied Dr. Western; "but as a copy will do as well, you had better keep on the right side. We will get a pen and ink, and then half an hour will suffice to transcribe it."

Dr Western moved towards the door as he

spoke, but ere he reached it, Edmonds, the park-keeper, entered with a face a little pale, and that expression in his eyes which can only be called intense anxiety. "I am afraid, sir, I must go away," he said, addressing Morton, "for my boy has just come up to tell me that Lucy is not yet at home—I don't understand it, sir—I must go and see."

He evidently strove to speak calmly, but the father's apprehensions would have way, and his voice trembled, and his lip quivered, while he mentioned the intelligence he had received. Dr. Western and Morton looked at each other with a grave and meaning glance; and Morton, closing the book before them, said, in a low tone of voice, to the rector, "We can do this to-morrow. Let us go with him. He may need support and assistance."

Dr. Western nodded his head, and, turning towards the park-keeper, said, in as easy a tone as he could assume, "We will go with you, Edmonds; but don't make yourself uneasy, my good man. Your wife told us that Lucy had gone down to poor old Janet Hazlewood's. Something may have occurred to detain her."

The man looked earnestly in Dr. Western's face, but he made no reply, for there was suspicion in his heart which he did not dare utter to any one else till it grew into certainty. The good old housekeeper, who had followed him into the hall, took the candle and closed the door after they had gone out; and, directing their course across the park towards a spot where the trees came nearly down to the river side, about two hundred yards' distance from the gates, they turned towards the marshy piece of ground where Williams and Lucy Edmonds had met the day before.

"Is there no other path she could have taken in coming home," asked Morton, speaking to Edmonds, who had not uttered a word since they had left the hall; but with his eyes bent forward to see if he could catch a glimpse of her coming form through the darkness of the night, had gone on in silence a few steps before the two gentlemen.

"She might take the gravel walk there that runs through the trees above," said Edmonds, "but I don't think it likely, sir."

"Then I will go that way," said Morton; "where does it join the other path?"

"Close by the osiers, sir," answered the park-keeper; and Morton, turning away, hurried on to the spot where the gravel walk which Edmonds had mentioned entered the thicker wood, and then pursued it as fast as he could go till it came to the side of the swamp. During the last thirty or forty yards, he could hear the voices of Dr. Western and the park-keeper speaking earnestly together, but they ceased as soon as he joined them, and examining the ground to the right and the left as they proceeded, the whole party walked on till they came to the park-wall. There was no gate nor door at that spot, but a little flight of wooden steps up one side of the wall and down the other, soon brought them to the sandy lane beyond where two or three cottages were seen by the side of the road. The yellow light was gleaming out from the windows of more than one of these lowly habitations, and advancing to a door that stood exactly opposite, Edmonds opened it and went in, followed close by Dr. Western and Mr. Morton. The park-keeper cast a quick and eager glance around into every corner of the room; but Lucy Edmonds was not there. There was an old and sickly woman sitting in a large wicker-chair by the side of the little fireplace, and another woman of the same class about forty years of age busily making her some tea; but the form he looked for did not meet the poor man's eye, and his heart sunk.

"So Lucy is not here, good dame?" he said, speaking to the sick woman, as both the tenants of the cottage turned round in some surprise at the entrance of so numerous a party.

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Edmonds," said Dame Hazlewood, "she's gone home."

"She's been gone well nigh an hour," said the other woman.

Edmonds pressed his two hands tight together, but uttered not a word. Yet the expression of anguish and alarm in his face instantly struck the woman who had last spoke, and she exclaimed, "Has the poor dear not come home?"

"No," answered Edmonds; "no, nor is she on the way."

"Perhaps you did not take the same path, Mr. Edmonds," replied the younger woman; "you might pass very close to each other without knowing it. I'm sure as I came down an hour or so ago, I should have never known that any one was along the other walk, if young Mr. Latimer had not come through the trees, and said, "Is that you, Jack?"

"Mr. Latimer is sick in bed at Brown's cottage, my good lady," said Morton, advancing. "You must be mistaken."

"Oh, no, sir," answered Dame Hazlewood's friend. "I saw him with my own eyes. He was oddly dressed, to be sure, as if he didn't wish to be known; but I'd swear to him anywhere."

"I think there must be an error," said Dr. Western; but before he could conclude the sentence, Edmonds, with a flashing eye and a burning cheek, broke in upon his speech, exclaiming, "No, no, no! It was he, sure enough. The villain has robbed me of my child—I know all about it. He has corrupted her heart, and condemned her soul; and God's curse and her father's be upon both their heads!"

Dr. Western laid his hand upon his arm, saying, with a grave brow and solemn tone, "Forbear, forbear!"

"I cannot, sir—I cannot!" cried Edmonds, furiously. "He has made her lie to me; he has perverted as pure and good a girl as ever lived. She has had warning—she has had counsel—she has had her father's commands; but she has neither honored his nor God's. All by the persuasion of this black villain! Curses upon him—ay, and upon her too, and may they light upon my head if ever I see her again! I will go home—I will go home, and break my poor wife's heart with this news," and, without waiting for remonstrance or reproof, he flung out of the cottage, crossed the road, mounted the stile, and entered the park.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Morton and the clergyman stood silent in the cottage for several moments after Edmonds had left them; the countenance of each was grave and sad; but though that of the rector, perhaps, expressed more sorrow, his companion's showed traces of anger and indignation in the contracted brow and flushed cheek.

"This young man is incorrigible, I fear," said Morton, after a pause. "With such warnings as he has had in various ways, to see him take the first moment of returning health to ruin an innocent girl and break her father's heart, shows a spirit too corrupt and perverted to admit even the hope of reformation."

"We must always hope," replied Dr. Western, "but this indeed is very bad. I know not well what is to be done; for in order to rescue this unhappy girl from his hands, if she be inclined to stay with him, we ought to have her father's sanction."

"Had we not better follow him to his house?" asked Morton. "Perhaps, by reason and admonition, my dear sir, you might induce the poor man to think better of this affair, and take the only means that can be devised for saving his child. They cannot have taken her far."

"It is in vain to talk to him to-night," said Dr. Western. "His mind is in a state that will not bear it; and, whether the law will justify me or not, I must take his consent for granted, and on my own responsibility issue a warrant against those who are supposed to have carried off this unhappy girl. We cannot tell as yet whether she has been wholly consenting, and at all events, being under age, her father can claim her."

"I am sure it was the young gentleman from Mallington House," joined in the woman who was in attendance upon Dame Hazlewood; "that I can swear to any where."

"Then come up to the rectory early to-morrow, Mrs. Wilson," said Dr. Western; "I will issue the warrant to-night at all risks, but in the mean time inquire amongst your neighbors as to which way Lucy and her seducer went, and if you gain any information let me know. They could not have gone out by the great gates or we must have met them."

"And they did not come over the stile, I am sure," said Mrs. Wilson, "for the door hadn't been shut two minutes before you came in, sir."

"Do you remember having seen a boat cross the river?" asked Morton.

Dr. Western bowed his head with a meaning look, but merely replied "We had better get home as soon as possible. Remember to send me any information you may obtain, Mrs. Wilson, without a moment's delay."

The good woman promised to obey, and the two gentlemen quitting the cottage, returned through the park, conversing over what had taken place.

"This is sad, very sad indeed," said Dr. Western; "and these are the things, my dear young friend, which form the most painful parts of a clergyman's existence; to see every admonition and every effort to check the wild course of passion and folly by the restraints of religion, vain and empty; to see the young go on in vice and wickedness, and the old often die in impenitence and sin; to witness men heaping on their heads misery and wretchedness, in this world and the next; and to commit to the earth from which we sprung the body of those for whom we dare hardly hope for salvation hereafter. They are every-day occurrences and very bitter."

"They must be so, indeed," replied Morton. "but yet there must be many subjects of consolation, too. Some you must be the means of saving, some of reclaiming and leading to repentance."

"Too few," answered Dr. Western, with a sigh, "far too few; and when I come to ask myself—if such vices and crimes produce feelings of grief and even of anger in a sinful mortal creature like myself, what they must be in the eyes of a being pure, wise, and holy like God—I feel almost overwhelmed at the contemplation; and the burden of the great responsibility undertaken by any one who attempts to teach and lead his fellow creatures seems far more vast and weighty than, in the light short-sightedness of our hearts, we are inclined to think it. I believe that if I had had a due sense of all the important duties and great requirements of an ecclesiastic's life, in those early days when I was ordained, I should have shrunk from the task, from a consciousness of my own inadequacy. But, alas! my dear sir, men enter the church as an occupation, as a profession, as a means of livelihood or of advancement; and rarely, very rarely, consider duly what it is they put their hand to. Here, this poor girl, Lucy, she has been a regular attendant upon my church. I have spoken with her and her family often in private. I have endeavored to give them on all occasions such counsel and admonition as I thought would lead them right; and yet, when I find her quitting the paths of virtue, disregarding her parents' commands, and forgetting the precepts of her God, I cannot but fear that I have not done enough, and that a share of this sin may rest with me for negligence."

"Nay, nay, my dear friend," replied Morton; "such, I am sure, is not the case. You must remember that prophets and preachers from the beginning of time have striven in vain to banish sin from the world, and restrain the force of human passion. All that we can do is to labor as far as we have strength; and very often that labor will be unsuccessful. But perhaps," he continued, willing to lead the conversation away from the points that were most painful to his companion, "we may be judging harshly of this poor girl—we may be even doing wrong to Alfred Latimer himself. That good woman may be mistaken, or if not, some violence may have been used. Do you not remember I thought I heard a scream as we were walking from the park-keeper's cottage up to the hall?"

"I do, I do," answered Mr. Western, "and though it may seem strange to say so, I would rather have it as you suppose than otherwise—I would rather have this poor Lucy injured in body than in spirit—I would rather that the wicked should add another crime to many gone before, than that one hitherto pure and innocent should fall into vice."

"I can understand you perfectly, my dear friend," replied Morton; "but in regard to

Alfred Latimer, do not let us give way too much to prejudice. This Mrs. Wilson may, as I have said, be in error. She saw the person whom she suspects to have been him but for a moment. It was nearly dark when she met him; he has no good reputation with the country people any more than with ourselves; and the resemblance may have been fanciful entirely. This morning he was certainly ill in bed; and I think it will be best, while you return home and take measures for apprehending those who have committed this outrage, for me to walk up to the common, and ascertain whether he be really there or not. Till that is ascertained our dear Louisa had better not be informed of what has occurred, as it would only fill her with painful suspicions, which after all may be unfounded."

Dr. Western offered some opposition to his young companion's plan, alleging that he might involve himself in a quarrel with Alfred Latimer, which might have very painful consequences; but Morton, sure of his own calmness and self-command, persisted in his design, and they walked on together towards the little town of Mallington, where all was calm and tranquil, the lights shining forth from the windows, and many of the inhabitants standing out before their doors, or strolling through the street to enjoy the sweet air of a night scarcely touched with the approach of autumn. The moon was rising large and round, as the two gentlemen crossed the bridge; and her light struggling with some clouds, as she ascended the arch of heaven, fell in patches of wavy silver upon the waters, and on the broad leaves of the water lilies that here and there spread out from the banks; but neither Morton nor Dr. Western had any inclination to pause and gaze at a prospect which at another time they might have stayed long to contemplate. The heart of each felt too dark and gloomy for the beauty of the scene to find its way in; and hurrying on into Mallington, Morton left the worthy rector at the inn to summon the constables of the place, and take such other measures as were necessary for the restoration of Lucy Edmonds to her home, while he himself walked on up the hill, and with a rapid pace bent his steps to the cottage of the Widow Brown. As he went he met several men returning from work at a distance, and when the moon shone out so that they could see the general appearance of the gentleman whom they passed, they civilly gave him goodnight, with that decent respect for superior station which was then general, and is not altogether extinguished in England; but the clouds still from time to time completely covered the fair planet, and even the sandy path from the high road to the cottage was then with difficulty to be distinguished.

At the door of Widow Brown's house Morton knocked before he entered, and at first no answer was returned; but upon repeating the summons the voice of the old woman herself was heard in a harsh tone exclaiming "Come in! Why the devil do you stand knocking there?"

On Morton's entrance she seemed both surprised and annoyed, but changed her tone to a more civil one as she asked what was his *pleasure.*

"I wish to see Mr. Latimer, my good dame," replied Morton; "shall I find him in the next room?"

Mother Brown hesitated, and probably, if she had possessed any means of preventing her visitor from satisfying himself, she would have said that the young gentleman was asleep. Certain it is that lie first rose to her lips; but remembering that she was alone, and could not stop Mr. Morton from going on into the adjoining room if he thought fit, she replied "He has gone out upon the common, sir, to take a little walk in the moonlight. He thought it would do him good, poor gentleman."

With this confirmation of the suspicions which had been entertained against Mrs. Charlton's son, Morton did not think fit to ask any more questions, but merely answering, "Well, tell him I called to see him," he turned and left the cottage.

There had been a light within, and a cloud was just coming over the moon, the silvery edge resting half over her disc affording a gleam of light, which lasted but a moment, however, till the dark vapor swept across and cast its shadows upon the earth. During that moment Morton thought that he caught sight of a man's head and shoulders just rising above the edge of the neighboring pit; but he was not one easily to apprehend any danger, and he walked quietly on, merely noticing that the figure disappeared more suddenly than could be accounted for by the increased darkness produced hy the cloud; for the brightness of the sky around afforded sufficient light to see, though indistinctly. Scarcely had he passed the spot, however, where the man's head and shoulders had appeared, when he heard a sound like gravel falling from the bank into the pit below, under the tread of some one springing up, and he was instinctively turning round towards the side whence the noise proceeded, when he received a violent blow on the head which laid him stunned and bleeding on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

What a strange thing it would be if, even for a brief period, we could see at one glance all the manifold operations that are going on around us, and are destined to affect the course of our life—to bring us weal or woe, to lead us to right or wrong, to raise us to fortune, or to sink us in adversity. How many minute and apparently trifling causes should we see working their way towards us; swelling as they come, like the avalanche, from the size of a pebble to the magnitude of a mountain; first rolling slowly, as if they would never have force to continue their course, and then sweeping on like lightning, and overwhelming all obstructions. Such a view of the causes which form our fate, however, is wisely and beneficently denied to mortal man, and it is only when deeds have been done and paths chosen, when events have occurred and consequences are inevitable, that we can turn our eyes towards the sources of the things that are, and trace the stream of circumstances that surround us, back towards the fountain head. Such also must be my course in regard to the

events of the night of which we have just been speaking; and we must look back for an hour or two, dear reader, to the period when about sunset a boat crossed the river from the Mallington side to the sedgy piece of ground, which we have more than once alluded to as that where Lucy Edmonds first met her lover's daring and criminal companion.

The boat reached the shore, and was drawn into a little sort of muddy creek where several large old willows hid it from observation. There, one of the two men which it contained jumped on shore; and the other, stretching himself out in the bottom of the punt, laid his head upon the raised part of the stern, and seemed to dispose himself to sleep. The other—in whom it required an eye well acquainted with his person to recognise Alfred Latimer—walked on, winding amongst the osiers, and choosing the firmer parts of the ground till he reached the path. Thence, after looking around him for a minute or two, he crossed through the shrubs and underwood, to the other footway, down which, as we have seen, Mr. Morton had come in the search for Lucy. There he paused for some minutes, looking up the path with an impatient glance, and muttering to himself with an oath, "Jack Williams is devilish late—I wonder what is keeping him. If Lucy should come first, I doubt that I should get her to the boat. It will soon be getting dark, and she won't stay out late I'm sure. Hark! there's a step," and hurrying through the trees again, he exclaimed, incautiously, "Is that you, Jack?"

The moment he beheld Dame Wilson, however, he withdrew before he thought she could notice him, and then listened for her retreating footfalls till he was certain she must have left the spot. He then turned along the path for a few steps in the direction of the hall, retrod his path again, and was once more wheeling round, when, without having heard any one approach, he found Jack Williams by his side.

"Why this isn't the place, Mr. Latimer," said Williams in a low voice; "if you don't mind what you're about, she'll pass without your seeing her; quick, get through the trees, and look out on that other road.

"Come along, then," said Alfred Latimer, "I did not know which path it was upon."

"No, go yourself first," replied Williams, in the same quick manner; "try to persuade her first, gently, before we use force; I will be close at hand."

The young gentleman, following this counsel, crossed once more through the trees, while Williams hid himself in the brushwood and listened. Several minutes elapsed, however, before Lucy herself appeared, and Alfred Latimer was beginning to think that she must have passed, when he suddenly caught sight of her coming with faint and agitated steps along the side of the marsh. He instantly sprang forward to meet her; but though joy at seeing him again was upon poor Lucy's countenance, her first words were—"Oh! Mr. Latimer, I promised never to meet you again."

"You have done so by accident, Lucy," said Alfred Latimer, taking her hand, and pressing it in his; they cannot blame you; and, indeed, if you would be wise, and loved me as I once thought you did, no one would have any right to blame you, for you would now be my wife."

"Oh, Alfred!" replied Lucy, looking up in his face with a reproachful glance, "you know too well"—but she did not finish the sentence, and he went on.

"You would have me believe that you do love me, Lucy," he said; "but how can I think so when, for a mere rash whim of your father's—a hatred of me without a cause—you not only make me miserable, but drive me to all sorts of rash things. See what your unkindness has already brought about. Have I not quarrelled with my mother, quitted her house, gone to London, half ruined myself, and then, in coming down like a madman to seek you because I was informed that your father was going to marry you to another, have I not been dashed almost to pieces!"

Poor Lucy wept, but through her tears she answered, "No, no, Alfred; I will never marry another."

"Then be mine now, dearest Lucy," replied Alfred Latimer, pressing her closer to him. "We have now the opportunity. Do not let us lose it. And then my heart will be at rest, and no one can tease you any more to be another's wife, when you love me. I have a boat here close at hand, which will carry us across the river in two minutes. Then I have got the pretty cottage for you that stands away at the back of the common, where you can be quiet and peaceable all night, and to-morrow we can go away to a distance and be married immediately—come, dear Lucy, come!"

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Lucy Edmonds, striving to free herself from his arms as he would have drawn her towards the river-side. "I must not—I dare not, Alfred."

"What, when I have risen from a sick bed to come and ask you at the risk of life!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, impetuously. "Is this love, Lucy? Is this affection?"

"You know I love you," she answered, "but my father—my mother—I cannot, I ought not—oh, I do love you truly, but—"

At that moment Williams appeared suddenly from amongst the trees, and though his touch was not rough as he took her by the arm, the surprise and terror of the moment called a scream from her lips.

"Come, come, Miss Edmonds," he said, "there is no use of resisting—one can see well enough how your heart leads you, and it is too late to fight with it now. Besides, you must come; Mr. Latimer has promised to marry you in my hearing, and he will keep his word. Do not keep us here till people come, and we get into a row, where some of us may lose our lives. Do kindly what you must do, and think what would befall if your father were to come up just now."

As he spoke he aided Latimer in drawing her along towards the boat, but his last words seemed to have more effect on Lucy Edmonds than any thing else. Before, she had resisted, though but feebly; but at the thought of her father's appearance at that moment, and all the consequences that might ensue, she murmured, "Oh, Heaven forbid!" and looked wildly round, suffering them to lead her on without farther opposition. In another minute she was seated in

the punt, which was immediately pushed off by the man Brown, and was soon in the midst of the river. Supported by Alfred Latimer, she sat with her hands covering her eyes, and the tears streaming through her fingers as the boat glided over the checkered surface of the waters, now rippling in the moonlight, now shadowed by the clouds. It took but a minute or two to cross, and as soon as the punt touched the ground, and the man Brown had jumped out and moored it by the chain, Alfred Latimer carried rather than led the poor girl to the shore, and then endeavored to support her trembling form upon his arm. But Lucy could hardly stand, and was still less able to walk, so that they were obliged to pause for a minute or two, nearly at the spot where Louisa Charlton had plunged in to save the unhappy girl's brother, while Alfred Latimer endeavored to soothe her agitation, and Williams brought some water from the stream to sprinkle in her face lest she should faint. They had not been long there when they heard the sound of voices from the other side. Lucy recognised her father's tones; but it was too late now she thought to hesitate or to resist. The die was cast; her fate for weal or woe was sealed, and the voice which had once been so pleasant to her ear, now brought nothing but terror; yet it was the terror which gives strength, and not which overpowers, and with a great effort she said, "I can go! I can go! Oh, Heaven! do not let them find us."

With her lover supporting her on one side, and Williams on the other—while the man Brown followed lest his aid should be needed—Lucy advanced along the road which led towards the back of the common, with her heart beating fearfully and her breath coming short. As they began to ascend the hill, however, she was obliged to pause again, and clinging to the arm of Alfred Latimer, now her only trust and support, she leaned her head upon his shoulder, saying, "A moment, Alfred, a moment—I will go on again in a moment."

They all stopped in silence, and as they waited the gay sound of village mirth reached them from Mallington.

Oh, how sad it came upon poor Lucy's ear! It seemed to tell her with a prophetic voice that the light laugh, the joyous merriment, was no more to be her portion upon earth—that she was given over to heart-sinking despondency, to self-reproach and sadness—that the peace and the pleasure, the calm night, the contented day, the spirit at rest, and the bosom without care, were all gone for ever! But there is something even in such dark and powerful convictions which gives a vigor, though it be the vigor of despair. She was anxious to fly from all sounds that she had loved, for they seemed to ring the knell of departed days, and saying, in a low tone, "Now, Alfred, I can go," she resumed her way up the hill.

The walk was a long one, for the cottage which Williams had hired for Alfred Latimer was at least two miles distant from Mallington; but Lucy Edmonds stopped no more. She spoke not, indeed; for she was full of the dark thoughts of her fate, and even love could not yet light up hope's lamp again. Latimer strove to cheer her, talked lightly of the future, spoke soothing and endearing words, vowed endless tenderness and affection; and Lucy still clung to him with an eager anxious clasp, which expressed too well how strongly she felt that he was all that was left to her on earth. She knew not to what a reed she trusted.

At length the cottage door was reached, but the windows were all dark and cheerless. There was no light within any more than in her own heart, and though the leaves of the woodbine and the rose climbed over the little trellised porch, and reached their fibres up to the thatch, they seemed like nightshade to poor Lucy Edmonds, as she waited while Williams drew the key from his pocket and opened the door. He had had everything prepared, however, with some care and neatness. Candles stood upon the table, which were soon lighted, showing a neatly-furnished room and various provisions upon the shelves and tables around. Such attention to her comfort might either have soothed the poor girl's heart, or have shown her that they had calculated with certainty on bringing her there that night; but it was of leaving her father's house she thought, of disobeying his command, of never seeing his face again, of being no longer pressed to her mother's bosom, of the breaking of all the fond ties of youth, of the loss of all the dear affections of early days—and when she looked around all seemed desolation.

Alfred Latimer led her to a chair, and seated her with her hand in his; but Williams, approaching one of the shelves, took down a bottle of wine, and pouring some out into a glass gave it to her, saying in the kindly tone which sailors generally use to the weak and young, "Come, take that, Miss Edmonds, you are tired and faint. It will be all well in a day or two, and then when you are his wife your father will forget and forgive, and see things very differently. Come, don't vex yourself; for you may be very happy if you like."

Lucy took the wine and drank it. She would have done anything that they bade her; but the moment after, though the hopes that Williams presented to her mind cheered her for an instant, the voice of the man Brown, who had just entered, made her start and turn round with terror.

"I shouldn't mind a glass, too," he said, "for it's a long walk. Come, pour us out some, Jack," and his words and his appearance brought a new source of apprehension into Lucy's mind. What were these companions of the man she loved! Who were these familiar friends with whom he consorted! Were these the companions of the son of a high race! Were these the persons he trusted and esteemed!

Williams, however, answered nothing to the ruffian's speech, but spoke eagerly for a few minutes in a low voice to Alfred Latimer, urging him apparently to some course which he did not think fit to pursue. "Well," he said at length, "you are not right — but we had better go. Only remember your promise, Mr. Latimer. Come, Brown," he continued, and seeing the man helping himself to the wine, he gave him a terrible oath, and pushed him out of the cottage.

Lucy Edmonds was left alone with Alfred Latimer. She gazed for a moment or two on his face with a look of deep, earnest, anxious inquiry, then cast herself upon his bosom with

a bitter and overpowering burst of tears; but Alfred Latimer was a villain, and without compassion.

In the meantime Williams and his companion, Brown, mounted the little bank under which the cottage lay, and came upon the common above. There was a small public-house at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, at the door of which Brown stopped, declaring that, as he had been bilked of his wine, the other should treat him to a glass of spirits; and, going in, he tossed off more than half a pint of the liquid fire, which is but too readily to be found in such places, partly at his own expense, partly at that of Williams. He was inclined to stop and gossip with some loose characters whom they found in the parlor; but the superior ruffian with whom he was associated for the time, suspecting that their adventure of that night might not be long a secret if he remained, would not suffer him to do so, but forced him out, after a halt of about five minutes, and took the way with him towards his mother's hut. The man had been drinking before, and the spirits he had taken had some effect, not in inebriating, but in raising his dull and obtuse nature into something approaching a brutal kind of energy.

"Hang me," he said, as they walked along, "if I should not like to have a spree of some kind to-night. I wish it was the pheasant season, I would clear out Master Edmond's covers for him while he's piping after his daughter."

"Go home, and go to bed, you fool," said William, in a surly tone. "When you do anything of that kind, have your head clear, and don't go drinking and then talking as loud as a babbling old woman in a passion."

The other man felt his own inferiority sufficiently to be silent, though he was not very well pleased with his companion's words; and thus they proceeded till they came to the clump of old fir trees, about a couple of hundred yards distant from Mother Brown's dwelling, where her son caught hold of Williams's arm, saying in a lower tone than he had used before, "D—n me, if there isn't somebody walking up to the house! If it's some one come after young Latimer, this job will all be blown."

"Some of the servants, I dare say," replied Williams, looking towards the house, and catching the indistinct outline of a figure coming from the side of Mallington. "I hope your mother won't be fool enough to say he's out."

"Why, what would you have her say?" asked her son.

"Can't she say he's asleep?" said Williams; but just then, a gleam of moonlight passing over the figure they had seen, he added, "It doesn't look like a servant either."

"I know who it is," said Tom Brown; "d—n him he is always meddling, and I'll break his head some day."

"If you mean Gibbs, you are mistaken, Tom," replied Williams, "he is safe enough, that I'll answer for."

"I know what I mean," rejoined the other, in a mysterious tone, "and I can tell you what, if that fellow finds that the young cove is out when everybody thinks he's lying ill at my dam's, you'll have the whole story ferreted out, and the lass taken back to her father before to-morrow morning. But come into the gravel pit, Jack; and wait till he is gone."

Walking silently along the path, they approached the house, and descended into a pit which lay at the side of the road from Mother Brown's cottage to Mallington. There Williams seated himself at the bottom of the bank; but Brown climbed up till he could see over, and his companion remarked that he sought out a large stone, which he held tight in his right hand, holding by the turf above with his left.

"Come, no nonsense, Tom," said Williams, "let us hear what you are going to be after."

"Nothing; but look out," replied Tom Brown; and immediately added, "he's gone in."

A pause of about half a minute ensued, and then the ruffian above said in a low voice to him below, "He has come out again. He has found it all out, or I'm—;" and at the same moment, he drew himself back as if about to descend.

There is a consciousness of the growing weight of crime which at times will oppress the most wicked, and Williams felt it at that moment. "Come down, Tom," he said, "no more work to night. We have enough upon our hands for once." But almost at the same moment Brown scrambled up without reply, and his companion heard a blow and a fall. All was silent, however; and, springing up the bank like a squirrel, Williams stood upon the common just as the moon was coming out again from behind the quick passing cloud. Tom Brown was standing at three or four paces distance; and Morton, with his hat knocked off and lying at some distance, was stretched upon the ground, with his face upon the grass.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The appearance of Dr. Western in the village-inn, and his immediately sending for the constable of Mallington, fluttered good poor Mrs. Pluckrose a great deal, nor was her agitation diminished when the worthy clergyman, having taken his seat in a vacant parlor, proceeded to inquire particularly into her knowledge of a certain Jack Williams, and of his usual haunts and places of resort.

"Why, bless you, sir!" replied the widow; "I know nothing of the man. He never comes here, not he. He knows better, except it be to see somebody lodging in the house, and that I can't help. However, it's only once that he's done that, which was this blessed night; and he and the fellow Gibbs got drunk together—that's to say Gibbs got quite drunk, and he a little worse for liquor. But I could not stop them, you know, sir; they would have the punch, and indeed I did not take notice of how much they had. Betsey made it and carried it up."

"My good lady," replied Dr. Western, "do not begin to defend yourself before you are accused. The fact is, a very wrong and improper act has been committed this night; and, from information which I have received, I am induced to believe that this man Williams has had some share in it. My questions, therefore, were merely directed to ascertain where he is likely to be found, in order that he himself may be questioned. I must also speak with this Mr.

Gibbs, and I wish you would call him down, if he is in the house."

"Lord bless your reverence! he is as drunk as a beast," answered Mrs. Pluckrose. "I never saw no one drunker. However, he's quiet in his cups, that's one thing, and as sound asleep as a pig in a sty."

Dr. Western mused, for from Morton's information he had learned that Gibbs had discovered the meeting of Williams and poor Lucy Edmonds, and had hoped to obtain some farther intelligence of the traveler. After a moment's thought, however, he continued his interrogation of the worthy landlady, saying "You tell me this man Williams was here to-night. How long is it since he left your house, Mrs. Pluckrose?"

"It can hardly be an hour, sir, I should think," answered the hostess.

"Which way did he go?" demanded the rector.

Mrs. Pluckrose put her finger to her temple, as people do when their brain has got a little confused under any circumstances of temporary agitation, and they wish to steady their thoughts, seeming to fancy that it can be done by mechanical pressure. "Oh dear! now I remember," she exclaimed at length; "he went up the village, sir, towards the hill. He came down and told me that Mr. Gibbs was drunk, and that he wouldn't drink any more, for fear he should be so too. I looked which way he went, and he turned to the right."

"You are sure he did not go over the bridge?" asked Dr. Western.

"He didn't seem as if he was going," replied Mrs. Pluckrose; "but Bill, the ostler, can tell more, for he was standing outside—Here, Bill! Bill! Where's Bill, Betsey?—send him in."

Bill, however, only confirmed Mrs. Pluckrose's account. In his estimation, as well as that of many other persons of Mallington, Jack Williams had grown somewhat of a great man since he had returned from sea, although he had previously been a very little one. The process of this transformation is very easily explained. It was brought about by the same means that affect the opinion of almost every human being, in regard to a fellow man,—I say almost every human being, I do not say all; for there are some few—perhaps one in forty or fifty thousand—who resist such influences. The fact is, that Williams had come back with a good deal of money, whereas he had gone away with none. Conceive what a vast accession of good qualities this simple fact implied. There is no use denying it—wit, wisdom, honor, honesty, grace, virtue, to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of the human race, lie in the small compass of a purse. A poor rogue, in the opinion of almost every one, is the worst of all kinds of rogues; and a rich rogue—Heaven bless the mark! was there ever such a thing heard of?

However, Jack Williams came home with plenty of money, and spent it with discreet liberality. The ostler, therefore, spoke of him reverentially, and called him Mr. Williams, with due decorum. He assured Dr. Western that Mr. Williams had gone up the street in an easy kind of way, as if he were going home.

"And where is his home?" asked Dr. Western, not yet satisfied.

"Why, you see, your reverence," replied the ostler, "he did use to lodge at Mother Brown's upon the common, till the young gentleman had the accident, and was taken in there; but since then I hear he's got a room at Pickett's, in the lane just opposite Mallington House."

"Have you seen Mr. Latimer since his return?" was Dr. Western's next question.

"Oh dear, no, sir," answered the ostler: "he's seed nobody, as I knows of. He is very bad, they say."

"Oh dear, no," replied Dr. Western; "he is doing quite well."

While this conversation had been going on Mrs. Pluckrose had been standing by the table, twisting the corner of her clean apron into as many curious forms as a sheet of writing paper is folded into by a certain ingenious gentleman who perambulates the streets of London, but she now ventured to join in for the purpose of informing the rector that Mr. Latimer had certainly seen Jack Williams, inasmuch as she had seen the latter in Mr. Goree's shop, purchasing some cravats for him. While she was conveying this important piece of intelligence the constable made his appearance: a keen stout man, with a hawk's nose and a pair of sharp bright eyes, not altogether parallel in their direction. The degree of obliquity which they possessed could hardly be called a squint, for two straight lines, one drawn from the pupil of each, would not have met for some ten or twelve yards; but nevertheless those two straight lines would have met ultimately, and the effect was a certain cunning and not very satisfactory expression, which conveyed to the mind of the beholder, perhaps wrongly, the idea of a shrewd but not very sincere character. His own interests, of which he had a very tolerable notion, generally kept his conduct indeed more straightforward than his look; and, trusting to this tie, Dr. Western and the other magistrates in the neighborhood generally relied upon him with confidence; nor had they ever hitherto had occasion to repent of so doing. It is true Edmonds, the park-keeper, and the gamekeepers of the late Earl of Mallington had more than once complained of his negligence in dealing with certain suspicious characters; but Harry Soames had always a good excuse in the fact that nothing had been proved against the persons they grumbled at, and that before he could meddle he must have something better than their mere suspicions to go upon.

In the present instance, Dr. Western communicated to him what had taken place, directed him to take two or three stout fellows from the village, and, without the loss of a moment, to use his best endeavors for discovering where poor Lucy Edmonds had been taken to. He further ordered him, if successful in his search, to bring her to the rectory, whatever the hour might be, and, moreover, to apprehend any one whom he had reason to believe was a participant in her abduction from her father's protection, and to lodge them in the cage for the night.

Harry Soames scratched his head at the idea of these vigorous measures; "Well, your reverence knows best," he said, "what's law and what's not, but if every young man was apprehended for playing the fool with a pretty girl, the cage would be desperate full, I've a notion.

I can't help thinking that Miss Lucy's gone willingly enough, though your reverence seems to think not. I've seen young Master Latimer more nor once a-hanging about after her. She was precious fond of him, too, as well she might be of such a young gentleman. Am I to take him up if I find him with her?"

"You are to make no distinction of persons whatsoever," replied Dr. Western, not very well satisfied with his constable's notions of morality. "I suspect, as you do, that Mr. Latimer may have had something to do with this affair, and although I have not sufficient proof of the fact to give you a warrant against him, yet I will furnish you with full authority to act in the manner I have directed, and the responsibility will rest upon me, not upon you. Bring me a pen and ink."

While the man was gone, the rector took from his pocket-book some blank warrants, and though, to say the truth, somewhat puzzled how to fill them up in a case of a character with which he was not accustomed to deal, yet, resolved rather to run the risk of overstepping the law than suffer a great wrong to be committed where he could prevent it, he drew the warrant in the best manner he could devise, and placed it in the constable's hands, repeating his order to lose no time, and adding such information as he thought might direct him in his search.

This being done he issued forth from the inn, and, after gazing up the street to see if Mr. Morton was yet returning, he took his way home to the rectory, where he found that his young friend had not yet arrived. As may be supposed, the events which had occurred and the business in which he had been engaged, had left a grave and melancholy shade upon his countenance which was remarked both by his sister and Miss Charlton. Each was somewhat surprised, too, to see him return alone; and though Louisa did not venture to inquire the cause of Morton's absence, Mrs. Evelyn did. Her brother's reply, that he had gone to make some inquiries, and would soon rejoin them, satisfied the two ladies that nothing had gone amiss in that quarter; but still the anxious and thoughtful look of the worthy old clergyman, the sudden and expectant turn of his head when he heard the gate bell ring, and the unusual degree of restlessness which he displayed, somewhat alarmed both of his fair companions, and showed them clearly that something was wrong, which he did not think fit to explain.

It had been arranged when Mrs. Charlton's carriage had been sent back, that Dr. Western was to walk up with Louisa and Mr. Morton to Mallington House, about ten o'clock, but that hour had not yet arrived when the sound of a vehicle driving up was heard, and in a minute or two after, the rector's servant announced that the chariot had come for Miss Charlton.

"Why, we told them that we would walk," replied Dr. Western, "and Mr. Morton has not yet returned."

"Mr. Morton is up at the house, sir," answered the man, "and not very well, so Jones says."

Louisa's cheek turned very pale; and the good clergyman, feeling for her anxiety, and knowing that few evils are equal to suspense, inquired at once, "What is the matter; did the coachman say?"

"Why, sir, he told me," replied the servant, who had not shut his eyes to the attachment between Miss Charlton and the young gentleman of whom he spoke, "that Mr. Morton had been knocked down upon the common, and had been helped home by a man of the name of Williams. Mr. Nethersole had bled him, and he was better, and begged Jones to say he was not much hurt."

Louisa Charlton had felt anxieties and apprehensions before now. During the last year of her father's life she had had a daily dread upon her, and her love for him she had thought was as great as it was possible to be for any human being: but those sensations were very different from that which she felt now. Her heart sunk and her spirit seemed to ask itself if this were the beginning of a fresh course of sorrows; if the new path which she had opened for herself, and which to the eye of imagination and hope had seemed all bordered with flowers, was already presenting the thorns that are destined to obstruct all human enjoyment. She did not give way, indeed; the paleness of her cheek and a certain apprehensive look in her beautiful eyes, were the only indications which showed to the two kind friends who watched her how deeply she felt. But Dr. Western understood it all, and, laying his hand gently upon her arm, he said "I will go with you, my dear child. I must see into this affair myself. Outrages are becoming somewhat too frequent here, and although I doubt not our young friend is not much hurt, yet measures must be taken for bringing the offenders to justice."

On the way up to Mallington House, which occupied a considerable time from the steepness of the hill, Dr. Western spoke cheerfully to his fair companion, trying to divert her mind from apprehensions for her lover to any other topic. Louisa followed the direction he gave to the conversation, but it was evident from her replies, though they were calm and reasonable, that her mind was still busy with the one engrossing subject, and at length Dr. Western, returning to it boldly, took her hand in his, saying, "Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily, my love. Griefs and anxieties are more or less the portion of every one, but as it is our duty to God to bear them with resignation when they do befall us, so is it our duty to ourselves not to hasten them by anticipation nor increase them by apprehensions."

Louisa replied by assuring him that she strove as far as possible to keep her mind easy, and the moment after the carriage drove through the gates and stopped at the door of the house. We will not pause to analyse poor Louisa's feelings, nor to tell how they varied at every step which that pretty little foot set upon the stairs. In spite of all good Dr. Western's exhortations—in spite of all her own excellent resolutions—Fancy, that incorrigible jade, had been playing all manner of unpleasant tricks with her poor heart, till she had set it fluttering like a new-caught bird; and the tormentor went on till at the drawing-room door Louisa had nearly dropped fainting on the carpet. By a strong effort of the mind, however, she contrived to regain some command over herself, and open-

ing the door, went in. There sat Mrs. Charlton at a table quietly writing a note, with an air of the most complete composure possible—very pretty, very well dressed, and very placid; she was the complete antithesis to all poor Louisa's feelings; and it must be confessed that, though our sweet friend was the least splenetic person in the world, she felt almost provoked, as well as a little ashamed, at the contrast between her own agitation and her step-mother's profound tranquillity.

Intense selfishness is a very excellent thing—in some respects—for those who possess it; for although they may be very sensitive upon the one central spot, yet, at every other point, where all the rest of the world are vulnerable, they are guarded with triple steel. I wonder when Lord Bacon wrote his essay upon the wisdom of the ancients, he did not show that the character of Achilles was a mere allegory of the blind Greek to represent a perfectly selfish man; for there cannot be the slightest doubt that such was the case. Take his whole history and it is evident; first, he was dipped in Styx, that hellish stream which rendered him invulnerable to all the stings and arrows of the general enemy. There was but one point in which he could be wounded, and that was the lowest point of his whole frame, his right heel. What could this mean but that he could not be reached through the head or the heart! This gave him very great advantages over all his companions, and he was able to overcome, and even kill, a great many much better men than himself; but still it did not secure him happiness, nor obtain for him ultimate success. What a fine moral to the allegory!—and at length a Phrygian boy, in a night cap, found out the weak point, and despatched him with a missile!

However, Mrs. Charlton was a perfect Achilles in her way; she was quite invulnerable upon all points that did not effect herself; and although it would not have suited her purposes at all, at this time, to have had Mr. Morton killed outright, yet a little bodily suffering and even danger which might render him more interesting in Louisa's eyes, was far from giving her the slightest concern. She would have gone on writing her note, with the fortitude of a martyr, if Mr. Nethersole had been actually trepanning the skull of her guest in the next room, provided she had been quite sure he would not die under the operation, and spoil all the schemes she fancied she had brought nearly to perfection. It was her part, however, on the present occasion to affect a considerable degree of benevolent interest in Mr. Morton's situation; and as soon as she beheld Louisa, with Dr. Western following somewhat more slowly into the room, she laid down the pen with a look of concern, saying, "I did not like to shock you, my love, with the news; but our poor friend, Mr. Morton, has met with a sad accident; but do not agitate yourself, my dear child, he is doing quite well. Oh! kind Doctor Western, I am glad you have come; Morton will be delighted to see you. Pray go up to him—he is in his dressing-room, and while you are gone I will tell Louisa all about it, for I know she esteems him as much as any of us."

Doctor Western thought more than he chose to say; but following Mrs. Charlton's suggestion, he went up to his young friend; while the worthy mistress of the house proceeded to relate to her step-daughter all the particulars of her lover having been supported back to the house by a man named Williams, wounded and bleeding; dwelling with somewhat cruel minuteness upon details which she could not but feel would inflict bitter anguish upon her auditor.

Hearing voices speaking within, Dr. Western knocked at the dressing-room door before he entered, and on going in found Morton seated in an arm-chair in his dressing-gown, with Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, beside him. The young gentleman's face was pale and his head had a bandage round it, but he received the worthy clergyman with a smile, saying, "Hard blows seem somewhat rife in your neighborhood, my dear doctor, but this will prove of no consequence, I am sure, and I hope that Miss Charlton has not been alarmed."

"A good deal," replied Dr. Western, who thought fit to speak guardedly in the presence of the surgeon, although he was very sure that Mr. Nethersole, in common with the whole village of Mallington, had already arranged the marriage of Mr. Morton and Louisa. "I dare say, however," he continued, "that the report of our good friend here will remove her apprehension, if he can, as I trust, conscientiously tell her there is no danger."

"I see none," replied Mr. Nethersole, rising at the doctor's hint, and moving towards the door, "and I trust in Mr. Morton to find a more tractable patient than Mr. Latimer has proved."

"Stay a moment, Mr. Nethersole," said Morton, "I think that your knowledge of the country, and of what is taking place amongst the people round, may give Dr. Western and myself some insight into the matter which took me up to the common where I received this blow."

"I cannot have you enter into any business to-night, sir," replied Mr. Nethersole, struggling between a certain degree of curiosity and a sense of professional duty. "Perhaps Dr. Western can explain the affair to me, and I dare say you will be able to express it fully to-morrow."

Morton whispered a few words to Dr. Western, who exclaimed, "Yes, yes, he will be able to tell us more than any one. So he was out! Then it is clearly as we thought," and turning to the surgeon, he informed him of all that had taken place in regard to poor Lucy Edmonds, and inquired whether anything had come to his knowledge which might direct them in their search for her. So well, however, had Williams laid his plans, that even to the ears of Mr. Nethersole, which were habitually regaled by all the gossip of the place, not a hint had arrived which could give them any insight into the events of that night; but, relying upon all the various petty sources of information which were at his command, the worthy surgeon promised boldly to bring them tidings of the whole affair by the next morning; adding at the same time, that if he received any intelligence previously, which might serve as a clue to the place where Lucy had been taken, he would immediately communicate it to the constable. He then added a

warning that quiet and forbearance from all exciting subjects of conversation were absolutely necessary for Mr. Morton, and descended to the drawing-room to make his report to Mrs. Charlton and Louisa.

The conversation between Morton and Dr. Western, after the surgeon had left them, took a sort of zig-zag course between the two principal events of the night, sometimes turning to Mallington Park, sometimes resting upon Mallington common. Into the assault which had been committed upon the person of his young friend Dr. Western inquired as a magistrate, hinting plainly that he strongly suspected that the act had been perpetrated by Williams himself, who was notoriously a bad character, and who had by no means cleared himself to the doctor's full satisfaction from the charge of having knocked down and plundered worthy Mr. Gibbs.

Morton, however, rejected the idea at once, exclaiming, "Oh, no, my dear sir, that is quite out of the question. For several minutes I remained quite stunned and senseless; and when I recovered my recollection, I found this very man bathing my head with water, which he had brought up in his leather hat. He told me that he had found me there as he was walking home, and had seen a man go away from the spot as he came up. Now, I saw the man, too, who did it—at least I can have no doubt of the fact—and he was much taller than this Williams, though not so stout and broadly built."

Dr. Western shook his head, still unconvinced, and proceeded to inquire into all the particulars, asking, amongst other questions, whether in this case as in that of Mr. Gibbs the act of violence had been accompanied by robbery.

"I suppose so," replied Morton; "but I really have not had time to ascertain the fact, what with bleeding, bandaging, and one treatment or another. The sum I had upon me, however, was very small, and, by looking in my pockets, the fact will soon be ascertained."

He rose as he spoke to examine as he proposed, but sat down again immediately, feeling himself giddy; and Dr. Western brought him his coat and waistcoat, which had been cast down upon a chair. His watch had not been taken, but his purse was gone; and though he merely laughed at the trifling loss of money that he had sustained, yet, when he came to put his hand into the pocket of his coat, his brow contracted, and a look of anxiety came into his eyes. "My pocket-book is gone," he said, looking at Dr. Western, "and with it the papers I took, thinking they might be necessary in the inquiry we were making this evening."

"That is unfortunate, indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, "but they were copies, were they not!"

"In some cases the originals," replied Morton. "They must be recovered by some means, or we shall have interminable law suits."

"They can be of no use to any one else," said Dr. Western; "so that, doubtless, if we offer a reward they will be restored."

"We must couple that offer," answered Morton, "with an engagement to ask no questions Perhaps, it might be as well to have an officer down from London. They are as much accustomed to negotiate with thieves as to apprehend them."

Knowing the great importance of the papers which had been taken, and feeling what must be the effect of the loss upon his young friend's mind, Dr. Western did his best to persuade him that they would be easily regained; and having succeeded in some degree, and also laid out the plan of operations to be pursued for their recovery, the worthy clergyman left Morton to repose, and proceeded to say a word or two of comfort to Louisa before he returned to the rectory.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERE be dark and fearful things in life, over which it is well to throw a veil deep and shadowy as themselves. Acts of blood and violence, indeed—the coarser and more deformed passions having little attractive in their aspect, and few links of association with the mind of man, except in its more brutal and depraved state—seldom lead to imitate, or induce to follow, any but those who are already plunged too deep in crime ever to extricate themselves from the abyss. But there be vices and acts, to which the descent, however wide, is so easy, from passions legitimate (and ennobling even) when restrained to proper limits, that many may be tempted to run down the declivity to gather the poisonous flowers at its foot, if their gaudy colors be flaunted to the eye, or their baleful odors brought too near the sense.

We left Alfred Latimer alone in the cottage with Lucy Edmonds, not quite an hour after sunset. It was near midnight when the door closed behind him, and he took his way, with a hurried and irregular step, over the moor. He watched not the clouds rushing across the sky; he marked not the light of the declining moon while it played as if in living sport—over bush and tree, and green grass and yellow road, and deep pit and glistening pool—with the shadows that swept by; but with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his hand thrust into his bosom, on he went, without pause, till he came within sight of the cottage where he had been carried after the accident which had befallen the chaise. There for an instant he stopped, put his hand to his head, and thought. As he did so, he looked towards the low building and saw the door partly opened, so that the light streamed out for a moment, and then closed again quickly, as if some one were watching—perhaps for his coming. He went on again quickly, and entered.

There was but one person in the little room; and that was the man Williams, who was seated gloomily at the table, with a candle beside him, smoking a short pipe.

"Ah! you've come back at last," he said abruptly; "this is all very wrong, Mr. Latimer—I know what you will say; but it's all nonsense. If she's to stay there the night alone, it is no matter whether it be an hour or two longer or not. However, here are other things to think of. The matter's blown all over the place; and there have been people up here seeking you, so it's fixed upon you. They have been up at my house, too, but I was not fool

enough to be out of the way; and Soames, the constable, and half a dozen others, have been beating about for you as if you were a cock pheasant under a hollybush."

"Who came up here!" demanded Alfred Latimer, not a little alarmed and annoyed at what he heard. "What the devil has the constable to do with it? Who can stop me from taking the girl if she is willing to go with me?"

"The magistrates say they can," answered Williams, "and they have issued a warrant against you, but Soames is in no great hurry in executing it; for he is not particularly fond of Master Edmonds, and chuckled over his daughter having gone off, as if it were fine fun. So you've got till to-morrow morning to get poor Lucy away into another county till you can be married, and that matter set all right."

Alfred Latimer made no reply, but looked down upon the table and twisted some white ashes which had fallen from his companion's pipe into a heap between his finger and thumb.

"As to who was seeking you up here," continued Williams, after a moment's pause, "it was the gentleman who is staying at your mother's; and that old idiot, Mother Brown, was fool enough to tell him you were out. Then her son, a greater fool still, chose to make the matter worse by knocking him down on the common with a great stone as big as your head. I found him stunned and bleeding, and took him home very queer, so there will be a fine work about it you may be sure, and I'd advise you to get out of the county for a time as soon as you can."

"I will—I will," answered Alfred Latimer, who saw all the difficulties that these complications were likely to plunge him into. "I can't go to-night, for Lucy must have some rest, and I must get a chaise or something to take us."

"That is soon got," replied Williams, "but you can stop till day-break and then be off. Turn in for a few hours and take some sleep; and about four I'll walk over to Long Sutton and bring a chaise for you while you go and tell poor Lucy Edmonds to get ready."

"But are you sure to wake by that time?" asked Alfred Latimer. I know if my head is once laid down I shall not open an eye for many an hour."

"You have never been at sea," answered Williams; "if you show a bold heart, and carry out what we were talking of, you'll soon be like me. I never sleep above four hours at a time and seldom that. I could not for my life, Mr. Latimer, go on a minute beyond the hour of my watch; so do not be afraid, I'll wake you."

After a few words more, Alfred Latimer retired to the inner chamber and lay down in his clothes, but his expectations of sleeping soundly were not verified. Whether it was fatigue, or agitation, or the consciousness of guilt that kept him waking, matters little; but he tossed from side to side for well nigh an hour without closing an eye, and during that time his thoughts turned more than once to the words which Williams had spoken—"if you show a bold heart and carry out what we were talking of"—and the wild and dangerous schemes which the other had instilled into his mind presented themselves to his imagination decked out in all the splendid colors of excitement and adventure. Yes, he thought, he would carry out what had been proposed; he would quit his native land, and on some fair foreign shore live a free and unrestrained life of pleasure and of enterprise. Why should he stay where he was? His noble race disowned him for no fault of his; his mother grudged him the pitiful supply necessary to the enjoyment of life; his little patrimony was already deeply dipped in debt. There were no prospects, no hopes before him—he never thought of honest industry and energetic exertion—and he would go afar, taking Lucy with him, to share his bold free life. Then came the question of, should he marry her? He had not yet got the length of answering boldly, No; but he resolved to think about it further; and that was quite enough to prove that the scoundrel was in full possession of his heart. When a man once asks himself if he shall keep a promise, he may tremble for his honor; but if he takes time to consider, he may write himself down a villain from that hour.

Sleep at length came, and when it did it was profound. He fancied that he had not closed his eyes more than a minute when Williams shook him by the shoulder, and told him to rise, for it was four o'clock. It was as dark as the grave—the moon had gone down, the sky was cloudy, and not the least glimmering of dawn was yet to be discerned. It is wonderful how external things give a color to the feelings of the heart. Alfred Latimer felt the bold wild schemes which he had been indulging, chilled and dimmed by the gloomy aspect of all around him; but after a few moments' conversation with Williams, he set off for the cottage where he had left Lucy, while his companion walked away in the direction of a neighboring village in which was an inn that let post-horses.

Slowly and thoughtfully—if that can be called thought which was but a confused and rambling concatenation of fancies, memories, and purposes—Alfred Latimer walked on in the darkness, internally cursing his own folly in not having returned at once to Mother Brown's cottage, as soon as Lucy had been carried away, and pouring out still more bitter imprecations upon the man Brown for his attack upon Morton; though he did not fail, at the same time, with the rage that all vicious men feel towards any one who endeavors to thwart or expose them, to comment upon what he termed Mr. Morton's impertinence, in endeavoring to ascertain where he had passed the night. "What business is it of his!" he asked himself, "a poor, pitiful devil—what right has he to meddle with my affairs? If he interferes any more, I will make him repent it."

Nor must it be supposed for one moment that Mr. Latimer's indignation at Tom Brown originated in any feeling for Morton, or that he felt grieved that a gentleman from whom he had received more than one proof of kindness had been injured. Not in the least. That was not a part of the young gentleman's character; his selfishness was not less than his fair mother's, though it assumed a different form. Morton might have had his brains knocked out, without calling for any other observation from

Alfred Latimer than "Poor devil!" or something tantamount. But Brown's violence he saw might lead to a good deal of noise and investigation. His conduct, his companions, his schemes, might all be exposed, and some of his purposes thwarted; and, therefore—but from that cause alone—he would willingly have inflicted upon Brown even a more severe chastisement than his offence merited.

As he walked on, the darkness somewhat diminished: not that even the faint streaks of coming day could be at first seen in the east, but there was a sort of gray light began to steal through the blackness of night; and when he reached the bank which sheltered the cottage, he could see a golden gleam coming on some of the clouds at the horizon's edge. He paused and looked at it as it extended, like the first glimmering of heavenly light upon a long darkened mind. He looked up at the cottage, too, as the dawn began to display its closed shutters and rustic porch, covered with climbing plants. It all looked peaceful and calm. There is no heart without some softer point, where some effect may not be produced for good; and as he stood and gazed while the light spread rosy over head, he thought of her within, and her young gentleness, with feelings of tenderness—almost of compassion. Some sensations of compunction came over him, and he murmered, "Well, I will marry her as I promised."

Then he gazed at the cottage again, and paused a while before he knocked, saying, "I dare say she is asleep!"

He little knew Lucy Edmonds, to think that she could sleep.

At length he walked up to the porch, and knocked with his hand, having told her to lock the door, when he left her the night before. But there was no answer, and turning the handle to shake it, so as to rouse her, he found the door open, and went in. Lucy was kneeling beside her bed, exactly in the same guise as the night before, with her head and arms resting on the bed clothes, and her face buried in them. The heaving of her frame showed that she was still weeping; and Alfred Latimer raised her up and strove to comfort her. The first words he spoke were the best that he could have chosen for that purpose, though they were simply suggested by the circumstances of the moment. "Come, Lucy, come!" he said, "do not go on crying; but prepare to come away with me immediately, for the people have found out all, and we must be off into another county directly, or they will take you away, and stop our marriage. Once we are married, you know, they have no power over you."

"Oh that we were!" cried Lucy Edmonds, drying her tears; "but how can we go?"

"I have sent for a chaise, dear girl," replied her lover. "Hark! I think I hear it coming. Get ready—there's a love."

"I will be ready in a moment," answered Lucy; "I will but wash my eyes."

"I will go out, and see if that be it," said Alfred Latimer; and walking into the road he took a step or two up the little declivity, where, as soon as his head was above the slope, he saw the chaise coming down at great speed, with some one inside.

"Williams has come with it," said the young gentleman. "I am glad of that, for I must tell him to look out, and let me know what is going on;" and thus thinking, he turned back, and entered the little passage of the house.

The chaise drove up at the same time, but the voice of Williams saying to some one, "Well, sir, we don't go any farther. Now, you must walk straight on; and then, the first turning on the left brings you to Mallington," caused Alfred Latimer to look round, when to his surprise he beheld the face of Captain Tankerville.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The sight of Captain Tankerville's face was, at that particular moment and place, by no means agreeable to Alfred Latimer. He remembered instantaneously a promise which he had made and not fulfilled, regarding a certain sum of fifty pounds which it was not very pleasant for him to part with; and he would willingly have retreated into the house, but he was not quick enough to escape the shrewd eyes of his former fellow prisoner, who at once replied to the directions given to him by Jack Williams, saying "I have no need to go to Mallington, for the person I came to seek I see is here."

There was a sort of sneering bitterness in his tone which irritated the already excited feelings of Alfred Latimer; and, giving up the plan which the first impulse led him to pursue, he advanced at once, saying, in a cold tone, "I presume you mean me, Captain Tankerville; but I am too busy at present to hold much conversation with you."

"Our conversation need be very short, Mr. Latimer," replied Tankerville, walking up to him; "I come to ask if you remember having promised me a loan of fifty pounds, which you went away without having performed; and if you are ready and willing to perform it now?"

"And what if I say no?" asked Alfred Latimer, put upon his mettle by the presence of Williams, as well as by the tone which the other assumed. "I am not a man to be bullied, Captain Tankerville; so I again ask, what if I say no?"

"Why, then all I can say for you is that you are a pitiful scoundrel, and that you are scarcely worth the horsewhipping which I shall give you."

"Hush, hush!" cried Williams; "if the matter's to take such a course as that, we had better move further off upon the common. It doesn't do to talk of such things with a lady near."

Alfred Latimer nodded his head, and pointed to Tankerville to go on up the path, which after a moment's consideration he did. The young gentleman followed, with a look towards the house, and Jack Williams strode on by his side, saying, in a whisper, "You should keep your promise, at all events, Mr. Latimer."

"I would if he had spoken civilly," replied the other, "but I won't be bullied by him or any man."

"That's all right, that's all right," replied Williams, "but yet you should find some way of keeping your promise, too."

Alfred Latimer did not answer for a moment or two; but then he put his hand in his pocket

and drew out his pocketbook, saying "I'll tell you what I'll do, Williams; I'll give you the fifty pounds, and then you can let him have it, whatever comes of it, for hang me, if he talks in this way, if I don't have a shot at him."

"That's the way you gentlemen settle these things," replied Williams, with a grim smile, "and perhaps it's as good a way as any other. But here we are out of sight of the cottage, and so you can have it out with him; I'll see to this," he continued, taking three notes, which the young gentleman handed to him, "and now you can talk to him with a cool face."

By this time Captain Tankerville had halted at about fifty paces before them, and the other two joined him without delay, Alfred Latimer walking up to him with that firm and decided sort of air which is not without its effect upon bullies of all kinds.

"You talked of horsewhipping me, Captain Tankerville," he said; "that is all nonsense, for, in the first place, you have not got a horsewhip with you; and in the next, that is a game that two can play at; but if you think I have done you any wrong, I am quite ready to settle the affair with you, as gentlemen usually do."

"When and where?" asked the captain, with a sneer upon his lip. "You are what our good bailiffs used to call a slippery customer."

"Here, this minute," replied Latimer, stung to the quick; "here, I say."

"Ah! that's only because you think I have not the means of taking you at your word; but I'll show you that you are mistaken," was Tankerville's reply; and, putting his hands into his pockets, he drew forth his duelling pistols, and laid them down upon the turf, together with a powder flask and some balls. "You thought to get rid of me in that way, did you? You know well enough I never miss my mark."

"I've heard you say so," replied the young gentleman, glaring upon him with eyes in which there was much anger indeed, but no terror, for he was now roused to a pitch of daring which even the thought of death could not cool; and as he spoke he drew forth his pocket-handkerchief, and twisted it round like a rope. "There's one way, Captain Tankerville," he continued, "of making all shots equal, and ensuring fair play. So, you load one of the pistols and I will load the other; after which you shall take one end of this handkerchief and I the other; for if you kill me, I'll be hanged if you shall kill any one else. Jack Williams here shall give the word; and if either of us fires before the time, he will both bear witness and secure him."

"That's the right sort, sir," cried Williams with a laugh. But Captain Tankerville did not seem to relish the proposal; and crossing his arms upon his breast, without any motion to take up either of the pistols he had laid down, he stood gazing, with a frowning brow, at his opponent, as if considering what he should reply.

"I did not come here to commit murder," he said at length, "or to be murdered."

"What!" cried Williams, "a man who never misses his mark does not come down to commit murder. Pooh, nonsense. Will you fight him over the handkerchief or not?"

"What's that to you?" exclaimed Tankerville. No, I will not; but still I say he's played me a very shabby trick."

"You shan't say that any longer," replied Williams, doubling up the notes and holding them out towards him. "There's the money, it is not for that he stands, but of course he would not be browbeat by a bully, and you are no better, and mayhap a bit of a coward too. There, there's no use of saying any more. We have had your answer, and can't wait palavering; but remember, if you don't pay him within two months I'll find you out and break every bone in your skin, if he doesn't."

There is a great difference, especially with a good marksman not very scrupulous as to taking little advantages, between a long shot at from eight to twelve paces, with an inexperienced opponent, and the very unpleasant alternative of the two ends of a pocket handkerchief. Captain Tankerville felt it fully, and did not at all approve of the latter. Now, he was not by any means, as Jack Williams suspected, a coward; but there are few men who would not a great deal rather avoid certain death, even with the consolation of taking an enemy out of the world along with them. Captain Tankerville, however, did not in any degree look upon Alfred Latimer as an enemy; nor did he at all want his life: he only wanted his money; and when that was offered him, although he did not at all like the tone which Latimer himself used, nor that which Williams thought fit to employ, yet he did not consider it worth while to lose a certain number of years, which he calculated upon passing pleasantly, in order to do away the disagreeable impression their scorn produced. He was a man of very nice calculations, and having summed up all the pros and cons in his head, he took the money proffered; but in order to get rid as far as possible of the appearance of sneaking, as schoolboys would call it, he exclaimed "Why the devil, Latimer, did you not let me have the money at first? I am sure I always wished to behave very friendly towards you; and if you had but said a civil word we should have had no quarrel at all."

Alfred Latimer turned upon his heel, saying, with a somewhat contemptuous look, "You came down here to bully, but you mistook your man; and you will now recollect that what I will do because I have promised it, or when I am asked civilly, I won't do for big words or angry looks;" and without waiting for any farther reply, he walked away with Jack Williams, leaving Tankerville to pick up the pistols and powder-flask, and stomach the disagreeable points of his situation as best he might.

He remained gazing after them for a minute or two with an angry face; and then with a toss of the head, placed the implements of destruction in his pocket, muttering "Well, perhaps I may pay you all I owe you some of these days."

With this satisfactory anticipation, which gives comfort to many a disappointed blackguard in this world, Captain Tankerville walked slowly over the moor, but he had also a still more substantial source of consolation for any mortification he might have suffered in the sum of fifty pounds which his pocket contained, and out of which he proposed to obtain some

thirty or forty pleasant days; for it never in the slightest degree entered into his mind to apply even a part of it to the satisfaction of those creditors with whom he had just been enabled to enter into an arrangement, as it is termed, by their discovering somewhat too late, indeed—that, though they might keep him in prison to all eternity, they would never be a bit nearer the receipt of their money. He had promised them very magnificently, that if they withdrew the detainers against him, and he could get a ship, he would make over to them two-thirds of his pay; and they had swallowed, or seemed to swallow, the bait, and, rather than plunge into any further law expenses against him, had agreed to his proposal.

While this scoundrel, one of the many whom we have had occasion to introduce into this work—and we beg the reader to remark that they were all very different scoundrels one from the other: Alfred Latimer, Jack Williams, Bill Maltby, and the others, all being distinct varieties of that wide-extended genus—was thus pondering and walking on, his two late companions proceeded towards the cottage, Alfred Latimer having risen immensely in the estimation of Mr. Williams by the events which had just taken place. Williams, indeed, said to himself, "I thought he would come out so if he had a chance;" but Alfred Latimer had risen in his own estimation, too, though not in the best possible way. He had neither thought nor known that his resolution and vigor would go so far. He had dreamt wild dreams, indeed, of bold and daring actions; but they had all wanted confirmation, and now they had it. He had been tried; his courage had been found equal to the occasion; and he had taken his place as one who would shrink from nothing that passion or necessity required. Instead, however, of the firmness in right and virtue which such a consciousness might have bestowed, it gave him nothing but an impetus in the course of evil which he was already following. There are two paths before every man, the right and the wrong one; and every fresh power of mind or body that he acquires or discovers but hurries him on, at every step farther and farther from the one he has not chosen. Well for those who make their first choice wisely.

While, with a firm and confident step, however, he was walking on towards the cottage, with some portion of the excitement under which he had lately acted still coloring his cheek and flashing in his eye, Jack Williams, of all men in the world, thought fit to read him a lesson in his own peculiar code of morality. "That was excellently done, Mr. Latimer," he said; "no one could have done it better; but you would not have been able to do it half as well, unless you had made up your mind to keep your promise to the vagabond. With that off your mind, you ran alongside of him like a schooner with the black jack flying, and he was glad enough to sheer off; but if you had known that you intended to break your word, you would have crept up like a dirty lugger that takes half an hour to reef her sails. Always keep a promise, for a man can stand anything with his heart free."

"Ay, I always intended to keep it," answered Alfred Latimer; "but it had slipped my memory."

"Never let that slip," replied Jack Williams; "always look sharp after word given. The devil might have been a sailor if he had but looked aloft—but it was all very well done together; first, you kept your word—which is right to man or woman—and that without being bullied into it, and then you showed the bully in his true colors."

By this time they were at the door of the cottage, and there Alfred Latimer paused for an instant in thought, which did not seem the most pleasant, notwithstanding all the commendations he had received; but there was one part of those very commendations not the most agreeable to him; for when he had said that he always intended to keep his promise to Captain Tankerville he had spoken an untruth. The fifty pounds was too great a diminution of his small store to be parted with willingly; and he did not feel at all obliged to his companion for having handed over his money to his adversary so readily. Men, however, are in general—I might, indeed, say always—willing to assume the qualities imputed to them. It is one of the minor forms of that want of mental courage by which we are continually led to actions that we never contemplated; and, unwilling to show Williams that he was at heart different from that which the other thought fit to suppose him, Alfred Latimer mused over what was to be done to supply the deficiency in his purse, but made no comment aloud.

When he entered the little parlor he found Lucy seated at the table ready to set out, but with her eyes full of apprehension, for she had heard angry words without. She asked some questions of her lover in a low tone, to which he answered briefly, almost sharply, that he would tell her as they went, for they had no time to stay; and taking her by the hand he led her to the chaise, spoke a few words to Williams in regard to their future proceedings, and then directed the postboy where to drive.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WEEK passed over at Mallington in events which may require some mention, but no very long detail. Gossip and scandal, tittle-tattle and surmise, had ample room to disport themselves in the affair of Lucy Edmonds and Alfred Latimer; nor were the marvel-mongers less satisfied with the pleasant little occurrences of Mr. Morton having been knocked down so shortly after the knocking down of Mr. Gibbs. It was all very delightful, in fact; and if one could have looked into the hearts of half the people in half the houses in Mallington, it would have been found that as much comfort and amusement was derived from these two disasters as from a grand festival or a race ball. It might, perhaps, have enhanced the delight of many persons in the place if Mr. Morton had condescended to be dangerously ill for a month afterwards, or to die of a brain fever, brought on by the blow he had received; but he was obstinate, and would do nothing of the kind. On the contrary, though Mr. Nethersole insisted upon his remaining in the house for three days,

yet Morton, who felt himself quite well, submitted with reluctance; on the fourth day went out with Mrs. Charlton and Louisa in the carriage; and on the fifth was walking about as usual.

Nothing could be kinder than Mrs. Charlton was during the whole period of his convalescence; nothing could be more tender or considerate for all his feelings. The house was kept as quiet as possible; no parties took place; she assigned him as his own particular abode the small back-drawing room, which looked down the hill; she was with him for several hours every day; and, when she was not, she invariably sent Louisa to amuse him and keep him from being dull. She was, in fact, wonderfully considerate, both as a step-mother and as a friend.

It must be confessed that Morton and Louisa availed themselves of her kindness to the utmost, and that they were very, very happy together, though Mrs. Charlton's conduct somewhat puzzled them both. However, they did not give themselves much concern about it; but, remembering the old adage of *carpe diem*, they made the most of the present moment; and every hour saw their love increasing and their confidence in each other and in their future happiness augmenting.

It is a pleasure and a relief to the mind to quit the society of scamps, swindlers, and blackguards, and to come back to the amiable and the good; nor are we slightly tempted to remain with Louisa and her lover, to dwell upon their conversations, to relate their words and thoughts, and to speak of all that passed between them, even at the risk of being accused of insipidity, but that other events greatly affecting them in the end, call for notice at our hands. Before proceeding to touch upon those events, however, it may be needful to tell how Mrs. Charlton bore the absence of her respectable son; and the strong suspicions which she, as well as everybody else, was forced to entertain regarding his abduction of Lucy Edmonds. She was a woman of great fortitude, and on no occasion of her life did she display that virtue more conspicuously than at present. When the news was brought to her that Alfred had left the cottage, and that there was every reason to believe he had taken Lucy Edmonds with him, her cheek did flush a little, her eye did flash; and it is not improbable that if her son had been at hand she would have given him a box on the ear; but she very soon recovered her serenity, and took rather a dolorous and lamentable tone with good Dr. Western (who broke the intelligence to her as tenderly as possible), grieved over the depravity of the world, moralised upon the sorrows which children bring upon parents, and shed a tear or two over the incorrigible vice of her own offspring. Nevertheless, with the truest philosophy, she soon became reconciled to that which she could not change, said a few discouraging words in regard to the pursuit of her fugitive son and heir, and before night, seemed to have forgotten the burden of her sorrows, so cheerfully did she bear them.

To Morton, indeed, she spoke a few words in regard to Latimer's conduct, expressing great regret that he behaved so unworthily; but declared that she thought it would be unwise to seek for him, and force Lucy away, as it was very evident from what Dr. Western said that Edmonds would never receive his daughter again, and, her character of course being ruined, she would have no resource but a course even more vicious than that which she was already pursuing.

In this very philosophical view of the question Morton did not altogether agree; but he reserved what he had to say upon the subject for worthy Dr. Western, whose opinions he knew were likely to agree more with his own. In the meantime, however, two events occurred affecting himself which must be noticed, as neither the one nor the other were altogether without their effect, insignificant as one of them might seem.

A large packet arrived at the inn from London bearing his address; and being sent to the house it remained for some time upon the drawing-room table, under the eyes of Mrs. Charlton. She gazed at it with much curiosity; she would have given a great deal to have seen the contents. Who knows how far the irritating passion would have carried her, if it had not been for all the obstacles that lay in the way. But the packet was guarded with double and triple folds of thick brown paper, equal in the eye of law and decency to triple gates of steel. There was, moreover, the strong string which boys call lay cord, and every knot was sealed. Brown paper, string, and seals are dangerous things to meddle with. Unlike the worthy independent electors of towns and boroughs in our purest of all pure representative systems, they almost uniformly bear witness of the fact whenever they are tampered with; and Mrs. Charlton, knowing the danger of such a proceeding, judiciously refrained.

Virtue had its reward, for no sooner did Mr. Morton enter the room than, as if he could divine what had been passing in her mind and wished to gratify laudable curiosity, he took out a penknife, begged Mrs. Charlton's pardon for investigating the contents of the packet, and cut the string in a most wasteful and extravagant manner, displaying to her eyes as he unfolded the covers what seemed nearly a ream of large-sized drawing-paper, a vast number of Brookman and Langdon's black lead pencils, and sundry small cakes of water colors. It seemed, in short, as if he had made up his mind to teach all Mallington to draw; but, strange to say, nothing could be more satisfactory to Mrs. Charlton than the sight—not that she had the slightest intention of taking lessons herself, but simply because it confirmed her belief that Mr. Morton was exactly the sort of gentleman she wanted.

The other incident to which we have alluded was the arrival of a visitor to Mr. Morton from the great city of London. Exactly two days after his misadventure on the common, and about half an hour after the arrival of the coach at Mallington, some one rang at the bell of Mallington House. It will be recollected that at this time Morton had not yet been out since the accident, and he was in the little drawing-room we have mentioned, sitting with Mrs. Charlton and Louisa, when one of the servants announced that somebody wanted to see him.

Morton naturally inquired what sort of a per-

son it was, and the man replied, "A queer-looking sort of gentleman, sir, with knee breeches and white stockings."

"Pray, let him come up," said Morton; "or, perhaps, not to disturb you, Mrs. Charlton, it will be better to send him to my dressing-room."

But the lady would not hear of such a thing, saying that she and Louisa would go into the other drawing-room, that Mr. Morton might speak with the visitor.

That visitor, however, had to pass through the chamber to which she betook herself before he reached the one in which Mr. Morton remained, and consequently the lady of the mansion had a full opportunity of seeing his somewhat remarkable person. He was a man of five feet ten or eleven in height, and yet, strange to say, he looked short, for his breadth was out of proportion to his length. What was the girth of his shoulders we cannot take upon ourselves to say, and his chest seemed to have been modeled by nature from the form of a bull. His thighs, legs, and arms, were all strong and muscular, and the calves of his legs, though the ankles were fine and small, looked perfectly colossal in the white cotton stockings. As if he fancied that the eye of the beholder could not take him all in at once with sufficient accuracy, he had divided the superficies of his person into separate compartments, as the geographers mark out the different countries on a map by distinct colors. His back, shoulders, and arms were clothed in dark blue, his chest and stomach a little below the waist were bright yellow, his abdomen and thighs, including the knees, were drab, and the legs down to the shoes, as we have before said, were white. His head, too, was a remarkable head; the forehead by no means an unintellectual one, with the observing faculties very strongly developed, and combativeness, destructiveness, secretiveness, as the phrenologist call certain bumps at the back and sides of the head, together with the organs attributed to many another animal impulse, were wonderfully large and protuberant. The head altogether, however, was not very large, but it had a square stern character about it, and the face, though the features were not bad, had a look of shrewd daring cunning as its habitual expression.

The instant he followed the servant into the room—though the man said "this way, sir," and walked on towards the opposite door—Mr. Morton's visitor stopped for an instant, bowed to the two ladies, and then, in a moment, his eyes wandered over everything that the chamber contained. The glance was as rapid as light, but yet you could not help feeling that it marked everything with an accuracy very peculiar. One saw that it was not a general sweep, but that it went round by pulses, as it were, stopping at everything for the millionth part of a second, and then on again, from table to chair, from chair to china vase, from china vase to fire-screen, from fire-screen to picture, from picture to piano, from piano to music-stand, from music-stand to windows, from windows to curtains, from curtains to doors, and so on to the very handles and key-holes of the locks. It was a glance quite equal to Lord Burleigh's shake of the head, and as soon over, for on he walked immediately, and followed the servant to Mr. Morton's presence.

"What a strange-looking creature," said Mrs. Charlton, to her step-daughter, as soon as the man had passed through the room. "I hope he is not one of Morton's friends; for though you know I care little about rank, yet good manners must be joined with acquaintances and connections at least respectable."

Louisa only smiled, perfectly certain that whatever the man might want with her lover, or her lover with him, there was nothing deserving the name of friendship between them.

So, indeed, it proved, for on the visitor's entrance Mr. Morton gazed at him as a stranger, and he, on his part, began the conversation by inquiring, in very good language, whether he had the honor of addressing Mr. Morton. The young gentleman replied in the affirmative; and the other immediately went on to say, "Well, sir, my name is Prior; and I was sent down by Sir Richard to speak with you concerning your pocket-book, according to your desire."

"Oh, from Bow-street!" exclaimed Morton, "I did not expect you so soon. Pray take a seat, and I will explain the whole matter to you."

Prior, the officer, according to this invitation, seated himself on one of the drawing-room chairs, holding his hat over his knees, and his body a little bent forward, and in that attitude received from Mr. Morton a clear and distinct, though succinct, account of the attack made upon him on the common, and the loss of his pocket-book. He uttered not a word while the particulars were related; he asked not a question, but, like a skillful physician, suffered the patient to state his own case before he commenced his interrogatory. In the present instance, indeed, the mind of the narrator was of that peculiar cast which brings easily and, as it were, naturally into one focus all the principal points of any question it has to deal with, and, therefore, at the end of the tale the officer had very few inquiries to make.

"He was a taller man, I think you say, sir," was his first question, "than the man who brought you home!"

"Decidedly," replied Morton; "if the person who struck me with the stone was the same that I saw by the edge of the pit."

"Can you give a guess how long you might lie there?" asked Prior.

"It could not have been many minutes," answered the young gentleman, "for as I reached the top of the hill in going, I heard Mallington clock strike nine; the distance from that spot to the cottage is about a mile, and when I came into the hall of this house with Williams, the hall clock was marking twenty minutes to ten."

"He must have been very near then, sir," rejoined Prior, "when the blow was given."

"That is true, certainly," replied Morton; but yet that does not prove that he had anything to do with it, or even saw it done."

"No, sir; but, as Sir Richard would say, it is a suspicious circumstance in the case of a man of bad character," was Prior's reply; and, after a moment's thought, he went on to say, "Well! there is no telling as yet, but I will go and make inquiries. I know one young fellow

down here of the name of Maltby; and though he is not likely to tell anything he knows, yet one sometimes gets a hint by finding out what it is that folks wish to conceal. However, I must have you tell me in the first place, sir, what it is you want—the man or the pocket-book. I think I shall have no difficulty in nabbing the one or getting back the other; but I doubt that I shall be able to manage both."

"Oh, the pocket-book, by all means, if it can be obtained with all its contents," answered Morton. "Indeed I have already ordered bills to be struck off, offering a reward for the recovery, and promising to ask no questions; but the lazy fellow of a printer has not done them yet."

"So much the better, sir," replied Prior, "don't you think of sticking them up. Leave the matter to me. If you will give a reward and ask no questions, we'll soon get the pocket-book back, never fear."

"The reward I proposed to offer was fifty pounds," rejoined Morton; "and I shall be well inclined to bestow on you, Mr. Prior, the same sum if you recover the papers for me."

"Thank you, sir; quite sufficient," replied the officer; "you may look upon the matter as done, if they have not tindered the stuff—I mean burnt the papers. First we must find out who has got the book, and then we must tame him a little. It may be Williams himself—it may be some other; and now I think of it, as I got off the coach I saw Captain Tankerville walking along with a slickery doll from London."

"With a what?" exclaimed Morton in much surprise. "Oh! what I call a slickery doll, sir," replied Prior laughing; "that means an over-dressed bad woman, and I should not wonder if there was a whole gang of 'em down doing business in different ways—cracksmen, and smashers, and prigs, and all. However, I'll look to that afterwards; the pocket-book's the first thing, and I'll just go and 'stablish myself at the Bagpipes, to see what's going forward; and, by your leave, I'll bring you up a report, sir, perhaps to-night."

"Do, do, Mr. Prior," answered Morton; "I should like to hear the steps you take as you go on. Good evening to you," and he walked after him to the door.

"In the name of fortune, Mr. Morton," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, as soon as Prior was gone; "who is that odd-looking man?"

"Only a Bow-street officer, my dear madam," replied Morton; "you know I lost my purse and my pocket-book when I was knocked down on the common; and I thought it expedient to send to London to see what could be done for their recovery."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Charlton, and there the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The movements of Mr. Morton were very mysterious to the good people of Mallington. They did not watch him. Oh no!—they would not have demeaned themselves to any such pitiful practices in regard to any person, much less *towards a poor* pitiful painter, though he was taken notice of by the gentlefolks, and held his head so high. But Miss Mathilda Martin could not help observing that though painters might, perhaps, sketch by day, yet she could not see how they could sketch by night. That was, she thought, quite out of the question; and yet Mr. Morton was more than once seen walking up to Mallington Park after sunset. Sometimes, too, he did it very slily, as Miss Mathilda observed; for twice, instead of walking straightforward down through the town, like a man, he went by the back lanes.

Mr. Crump, who was one day in the shop while her observations were going on—for she was one of those who did not at all wish to conceal her opinions of other people—ventured to hint that perhaps Mr. Morton might have wished to call upon Dr. Western in his way, as the doctor was so fond of him. But Miss Mathilda, who had a touch of the spitfire in her disposition, immediately proceeded in the most approved fashion to neutralise Mr. Crump's defence of the young gentleman, by imputing personal motives for the unwonted candor he showed.

"Ah! you say that, Mr. Crump," she replied, "because he's always buying things at your shop."

"He always pays for them ready money, however," said Mr. Crump.

"Well, we may some day see the end of that," exclaimed Miss Martin, coming to her sister's rescue. "There was that Mrs. Latimer, when first she came she must pay ready money for everything, too; and yet I know that when that old fool Charlton took up with her, and made her his wife, she had not a five-pound note to bless herself with; and now that she is his widow, and got a large jointure, she is in debt to every person in the place, and I fancy in London too, if we knew all."

"I don't see why she should be so taken with Mr. Morton," said Mr. Crump, "if he isn't a man of fortune; for she's very fond of great people."

"Pooh, nonsense!" replied Miss Mathilda. "Birds of a feather flock together, Mr. Crump; and, if all tales be true, her own father was just such another as this Mr. Morton: a dashing impudent artist, or music-master, or something of that kind, giving himself all the airs of a gentleman born, till he hooked in the Honorable Mr. Latimer to marry his daughter; and now this fellow is just playing the same game to marry poor Miss Louisa. I should like to spoil the job for them very much; for I can't a-bear to see a nice, pretty genteel young woman, of six or seven thousand a year, throw herself away on such a fellow as that."

"Well, it's no business of mine," said Miss Martin senior; "but I can't help wondering what makes him go down so often to the park. I thought at one time it was after pretty Lucy Edmonds he went, but now that she's turned harlot, and gone away with that young scamp Latimer, that can't be the object."

"I should not wonder if he went poaching the game," said Miss Mathilda. "Edmonds complains very much that there's continually some depredation committed; and perhaps that's where all his ready money comes from."

"Pooh, nonsense!" said Mr. Crump, who did not seem to have learned in Mallington that malignity scorns all the bounds of probability, and is not checked by gross absurdity itself.

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried Miss Mathilda. "You think yourself very wise, Mr. Crump; but you do not know half the things that go on in the world, I can tell you. I once saw as handsome and genteel a young man, and as well dressed, too, as ever you saw in your life, hanged for highway robbery. Sister and I paid one pound eleven and sixpence for a window, and saw him as plain as I see you. He was dressed in a suit of fine black, bran new, with a white broad-hemmed cravat and weepers on, and he had got a crape hat-band round his hat, as if he was going to his own funeral, poor young man. Quite a gentleman, I assure you. This Mr. Morton is nothing to him. Pooh, nonsense, indeed!—If it isn't poaching, it's something a great deal worse, I dare say. I know he has sent three or four large packages up to London by the stage-coach, and no one knows what was in them. I think the magistrate should be informed that he is always hanging about the park."

"You had better tell Dr. Western," said Mr. Crump. "There he goes down the hill."

"Pooh! Dr. Western's no better than an old woman," said Miss Mathilda. "No, if I tell anybody—and I've a great mind to—it shall be Mr. Middleton. He's something like a magistrate."

"I think we get nothing but odd people, whom nobody knows," said Miss Martin, who had got a little tired of the subject of Mr. Morton, and was less staunch upon the scent of a scandal of any kind than her sister, though the older dog of the two—"there's that man, now, down at the Bagpipes."

"What, Gibbs!" said Mr. Crump.

"Gibbs! no," replied Miss Martin; "though Gibbs and he are a good deal about together, too. I mean that great heavy, odd-looking man, with the low-crowned hat."

"Men say he's a Bow-street officer," replied Mr. Crump; "but I dare say they know little about it, for I cannot say I had it from the best authority."

"If he is, I'll warrant he's come down to look after this fellow Morton," observed Miss Mathilda.

"I've seen him twice walk up as if he were going towards Mallington House," added Miss Martin; "perhaps it was to watch what this Morton was about there."

"Ah! he'll be caught some of these days," rejoined her sister, "if he does not make haste to marry Miss Charlton, for gold is a salve for all sores, they say; but if he does marry her, her guardians are greater fools than I think them, and Mrs. Charlton's what I always thought her."

"And what's that, Miss Mathilda?" said Mr. Crump.

"That's nothing to nobody, Crump," replied the fair lady. "I know better than to speak out, whatever I think. So, go along with you."

And Mr. Crump did go; but the conversation in which he had taken part, was only a specimen of that which was held in various circles in Mallington. There were in the place, indeed, two factions—a Morton [illegible] an anti-Morton faction—but it is sad to say, notwithstanding all Mr. Morton's many good qualities—and they were conspicuous ones—the anti-Morton faction was by far the strongest. This may and ought to be accounted for; but the facts were these: All those whom he dealt largely with were his partisans; but as Mr. Morton was a single man, keeping up no great establishment, the number with whom he dealt largely was not great. The body of the rest of the townsfolks hated him for two very sufficient reasons—first, because he did not deal with them, and, secondly, because they knew nothing about him, and would have liked to know something about him. He acted as a continual blister upon their curiosity; and all reasonable men hate a blister, wherever it is applied. Thus, Mr. Nethersole spoke with profound respect of Mr. Morton, thought him a very distinguished man, evidently of very high breeding and great talents. This was because he had bandaged his head, bled him, and sent him sixteen draughts and three boxes of pills, for all of which he had been handsomely remunerated. The lawyer, on the contrary, ventured to sneer at Mr. Morton, talked about men of straw, shrugged his shoulders, and said people would see what would come of it, which, for a very discreet and silent man, was going somewhat far. But the reason was that Mr. Morton had never during his residence in Mallington employed half a skin of parchment or three inches of red tape.

Happily, however, the means were always in Morton's reach for wiping away such enmities whenever he liked it; and, if the real and very truth must be told, he cared nothing about them; but one day in the course of the week of which we have been talking, he extinguished at one blow the animosity of the worthy "Solicitor, &c." It so happened that as he was walking up the street, after a call at Dr. Western's, he turned sharp in at the office door, and asked one of the clerks if Mr. Skinner was at home. The clerk replied in the affirmative, and instantly descending from the perilous height on which he was perched, he opened a painted door which led into a room behind—the green door was hooked back—and announced to Mr. Skinner, who was writing letters within, that "the gentleman" wanted to see him. Now it would seem from the clerk's expression, and from Mr. Skinner's immediately comprehending what it was he meant, that there was only one gentleman in all Mallington—at least, in their opinion. However, out came Mr. Skinner immediately, with spectacles on his long and somewhat fox-like nose, down which they slipped very nearly to the apex—as very well they might, considering the steepness of the declivity—and with a profound bow he ushered his visitor into the interior of his temple, where the clerks could hear a few murmured words, but could not discover their import. It is not improbable that the lesser of the two might, in the long run, have been tempted to put his ear to the door; but just as he had got one leg off the stool for that purpose, Mr. Skinner himself appeared, drew to the green door, fastened it within, and shut to the wooden one. All communication was now cut off; they might fret their hearts to bow-strings, or to fiddle-strings either, without discovering a word of what passed; but the result was that the

young gentleman remained with the elderly lawyer for nearly an hour, and at the end of that time Mr. Skinner showed him out with the most profound deference and humility. Not a word passed in regard to the subject of their intercourse—not a single syllable, though Mr. Skinner sat up that night till half-past twelve, writing letters and papers with his own hand, and ever after declared that Mr. Morton was indeed a very gentlemanly man, and evidently a person of distinction. His conversion, however, had no effect upon the rest of the citizens. Though his opinion was of value—though he was not a man to be done, cheated, taken in, deceived, or imposed upon, yet the great bulk of the good people of Mallington remained obdurate in their infidelity, and, headed by the Misses Martin, seemed only the more acerb and virulent from the loss of the co-operation of Mr. Skinner.

That very night there was a little party of four assembled to take tea at Miss Martin's; and how they did enjoy themselves! If Mr. Morton had been a haunch of venison, he could not have supplied them with more delicate food. They cut him up, and carved at him, and hewed him into all manner of shapes. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon—between whom and the Misses Martin once raged the most deadly enmity—had now found favor with the two spinsters, and having amassed a little money, acquired a considerable fund of gossip, and increased in spleen as they grew old, were quite of the Martin coterie. They were their two co-operators on the present occasion, especially Mrs. Dixon, who was a tall, large-boned, gaunt woman, with the frame of a life-guardsman, and the face of a hyena. Her character was a very determined one; she had no fears, no scruples; she herself declared that she always spoke out what she thought; and, to do her but justice, she did that and more, whenever the reputation of another human creature was concerned. She boldly pronounced Mr. Morton to be no more than a swindler; and when the junior Miss Martin communicated to her all her own doubts and suspicions regarding that gentleman, and the excellent grounds upon which they were founded, Mrs. Dixon replied "Well, Mathilda, if I were you and possessed all the information you possess, I would lose no time in communicating it to a magistrate: that I would. It's a positive duty, my dear."

"No, no!" said Mr. Dixon, who was a small, thin, palefaced man, with a reddish nose rather turned up, which looked as if he had always caught cold. "No, no, don't you meddle. If people is such fools to be cheated, let 'em be cheated. Why should you stop 'em. Put the case so, Miss Mathilda: let us suppose that Mr. Morton is a swindler, or anything you like — I say nothing, though I confess it looks very like it—well, but supposing that it is so, and you goes away to Mr. Middleton, or any one else, and tells him what you thinks upon the case. Well, then Mr. Middleton asks you for your proofs, and then there's a rumpus. You can prove nothing. Lord bless you! these swindlers take good care that nobody shall be able to prove nothing against them. If you're asked, if Mr. Morton ever said he was a gentleman born, you can't say he ever did. As far as I've heard, he never spoke a word about his self to nobody. No. no, he knows better. You can't have him up for getting goods on false pretences, even if Miss Louisa were at the top of the lot. He might prosecute you for calumny."

"No, but"—replied Miss Martin the elder, who was fond of vigorous measures done dexterously—"Mathilda might go up to Squire Middleton's in a quiet slip-my-over kind of way, and tell him about the beautiful ribbons we have got from town, in case he should like to give some to his cousin, Miss Jones, as he did last year; and then she can slide in a word about Mrs. Charlton; and that will soon bring it round to Mr. Morton; and then she can tell him her mind, do you see, without making it a regular sort of eggs-o'fishy information."

After much debate, thus was it settled that Miss Mathilda Martin should do; and thus she did do, not a little to the satisfaction of Mr. Middleton, who, to say the truth, had no great predilection for Mr. Morton, and who was well pleased to find that there were people in Mallington who liked that gentleman as little as he did himself. He communicated the fact to his two sons, who were equally delighted with their papa; and Miss Martin had the satisfaction of finding, not only that she had given pleasure to several of her fellow-creatures, but that she had also sold twelve yards of ribbon, at one-and-three-pence halfpenny per yard, by her manœuvre.

CHAPTER XI.

In the meantime, Mr. Prior had set about his work very quietly. Having secured a bed at the Bagpipes, seen Mr. Morton, and returned to the inn, he sat himself down in the commercial room, as it was called, and quietly considered his ground, and looked about him. He courted no conversation—he looked dull and reserved—he gave himself none of the airs of inquiry, or of Bow-street-officerism; but while he ate his mutton chop, and drank his pint of ale, seemingly not looking at anybody or anything in the room—though one glance as he entered had sufficed to gather them all up, and note them down in the pocket-book of memory—he overheard everything that was said around him, and judged, with the utmost professional skill, the characters of those who sat at the different tables round the room.

There was a pale man, with a blue beard, at one of these tables, dressed in a black coat and grey breeches, who sighed frequently over a plate of boiled beef and a glass of gin-and-water.

"A walker of the Tract Society," said Mr. Prior to himself, as he eyed him.

At another were seated two men — one in a blue coat and bright yellow buttons, with well worn, but not well cleaned yellow breeches, and top-boots sadly in want of oxalic acid. The other, with a green Newmarket coat, a fancy button, brown cloth trousers, and boots with spurs over them: a fresh-colored blue-eyed youth, with large lips, and curly light hair.

"Sound! Lord bless 'ee, you've only to look at her," said leather breeches, with a screw in his eye. "Why, I trotted her up that blessed hill this morning as hard as I could go. She's none of mine, or I shouldn't say so much about her;

but she's the genuine property of a gentleman who wants a little hard cash. So take her or leave her, just as you like. I've no interest in the matter. I'm sure to get twenty guineas more for her at Sturton, only I want to get on to Oxford, where there's to be a sale o' Tuesday."

"A horse couper and his cully," said Mr. Prior, internally. "He'll do him."

At a third table appeared Mr. Gibbs, with his long ringlets flowing, and dropping odors, though not wine. He looked about him, sadly at a loss for somebody on whom to bestow a description of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. The horse couper was hopeless, for it was evident that his hair was never trimmed but with the same shears that cut his horses' manes and tails—never oiled but by the sweat of his brow, and only powdered by the dust of the road or the market place. To the dispenser of tracts, the Balm of Trinidad would have been an abomination. But the young country cully gave him some hope; for his fair curls were so crisp and dry as to excite Mr. Gibbs's compassion. He would have fain watered them on the spot with his fragrant balm, and was only waiting for an opportunity of fairly introducing its universal qualities to his notice, when Mr. Prior entered the room, and took his seat in the left hand corner. Mr. Gibbs's eye instantly followed him, and rested upon the close-cut black hair, which seemed as if intended to have a wig over it, with a look of great despondency. It was a hopeless field upon which he almost despaired even of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad producing any effect.

Nevertheless, the brief glance of Mr. Prior was sufficient to make that gentleman expect something more from Mr. Gibbs; and when, as he was proceeding with his mutton chop, the girl of the house entered, and Mr. Gibbs called her "Betsey," and moreover told her to tell "Mrs. Pluckrose" so and so, Mr. Prior was confirmed in his previous opinion, that he should get something out of Mr. Gibbs. "For," said he to himself, "he has been here some time, that's clear, and knows the place and the people." Prior bided his time, however, and listened attentively, when Mr. Gibbs, joining in the conversation between the cully and the horse couper, ventured to recommend to the former the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, much to the indignation of the latter, who did not like his dealings to be interrupted.

"He's a perfumer," said Mr. Prior mentally, and a minute or two after, Mr. Gibbs sat down, rebuffed by the brutality of the horse couper and the indifference of his chapman. After having finished his mutton chop, and drank his ale, the Bow-street officer called for a glass of brandy-and-water, and then, as if the icy shackles of reserve had been thawed by that warm and potent beverage, he put on a brisker look, gazed about him, and entered into conversation with his companions of the commercial room. He made his approaches by degrees, indeed — first speaking a word to the tract distributor, then saying something in a somewhat jeering tone to the dealer in horse flesh, which called for a pretty sharp reply.

"Ah, yes," answered Prior, "I've seen you before, I think. Weren't you the man that was pulled up one day for selling two glandered horses in Smithfield?" and he looked him full in the face, as if he had known all about it, though, to say truth, he spoke but from a random suspicion that such an event might very well have formed part of his good friend's history at some period or another. The horse dealer repelled the insinuation with indignation; to which Mr. Prior merely replied, "Well, don't put yourself in a passion, I only asked you a question, my good friend;" and then, turning to Mr. Gibbs, he added, "Such a thing isn't unlikely to any man in his way of life, is it, sir?"

Mr. Gibbs did not venture an opinion upon the subject, but a conversation immediately began between him and the officer, while the two personages at the other table arose and quitted the room, probably to inspect the horse, which one of them had for sale.

"I thought it best to give that young fellow a hint," said Prior, in a confidential tone, "for I'm quite sure that jockey will do him, if he doesn't look sharp. I'll bet you a glass of brandy-and-water that the horse he's going to sell him is spavined, or sandcracked, or broken kneed, or has some screw loose, or another, and yet he'll go and buy him, and pay a pretty penny."

"There's nothing so good on earth for broken knees," said Mr. Gibbs, "as the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. Why, my dear sir, it will make the hair come upon the baldest places: it would make the back of your hand in a fortnight like a bottle brush."

"It's not much unlike that at present," said Mr. Prior, looking down at his great hirsute paw; "but suppose, sir, we take a glass together. What shall it be? Hot with sugar, or cold without?"

Mr. Gibbs would take anything that his companion thought proper; and they were soon in full talk, during the flow of which the officer ascertained that Mr. Gibbs had been now for several weeks in that identical little town of Mallington. He moreover discovered that he was not exactly a perfumer, but the traveler for a great London perfumery house, and he asked himself, with the true inquiring spirit of his character, what could have induced such a person to pitch his tent for such a length of time in a spot that offered so few inducements to one of his calling. He found, likewise, that Mr. Gibbs knew something of almost everybody in Mallington; and, therefore, that his own sagacity had not deceived him in pitching upon him as an informant. There were certain subjects, however, upon which the worthy patron of the Balm of Trinidad was rather shy; for having his own views and determinations, and not knowing the character of his collocutor, he could not divine that there, upon the chair opposite to him, sat the man of all others who was most likely to help him. Thus, when Mr. Prior propounded to him the following sage observation, "There's been a good deal of ugly work going on here lately, I hear," he merely replied, "So it seems."

"A gentleman has been knocked down upon the common and robbed a night or two ago," continued Prior.

"Yes, so I find," replied Mr. Gibbs.

The blue-bearded vender of tracts, over-hear-

ing this awful notification, looked at the large clock over the mantelpiece, and having to walk five or six miles that night, drank up the remains of his gin-and-water, paid his score, and quitted the premises. Prior, however, sat immovably fixed opposite Mr. Gibbs, sipping the contents of his own rummer, and calculating what made his companion so reserved upon the particular subject before them. He resolved to pursue his point, nevertheless, and added, after a short period of reflection, "I should like to know somewhat more of that affair."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gibbs. "Why so? How does it concern you?"

"Oh, it concerns me a little," said Prior; "I may tell you how by and by. Pray do you know anything of a man named Williams here?"

"Oh, yes," replied Gibbs, in an indifferent tone; "I know something of him, but not much."

"What sort of character does he bear?" demanded the officer.

"Why, the people about give him a very indifferent character," answered the traveler; "but I say nothing, for I don't like to speak what I can't prove."

"Quite right, Mr. Thompson, quite right," replied Prior, "that's the best way in every court."

"My name is Gibbs, sir," answered the traveler with a dignified air.

"Ah, yes, I beg your pardon, Mr. Gibbs," rejoined the officer; "nevertheless, I should like to hear something more of this Jack Williams. He helped the gentleman home, it seems, that was knocked down."

"He didn't help me home, though I was knocked down too," said Mr. Gibbs, in an incautious moment.

"Ah!—so you were knocked down too, were you?" was the officer's rejoinder. "Well, I should like to hear about that, too," and he proceeded to cross-question Mr. Gibbs in a way that gentleman found it impossible to escape from. By this means he wormed out of Mr. Gibbs the whole story of his adventure in Wenlock Wood—the apprehension of Williams upon suspicion—his discharge, upon what seemed to the officer very insufficient testimony—and, as one confession begat another, Mr. Gibbs ended by avowing that he was determined not to quit Mallington till he had discovered the robber.

"Whom you still suspect to be Jack Williams," said Prior, "notwithstanding all that's said and done."

"No, no," replied Mr. Gibbs, "I didn't say that; I suspect nobody."

"However, I'm different," said Prior, "for I suspect everybody. That's part of my trade;" and leaning his two arms upon the table, he bent his head over them, saying, in a low tone, "I am an officer from Bow-street, Mr. Gibbs, and have come down to look after this affair; but that's between you and me. I don't wish people to know what I'm about, and perhaps shouldn't have told you, if it hadn't been that I've been seen by one chap that knows me; so it's likely to come out any way, which is a pity. However, you and I can chat the matter over, and I'll tell you one thing to begin with. Williams was the man who knocked you down, you may be sure of that; and if he did not do this other business, he had a finger in the pie."

Mr. Gibbs no longer affected to deny the suspicions that he really entertained, but, delighted with the prospect of such aid and assistance as he was likely to receive from a Bow-street officer, poured forth the long dammed-up stream of his communicativeness, told all that he had done—how he had watched, spied, and dogged the object of his doubts—and gave Mr. Prior a full insight, as far as he could give it, into everything that had taken place in Mallington during the last month.

Prior congratulated himself upon his success, and bestowed great commendations upon Mr. Gibbs's skill, perseverance, and ingenuity, exclaiming, "Why, with a little teaching and practice you would do for the office, Mr. Gibbs; but now I must find out this fellow Williams, and have a talk with him."

"Oh! that will be easy enough," replied the traveler, with a knowing wink of the eye; "he's a great friend of mine is Jack Williams. I invited him here to drink a bowl of punch with me, and tried to get him to change a ten-pound note, because, you see, amongst the guineas I had about me when I was robbed there was one of Queen Anne, with the least little bit filed out of the edge, so that I could have sworn to it; but he was too deep, and he wouldn't change the note; and I don't know how it was, but either the punch must have been very strong, or something; for by the time we got to the end of the first bowl I felt as drowsy as if I had drank a whole bottle of the American Soothing Syrup, and in a minute or two after I was sound asleep."

"You must have left the room for a minute," said Prior.

"No, I didn't," answered Mr. Gibbs; "nor the table either—yes, by the way, I did leave the table; I went to get out some of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, but that was only at the other side of the room."

"Ay, he hocussed your liquor for all that," replied the officer; "he must have been up to something that day, and didn't want to be watched."

Mr. Gibbs mused for a minute or two, and then said, "I dare say you're right, for that was the very day when that wild young blade, Mr. Latimer, carried off the park-keeper's pretty daughter, and Williams had a hand in that affair I know"—and then came the whole story of Lucy and her abduction by Mrs. Charlton's son.

Prior listened attentively, picking out from the somewhat long-winded statement of Mr. Gibbs whatever suited his own purpose, as throwing light upon the character of Jack Williams, just as an industrious sempstress, from a great bundle of thread, chooses out those skeins and colors that are necessary for the work she has in hand. He had settled it in his own mind long before this that if indeed Williams was not the man who actually struck the blow that brought Mr. Morton to the ground upon the common, he was an accessory either before or after the fact; and it was a great object with him to get such an insight into his habits and disposition as would enable him to recover Mr. Morton's pocket-book in the speediest manner. When the whole story was brought to a conclu-

sion, however, he returned to the charge about seeing the person in question, and Mr. Gibbs professed his readiness to lead him that moment to the house where Williams lodged. The officer was not inclined to delay; and out they both sallied into the streets of Mallington. Near the door, however, they suddenly encountered Captain Tankerville, with an extravagantly smart, but somewhat brazen-looking lady on his arm, and the meeting did not seem particularly satisfactory to that respectable gentleman. For a moment—for a single moment he appeared to hesitate whether he should recognize Prior or not; but the devil of habitual impudence had possession of him, and he gave the officer a cool, condescending nod, such as the fashionable gentleman might bestow upon a person whom he had employed in such functions as those of the police.

Prior understood the matter perfectly, perceived all the most minute springs and wheels that were moving in Captain Tankerville's mind, but did not choose that they should produce the result intended, and, therefore, pausing, with a familiar shake of the head, he said, "Ah, captain, you down here! What's the go now? I should think that this was no lay for you. There can't be much business doing in your way here."

"I wanted a little country air, Prior," replied Captain Tankerville, moving on.

"Why, I heard you had been taking country air over in Surrey," answered the officer, with a laugh; and he too pursued his way with Mr. Gibbs up the hill, asking his companion as they went "whether that chap had been long down in those parts?"

"Oh! dear no," answered Mr. Gibbs; "the first time I ever saw him was yesterday."

"I was thinking," said Prior, "whether he could have anything to do with these jobs. He's just a likely fellow to put other men up to a bad piece of business, and then turn stag. It won't be long before he weighs his weight now; and so if he's had any hand in this, we could soon get at it from him."

"I don't think it," answered Gibbs. "He's never been here before since I've been in the place, and this has been going on a long while."

"Well, we shall see," answered Prior; "but we'll talk to Williams first. You show me where he lives, and I'll go in and have a chat with him."

"Oh! I'll show you directly," replied the traveler, "and then we can talk more about the matter when you've done with him."

The two worthy gentlemen, however, were disappointed in their expectations. Gibbs led his companion up the hill, and then some way down a lane which branched off from the edge of the high road just opposite Mallington House. First came two or three poor cottages—then a field and a garden—then a small red brick house, with some cakes, parliament, gingerbread, and apples in the window; while over the door was inscribed "Pickett, dealer in tea, sugar, coffee, snuff and tobacco," and this was pointed out to the worthy officer as the present abode of Mr. John Williams. But on inquiring in the shop, while Gibbs walked slowly up the lane, the reply of the woman of the house was, that her lodger had not been home for two days, and that she did not know when he would return.

"Are you sure he'll return at all?" asked the officer, in a cynical tone.

"Oh dear, yes," replied the woman; "he's sure to come back, for he's left all his things."

Prior paused for a moment with an unusual degree of hesitation. His habitual propensities impelled him strongly to walk up stairs, and to examine into the facts and circumstances of what things Mr. Williams had left behind him; but recollecting, that in order to obtain what Mr. Morton wanted, he must "do his spiriting gently," he forbore, and merely requested the worthy lady to inform Mr. Williams that a gentleman had been to see him; that he was lodging at the Bagpipes, and would be glad of a call as soon as her lodger came back.

He retrod his steps, hurrying his pace, a little to overtake Gibbs, and soon perceived him walking slowly along in conversation with another person. With his keen quick eye Prior scanned the figure of the good traveler's companion, while a slight smile curled his lip; and then walking up to the personage who was still busily talking with Gibbs, he laid his broad hand heavily upon his shoulder. Bill Maltby, for he it was, turned round with a start, and the moment he saw Prior, turned as pale as death.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Ah, Master Maltby, you down here!" said Prior, fixing his keen eye upon the other's countenance, and marking the waning color in his cheek with a slight smile; for the ancient Bow-street officer, he of the potent old school—long since softened down into what is called a preventive force, which, God wot, prevents little to compensate for the evils that it perpetrates or encourages—he of the ancient school, I say, which could really detect the criminal almost as soon as the crime was committed, and which commanded the best means of prevention by ensuring immediate punishment, felt some degree of self-satisfaction at the awe with which his presence affected any notorious offender,—"Ah, Master Maltby, you down here! Still upon the small go, I suppose; nothing heavy yet, or I should have heard of you, Master Maltby."

Although the speech of the excellent Mr. Prior was not altogether pleasant to the ears of Bill Maltby, especially being delivered, as it was, in the presence of Mr. Gibbs, yet it was so far satisfactory that it showed him that the especial errand of the worthy officer in Mallington did not refer to himself. He therefore replied with a re-assured countenance, and in a civil tone, "Oh no, Mr. Prior; I am down here in my native place, living a very quiet life now."

"I dare say," answered the officer in that peculiar tone which implied that he dared to say nothing of the kind. "Well, we shall see, Bill; but there's one little thing I should like to speak to you about—as a friend you know, quite as a friend, for I am only taking the country air, traveling incog. for my amusement, like other great men—no business in life, Bill, but just a little holiday—so if you could just make it convenient to give me a call at the Bagpipes

some time this evening, I should like to have a little talk with you about one or two things."

"Oh, I'll come, certainly, sir," replied Bill Maltby, who was quite sure that if Prior wanted him for any unpleasant purpose he would have had the handcuffs on him in less time than it had taken to speak one quarter of what he had uttered; "at what time shall I come?"

"Why, in about an hour," said Prior; "then we can have a glass of wine together. In the mean time, I want to talk a little with this gentleman;" and though Maltby did not altogether like the prospect of any long communion between Mr. Gibbs and his friend of Bow-street, he had no excuse ready for not walking away, which he did, reiterating his promise to come at the appointed time.

No sooner was he gone than Mr. Gibbs proceeded to inquire into the personal character of Mr. Maltby; and when he heard the circumstances of the officer's acquaintance with him, he in return related the fact of his having been wheedled over to Sturton on the very day when he was knocked down and robbed.

"Ah!" said Prior, in a meditative tone; "then he's a confederate of Jack Williams, is he? I thought it must be so; but we'll try if we can't make the decoy duck quack as far as is needful. A pretty gang of them there seems to be hereabouts just now; but our London gents do love, every now and then, to see a bit of country life. He must be a shrewd hand, this Jack Williams, not to take your flimsies, Mr. Gibbs. You won't be able to do anything with him; for, take my word for it, he's got as sharp an eye for a Queen Anne guinea as you have; and I'll bet you any money it's in the soup-pot long before this time."

"He'll not stop there, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs, "depend upon it, he'll not stop there. When once a man begins he's sure to go on."

"Ah! there you're right, there you're quite right," replied Mr. Prior. "That shows you know something of life, Mr. Gibbs; and as soon as he weighs his weight we shall have him."

In conversation of this kind they pursued their way back to the Bagpipes; and the officer, to use the reporter's term, subjected the worthy traveler to a searching cross-examination in regard to everything and everybody in Mallington; after which Prior retired to his own chamber, and ordered a bottle of wine, much to the astonishment of Mrs. Pluckrose, who entertained a notion that wine was only fit for gentlefolks, in which class she had not thought fit to include her new guest. Shortly afterwards Bill Maltby, true to his appointment, appeared at the inn-door; but had very nearly been sent away again, as Prior had not thought fit to communicate his name, and it was only by description that the barmaid was at length brought to understand who was the person asked for. When at length all difficulties were overcome, and Mr. Maltby was ushered up to the officer's room, which was tolerably high in the building, he was received by Prior with a sort of condescending courtesy, requested to seat himself, and had his glass filled with wine as a preliminary. He looked a little anxiously for the commencement of the discourse; but Prior filled his own glass, nodded, and gave "The King." When this toast was drunk, the officer filled again for both, and then, scratching a certain spot a little behind the temple, which was accustomed to be scratched upon important occasions, he entered upon business.

"Well, Mr. Maltby," he said, "so you are down here taking your native air. That's right, that's quite right. Here's your health. You are a young man who know how to take care of yourself, and I dare say may go on a long way, if you don't go too fast. But what I wanted to say is this, you are acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Williams, I think!"

Maltby nodded his head.

"And do a little business with him in a quiet way, I dare say," continued the officer.

"Oh dear, no," answered Maltby; "I've given up that sort of thing; and besides, Mr. Williams is quite a different sort of person. He's only here for a while till he gets another ship, and spends his prize money."

"Come, come, now," answered Prior, in a tone of jocular reproach; "as if I didn't know, Bill. What's the use coming that lay with me. Besides, I am not looking after the young man to do him any harm; I've got no warrant against him, bless you; I've got a little bit of business to do with him which may turn to his good. So, if you know where he is to be found, speak out like a man."

"No, I don't know," replied Maltby; "I haven't set eyes on him these three days, and was going up to see if he had come home when I met you. But what is it about, Mr. Prior? Perhaps I can help you, notwithstanding."

"Ah! that's another affair," answered Prior, meditating; and Bill Maltby ventured to add "If it's about the job of that fellow Gibbs, you are mistaken, I can tell you. Jack Williams wasn't in Mallington at the time."

"You were," answered Prior, turning his eyes suddenly upon him.

"That's neither here nor there," answered Maltby, with a perceptible change of countenance. "He wasn't, that's sure."

"He might not be very far off, though," answered the officer, with a grim smile; "but, however, it's not about that at all. I've nothing to do with that, and I mind my own business. I know what I know, and if it were needful, could take you all over the ground, and show you how he came, and how he went, and where he stood, just as if I had seen it all. But as I said, that's no affair of mine. I've no warrant. What I'm after now is this business of Mr. Morton's; and look you, Bill, I'm determined—and you know I'm the man to do it—either to have the papers or to have the men. The money they may keep, and perhaps may have a trifle more, of twenty pounds or so, if they give up the pocket-book quietly and quick."

"I didn't know any pocket-book had been taken," answered Maltby; "and if it has, most likely they've burnt it. They're not likely to keep a sticky thing like that."

"Then I'll have the man," said Prior, in a determined tone.

"Well, I can't help you there," replied Maltby, drinking down his wine with a gulp; "one thing I'm very sure of, Williams was not the man to knock the gentleman down. that I give you my honor."

Small rogues are men of honor as well as great ones—in their own particular way.

"I'll have him, and the other fellow, too," answered Prior, "and then, you know, Master Maltby, that this business of Gibbs's must be gone into; so you can judge whether that will be pleasant, and had better look to it. It will be much better for them to give up the papers and the pocket book quietly, and then they can go on till another time, you know; but if they don't they're done; and some others may find themselves in a mess, who, if they don't cut capers, would find themselves lagged to Botany for life; and that's not pleasant."

"No," said Bill Maltby, in what we romance writers call a tone of deep feeling; and thereupon he fell into a fit of meditation, which lasted several minutes uninterrupted.

"Does the gentleman suspect Jack Williams?" he inquired at length.

"Lord bless you, no," replied Prior, laughing, "he thinks him a very honest fellow, as I dare say he is in his way. I don't mean to say he knocked him down; but there are such things as accessories before and after the fact, my good sir; and, even if he were to get out of this, there's weight enough upon him, I can tell you, to pull the rope tight, if things were looked into; and it's much better a young man should be quiet, and give up a trifle like this pocket-book, which can be of no use to him, than to hang about shilly shally for the chance of a better reward. Twenty pounds is very handsome, I think, and I dare say the gentleman wouldn't stand for five pounds more or less."

"Well, I tell you, Mr. Prior, upon my soul, that Williams had nothing to do with it, I know," answered Maltby; "and I can't tell anything about the papers, for I never heard of them; but I think I know where I can find out whether they are burnt or not, and, if not, I dare say they'll be given up."

"If they are given up, all may be kept as still as an empty trunk," replied Prior; "if not I must have the men, and then there will be some precious work. You must be quick, however, Bill; for you see I can't dawdle away my time and let matters slip; we must go to work at once either one way or the other."

Bill Maltby fell into a new fit of thought, and rubbed his head continuously, as if to stimulate the organ of cogitation. At length he brought forth, as if by a jerk, the following question, "Would you mind taking a long walk with me to-night, Mr. Prior?"

"Not particularly," replied Prior, "I want a little exercise."

"Well, I think," said Maltby, "I could get you to speak with a young man who knows something of this job; but mind, it's only upon condition that you do nothing against him."

"Not to-night, not to-night, of course!" replied the officer. "Honor, Bill!—honor! I'm upon a negociation now; and I know what that means as well as the best plenipo of them all. Before I begin active operations of course I shall declare war; but it's to be the same on both sides, remember. We must have no traps, Bill."

"Oh dear, no, Mr. Prior," replied Bill Maltby. "That would be devilish little good; for though you're keen enough, there are plenty more besides yourself; and you always behave pleasant and gentlemanly, which is more than many of them do."

"Well, I'm your man," said Prior; "only I must just go and tell that Mr. Gibbs that I can't drink tea with him to-night. We had better set out at once, I think, for it's beginning to grow duskish."

"Let it get a little darker first," replied Maltby, "for I don't well know how these fellows may like it."

"That's just as you please," replied Prior; "and we've got the bottle to finish, too; so you take another glass, while I go and tell Gibbs, for he's expecting me, I think."

Thus saying, the officer left the room; and Bill Maltby helped himself to another glass of wine; but that was the only movement that he made. He did not even venture to look round him, but remained seated where he had first taken up his position, as if he were afraid that Prior might see on his return if his chair were moved in the least degree out of the same situation. Throughout the whole of their conversation, as the reader has, doubtless, observed, the swaggering, bullying dare-devil has been changed into the meek, compliant, very humble servant of the officer; and such, indeed, was the influence of those myrmidons of old Bow-street, that it seldom if ever happened, in dealing with habitual ruffians, that they met with anything like resistance. It was only when they came to encounter—as in the case of poor Smithers with the Cato-street gang—some persons who from accidental excitement had jumped at once to a great crime, that they were opposed with anything like violence; and it is a well known fact that a single officer would venture unhesitatingly into one of the most notorious dens of London, and pick out a man, who knew his fate was sealed, from the midst of a whole gang of foot-pads, housebreakers, and murderers, without any one of them ever dreaming of an attempt to rescue their companion or injure the officer. The utmost courtesy, too, existed between the rogues and those who apprehended them; and when a man was thus taken up, in the midst of his companions, there was no swagger, or threat, or loud announcement of his purpose on the part of the officer; but, merely beckoning him out, he was wont to say, "Mr. So-and-so, I wish to speak with you for a moment," in the civilest tone possible, though he was about to take him to prison and to death; and it generally happened that the man's only reply to this fell summons was, when they were alone together, "Pray, don't put the darbies on me," with an assurance that he would go along quite quietly unmanacled. Such was the effect produced upon every individual of a large class of men by the mere aspect of those to whom the law entrusted the terrible task of watching their proceedings and bringing them to a close when their guilt reached a certain point of enormity; and Maltby was fully under that impression, well knowing that there were many acts, even in the course of his short life, which brought him within the reach of the iron arm of justice. In the present instance, indeed, there was a predominant fear that awed him into the most

submissive tranquillity in the presence of the officer. It were needless, and perhaps unfair, to inquire whether it would have induced him to turn informer and betray his companions; but it certainly would have brought him to do anything short of that. The part which he had taken in the robbery of Gibbs was perhaps sufficient, as the law then stood, to put his head within the unpleasant circle of a rope. He had prompted and planned the robbery—he had shared the spoil—he had been an accessory, both before and after the fact—and it was clear to him that Prior very well knew the share he had in it. Men who have committed evil acts are always inclined to suppose that others who suspect them have better information than they really have; and he attributed the hints which the officer had given regarding the real state of the case, rather to actual knowledge than mere suspicion. It is, indeed, conscience that makes cowards of us all; and he sat considering the fearful phantoms of his imagination, and thinking how he might drive them from him, till Prior returned.

In the meanwhile that worthy gentleman had visited Mr. Gibbs, and though he entertained no positive fear or hesitation in regard to accompanying Bill Maltby, whithersoever he might lead him, yet he thought it might be just as well to take some precautionary measures, and consequently asked his new-found friend to watch which way he and his companion went, without actually dogging their steps, and to sit up for him till he returned.

"If I'm not back by twelve," he said, "it may be as well to seek for me. Not that I think anything is likely to happen; but still you know men's blood will get up, and they may take a drop or two of spirits more than needful, and then there's no saying what they may do. So I shall leave you, Mr. Gibbs, to look out for me."

This being settled, the officer returned to the room where he had left his companion, eyed him well to ascertain what he had been about during his own absence, finished the bottle according to their previous determination, and then proceeding to the goods and chattels which lay in the window he drew forth a tolerably large pair of pistols.

"It's always as well," he said, examining the powder in the pans, and pressing down the ramrod tight in each, "It's always as well, Mr. Maltby, to be provided with the barkers, though I am quite sure you would not behave ungentlemanly towards me. However, I never go far without them, and so there's no offence in putting them in my pocket."

"Oh, no, none at all—none at all," answered Bill Maltby. "but you'll not have to use them, sir, I can tell you."

"Likely," answered the officer; "but now let's go. It will be quite dark before we are up the hill."

"We're not going up the hill," answered Maltby. "But I'll show you the way," and accordingly he walked to the door.

We have led the gentle reader, by the hand, all about the little town of Mallington, along the road, over the common, and the sandy way which skirted it, by the cottage where poor Lucy Edmonds passed her first night of absence from her father's house, down the back lanes, and through the fields to the water side, and along the river, by the rectory, back to the bottom of the hill. We have also led him across the bridge, and through several of the paths of Mallington Park, along the road on that side of the river, and up the sandy lane leading away to Wenlock Common and Wood. Then, proceeding across the heath, we have taken him, in company with Jack Williams, after his assault upon Mr. Gibbs, round by the other side of Mallington Park and back to the bridge. If we had been the surveyor of the roads for that district, we could not have laid them out with greater accuracy—all except one. Have you ever looked upon a map, dear reader, in which a river figured as the principal object? you must have found that, if there was a bridge over it, it generally presented you with the letter H, the bridge forming the cross of the letter, and a road on either side the two limbs. Now our H wants one of its very principal parts, which must be immediately supplied. That is neither more nor less than the superior portion of the left hand limb. The highway through the village, which was called Mallington-street, taking a little turn round the angle formed by the inn, swept over the bridge. On the right hand it was joined by the road to the rectory and the church; but we have said nothing of any way, highway or by-path leading further up the river on the Mallington side, and have thus, perhaps, left the reader's imagination to suppose that the inn named the Bagpipes, its gardens, sheds, or outbuildings, actually abutted upon the river, or else that fields and hedges closed the way, and left nothing but the milkmaid's path and the urchin's beloved stile. Such, however, was not at all the case, and we must hasten to correct this geographical error. The road from the church, the rectory, and the country beyond, did indeed enter upon Mallington-street, and afford a means of communication between the village and the neighboring residences; but it did more—it crossed the highway, and was continued along the bank of the water, sometimes approaching close to it, sometimes leaving a meadow or two between, as the circuitous process of nature deviated from the straightforward proceeding of art.

It was up this road, then, that Bill Maltby, on the night in question, led Mr. Prior, shortly after the sun had set under the horizon. There was more light, however, than the former personage had calculated upon; for though the evening was somewhat grey, and thin wreaths of white mist might be seen twisting about upon various parts of the stream, yet the twilight had not completely ended, and in many parts the river shone out clear, reflecting all the light that still remained in the sky. Bill Maltby walked slowly, and his companion did not hurry him on, letting him follow the bent of his own inclinations, but at the same time watching all his proceedings with a keen and shrewd observation.

"He wants to prevent me finding my way back," said Prior to himself; "but it won't do;" and then remarking that, as they came to the side of some meadows left by a sweep of the stream with a footpath across them, Bill

Maltby lifted his head and looked across, but still seemed inclined to follow the high road, though the foot-way evidently joined it further on, he asked aloud, "Had we better not take the path, Bill? it's shorter."

Bill Maltby assented, merely murmuring something about its being damp; and then, after a short interval of silence, observed, "You seem to know this part of the country, Mr. Prior?"

"Oh, I know something of most parts," replied the officer; and on they went.

At the distance of about a mile from the village, it became as dark as it was likely to be, and about half a mile further Maltby deviated from the road they had hitherto been pursuing, and struck into some very intricate lanes upon the left. They were melancholy lanes enough, too—not overhung with embowering shrubs and bushes, but generally with a ditch on one side and some stunted willows on both. The land was flat and unpicturesque, though doubtless affording good feed for cattle; and, as the meadows were not unfrequently under water, the road was generally raised above them. On the left, however, was some high ground, and towards it the two wayfarers gradually approached, though Prior shrewdly suspected that they might have reached it by a much shorter cut. At length the lane they were pursuing entered between two abrupt sandy banks crowned on either side by some young fir plantations, after which it issued forth upon a wide track of wild unproductive ground, where patches of cultivation, encircled by young hedges, amidst a quantity of moor land, showed that efforts were making to reclaim for the use of man a portion of the soil from the waste. It was with difficulty that Prior's eye, although accustomed a good deal to mark objects in the night, caught the indications of the sort of country he was passing through; for the darkness was by this time profound, and no convenient moon shone forth to light the traveler on his way. When they had gone about a quarter of a mile on the moor, however, near a clump of black-looking trees, which, lifted up upon a little elevation, showed themselves more distinctly than any object around, he thought he perceived one of those tall, single, many-storied houses, which people of a peculiar taste occasionally build upon commons, generally for the purpose of a roadside public-house. No ray of light, however, flashed forth from any window, and for some way the officer was not certain whether fancy did not deceive him.

At length, however, Bill Maltby stopped, and after some humming and hawing, communicated to the officer that he thought he had better go on, and inform the good folks of the business they had in hand. "I may tell them of course, Mr. Prior," he said, "that they're all safe if they let you come?"

"As safe as a babe in the cradle," replied Prior. "You know me well enough, Bill, and what sort of man I am. I'm never afraid of doing anything I have to do straightforward, so I've never any occasion to tell lies about it."

"That's true—that's true," answered Maltby; "so, if you'll just wait here for five minutes, I'll go and tell them, and be back again."

Prior agreed to do so; and the young man left him, walking on in the direction of the house which he had seen. When he was gone Prior put his hand in his pocket, took out one of the pistols, felt the pan with a delicate and scientific touch, rammed down the ball once more, to make sure that it had not slipped down in the barrel, and then replaced it in his pocket, leaving the butt to hang out, so as to be ready for his grasp in a moment. All this did not in the least show that he was afraid; for, as I have before said, fear or hesitation were not things that easily entered into his mind; but he was eminently a man of preparation—he was always ready for whatever might come, and always making himself ready for what was to come next; besides the examination of his pistols was a sort of pastime of which he was fond; and it was serviceable in the present instance by occupying a minute or two of the time he had to wait.

Bill Maltby, indeed, was longer in returning than he had promised; and Prior had full opportunity of examining to the best of his ability the objects round the spot where he stood. Notwithstanding the darkness, notwithstanding the monotony of the scenery around, his habitual powers of observation were such as to enable him to mark accurately several different points, for the purpose of recognizing the place again, if ever he should be called upon to visit it; and in order to leave no doubt of the matter, when he found that his companion did not speedily re-appear, he walked up to a thin pollard that stood by the side of the road, and, taking a large knife out of his pocket, cut a deep notch in the bark.

At length, after waiting about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, he heard a quick step, and advancing, was met by Maltby, who said in a low voice, "Come, sir, come; they will speak with you, though they don't like it at all."

"They must be fools," said Prior, "not to like to get a matter of twenty or five-and-twenty pounds for some scraps of paper that they can do nothing with."

"That's what I told them," said Bill Maltby.

"Have they got them still," asked Prior, as they walked along, with the house we have mentioned growing more distinct as they came near.

"I can't tell," answered his companion. "They didn't say; but you'll soon find out. However, Mr. Prior, it will be all in the dark, for they won't let you see them."

Prior made no reply, but cogitated. He did not much like the idea of going into a place with which he himself was unacquainted, tenanted apparently by a body of men of a daring and violent character, well acquainted with every turning and winding that it contained. He knew and understood the risk; but yet it did not make him pause or hesitate; he only bestowed a little meditation upon the means of insuring himself as far as possible; and consequently, when they came to the door of the lonely and desolate-looking building to which his companion led him, he quietly slipped his hand into his pocket, drew out the two pistols, and, with the one in his right hand and the other in his left, followed Bill Maltby into the dark and narrow passage.

"This way," said his companion, turning

through a door on the left; and immediately the officer had entered, a rough harsh voice, apparently proceeding from a room beyond communicating with the first by an open door, demanded "Who is there?"

"It's I and Mr. Prior," replied Maltby.

"Well, you can stay where you are," rejoined the voice; "we can talk as we are without his coming further. What does he want?"

"Why, I want Mr. Morton's pocket-book, and the papers that are in it," answered Prior.

"And why the devil should we give them to you?" rejoined the voice.

"Oh, for several reasons," answered the officer, "which I'll tell you as soon as you let me know whether the papers are safe; for, if they are not, there's no use of talking any more about it."

"Oh yes, safe enough!" rejoined the voice. "Now for it, speak out."

"Well, then," said the officer, "I have been sent for from London, in order to get them. The gentleman's content, if they are restored, to let all other matters sleep, and, moreover, to give a reward of twenty pounds for them. So, if you've a mind to hand them out, why you can either let me have them now, or send them to me by Mr. Maltby here."

There was a low murmuring at the other side of the partition, as if two people spoke together; and then the voice answered, "They are worth more than that."

"Well, I dare say the gentleman won't stand for five pounds," answered the officer; "but you know, my good fellow, if you ask too much, you may chance to get yourself into trouble. There's a bit of Bow-street to be set against the value of the papers; and it's much better worth your while to take a fair offer, and let the matter pass quietly, than risk your neck in the hope of getting more."

"Oh, my neck's in no risk about it!" answered the man. "I've not got the papers—I'm only speaking for another."

"I hear that," replied the officer, dryly; "and we are both the same in that respect, for I'm speaking for another too."

There was a short pause; and at length a new voice said, "It's better that principals should deal together; so you may tell Mr. Morton that he shall hear from the person who has got the papers in a day or two, and then he can have them or not at the price put upon them, as he likes."

Since his entrance into that room Prior had used his best endeavors to gain some knowledge of the interior, and as his eye became more accustomed to the obscurity—for there is seldom anything on this earth so utterly deprived of light as to deserve the name of actual darkness—he had made out not only that there was a window upon his left hand, but, also, that there were several broken panes in it, and that that there was an open door on the other side. Beyond that, however, he could see nothing; but he marked with strong attention the tones of the two speakers, so that he thought he could swear to the voices whenever he heard them again. The proposal of the person who had last spoken was not by any means agreeable to him, as he foresaw a possibility of its depriving him *of a part*, at least, of the sum promised for negociating the restoration of the papers. It must not be supposed, however, that in his proposing the sum of twenty, or five-and-twenty pounds, instead of fifty, which Mr. Morton had offered for the recovery of his pocket-book, he was influenced by any corrupt desire of transferring the rest to his own pocket. On the contrary, he had only begun with the small sum, in order to leave himself an opportunity of increasing it to the extent permitted, according to circumstances. But, nevertheless, he did not like to be curtailed of his own fair proportion, and he therefore answered, after thinking over it for a moment or two, "Come, say in a word what you will take, and let us see whether we can't make a deal of it at once. It's better than hanging fire about the thing, because you see I must do my duty one way or another, and if I don't get the papers I must do the other thing."

"You've got your answer," said the second voice in a stern tone, "and that's all the answer you'll get."

"It's an answer that doesn't quite suit me," replied Prior quietly; "but I'll let you hear more what I think of it to-morrow."

"What, I suppose you are afraid of losing the reward," said the second voice, after a short murmured consultation, the words of which were indistinct; "but as you have opened the way for him, the gentleman will have no right to refuse you whatever he promised, and if he does it shall be made up to you."

"Much trust there is in that," answered Prior. "However, I'll think about it, as I said before. You say you'll let him hear from you in a day or two. Well, I'll tell him, and talk with him about the matter, and so good night. All I can say further is, that you'll be great fools if you suffer yourselves to be lagged up to the office by sticking out for too high a price. Many a man has put his neck in a noose by such a go as that; so you look sharp about it."

While he had been thus speaking he had gradually approached the door as silently as possible, and in a minute after stood on the outside of the house. He had heard some whispered conversation, indeed, as he went; but he did not think fit, after the very significant hints which he had given, to wait for the result. Comparatively the atmosphere without was clear and light after quitting the dark room, and Prior walked along the road back towards Mallington without waiting for his companion. Maltby, however, soon overtook him; but the officer was in no very good humor with the success of his operations; and the only words that passed between them till they reached the entrance of the town were spoken when Maltby endeavored to lead him by another way, which elicited from the officer the following observation, in a grumbling tone: "It's no use, Bill, I know the road as well as you do. You call upon me about twelve to-morrow, and I'll tell you more. Those fellows will make a mess of it if they don't mind; but it's their own fault, so there's no help for it."

CHAPTER XLII.

It was at an early hour of the morning, a very early hour indeed, not yet half-past five—and,

as the astronomical reader well knows, the sun in the month of September begins to show that laziness which creeps over him in his declining days, and does not rise so early by an hour or two as he does in his lusty prime — when Mr. Morton crossed the bridge at Mallington on foot, with a double-barrelled gun under his arm, and a game-bag over his shoulder. There were few people stirring in the village at that hour, with the exception of a laboring man or two walking away to his daily toil; but whoever saw the young gentleman, and marked his attire, naturally concluded that he was going out to shoot, and yet several of them noticed as they passed that he had no dog with him, which excited some surprise, as he had no establishment of keepers in the neighborhood, and was, consequently, they concluded, not likely to be supplied by the way. Perhaps these remarks would not have been made in any other place than Mallington, but it unfortunately happened that during the last few years almost all the peasantry had acquired both a taste for, and a practical knowledge of, the pleasures of the chase, and viewed everything referring to sporting with the eye of a connoisseur.

Mr. Morton, however, took his way onward with a quick step, entered Mallington Park, and crossed it by a path which, making an angle of forty-five degrees both with the river and the road to the house, passed behind the latter at some distance from it, and wound away through some of the wildest parts of the domain. In that direction lay the favorite haunt of the deer, who seldom came down into the more trim and decorated part of the park near the river, except to drink in the cool moonlight; and here, to the shady groves and broad clumps of beech, and elm, and oak, succeeded a wide tract of tall fern or short dry grass, sprinkled over with numerous hawthorns, while here and there appeared a solitary chesnut tree of immense girth, spreading out its long limbs wide enough to cover a whole herd. The sun had risen, it is true, but was not yet high enough to overtop the neighboring woods and hills; and though the sky was full of light, the dew of the preceding evening lay thick and white upon the grass like a hoarfrost, or hung upon every thread of the spider's web, like a fairy net-work strung with gems. The park was quite still and solitary, as far as the human race was concerned, but not so in regard to the wild creatures, who, following the warning voice of nature, wake up to the enjoyment or to the strife of the day with the first ray of the rising sun. The tall deer were already standing in herds, or stretching their long slender limbs amongst the fern, and on a broken sandy part of the ground innumerable rabbits were hopping about, till, startled by Morton's approaching foot, they bustled away into their burrows, terrified at the sight of the great general oppressor, man. Wild birds of various kinds, too, were seen, either in the air, on the ground, or amongst the branches. A hawk hovered over head, watching for his prey; a glistening cock pheasant started from beneath a low holly bush, as the young gentleman brushed it in passing; a hen partridge trotted off with her young covey, without thinking fit to take wing; and a curlew, with its long wings, swept away towards the wilder and more barren country beyond the park. Morton, however, showed no inclination to begin the warfare so soon, and walked quietly on, with his gun still under his arm, till he reached the park paling on the side next to the heath, and had crossed the tall stile leading to the sandy road on the other side. There, however, he paused, and charged both barrels, examining the flints, for percussion caps had not been then invented, and taking care that the priming was well and orderly disposed in the pan. This being done, he walked across the heath in the direction of a clump of firs upon a little mound, which I think has been already mentioned, and soon perceived, seated on the first rise of the ground, three stout men holding a couple of brace of dogs, with two or three young lads. At their head was Edmonds, the park-keeper; and as soon as Mr. Morton was within about a hundred and fifty yards he advanced to meet him, and spoke a few words in a low tone.

"No, it is not needful," replied Morton, "there is no danger, my good friend. Merely let one of the boys go with me to the wood to show me which is the path mentioned, and I will rejoin you in a few minutes. You would hear my gun, of course, at that distance."

"Oh yes, sir," answered Edmonds, "no fear of that, the wind sets this way."

"Then unless you do hear it you need not move," rejoined Morton; "if you do you may as well come to seek me."

While they had been speaking they had walked on towards the trees; and then one of the lads, having been selected from the rest, accompanied the young gentleman to the edge of Wenlock Wood, where the very path entered which had been pursued by Mr. Gibbs on his unfortunate expedition. There Mr. Morton left him, and, bidding him return to the keepers, walked on alone, with his gun resting easily on the inside of his arm so as to be brought forward at any moment without delay. The path, as we have before described it, was sometimes narrow, with the shrubs and young trees standing forward so as scarcely to leave room for two persons to pass abreast, sometimes wide and open where the bushes were low and scattered, either pursuing its direction in a single line, or dividing into two to sweep round some thicker clump of brushwood, or some saplings that had grown up in the midst of its course. With a slow step, and not without caution, the young gentleman continued to advance, turning a keen and quick eye to the foliage on either side; for so severe and so recent a blow as he had unexpectedly received might well teach him watchfulness against a concealed assailant. He had gone about two hundred yards from the edge of the wood, when he thought he heard some murmuring as of persons speaking low at a little distance in advance, and he paused for a moment to ascertain the fact. All was silent again, however, the next instant, and, thinking he had deceived himself, he walked on with a slow and quiet step. The trees were there close and thick, but a little beyond they opened out into the sort of wild scattered tract of woodland lying at the foot of the high bank to which we have before traced the steps of Alfred Latimer. The brighter light and freer air were

just making themselves perceptible, when suddenly the voices were again heard, and Mr. Morton stopped, saying to himself, "The letter assured me he would be alone." The next instant, however, it appeared that he had made up his mind to go on, and, proceeding at a quicker pace than before, he was soon in the open ground, where, to his surprise, he beheld the form of Mr. Gibbs himself, busily engaged, as it seemed, in pointing out to Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington, the spot where he had been robbed. He performed the task with all due grace and eloquence, showing the spot where he had been assailed, the way which the plunderer took after depriving him of his property, and the very tree behind which Williams had concealed himself while lying in wait for his coming. The sight of these two personages was by no means agreeable to Mr. Morton, on his present errand, and, wishing not to be interrupted, he was drawing back to give them an opportunity of finishing their perquisitions, when the quick eye of the traveler fell upon him as his head and shoulders overtopped the brush-wood that lay between.

"Ah, Mr. Morton—Mr. Morton!" exclaimed Gibbs, as he perceived the young gentleman turning away. "We are nobody but friends here. You need not be alarmed, though it is such a murderous sort of place."

"I am not alarmed in the least, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton; "but I was not in search of society at present."

Mr. Gibbs, however, would not take the hint, replying with a knowing smirk, "In search of feathered bipeds, I presume. I was just pointing out to the good constable here the place where I was knocked down and robbed, for I can't help thinking that those fellows must have a rendezvous somewhere hereabouts."

"Not at all improbable," replied Morton in a dry and discouraging tone. "The place looks very well fitted for such a purpose."

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it," rejoined Mr. Gibbs, not to be stopped, "for, with my glass, I saw Jack Williams walk up to the edge of the wood yesterday afternoon, and Bill Maltby follow with another man about half an hour after. I knew the one by his walk, and the other by the switching of his stick, and so we came up so early just to see if they had left any traces behind them."

"Have you discovered anything," demanded Morton.

"No, sir," replied the constable, fixing his two hawk-like eyes upon him; "but I think we shall before we've done."

"Well, I wish you success," said the young gentleman, and walked on for about a quarter of a mile through the wood. He then returned, thinking that in all probability the traveler and his companion would have abandoned the pursuit by that time, but he found them seated on the stump of a tree very near the spot where he had left them, discussing some viands which Mr. Gibbs had taken care to bring with him in a pocket-handkerchief, and, merely bowing his head in answer to their salutation, he walked on along the path, and, rejoining the keepers on the common, shot his way back through the fields on the other side of Mallington Park.

Mrs. Charlton's larder was well stored with game that afternoon, but we will not tire the reader by the description of Mr. Morton's exploits in the field, or of the gamekeeper's admiration of the coolness and precision of his aim. On the contrary, returning to the worthy traveler and his companion, Harry Soames, we must take some notice of their conversation after Morton passed them a second time.

"I wonder who that fellow is," said the constable in a meditative tone.

"I dare say you do!" answered Mr. Gibbs, with a shrewd smile.

"What makes you say that in that sort of way, Mr. Gibbs?" rejoined the constable. "It was just as if you would have said 'I could tell if I liked.'"

"Oh dear, no!" answered the traveler; "I didn't say anything like it. I only said I dared say you would, because nobody seems to know, and everybody's curious."

"Well, I doubt that he's after any good," observed Mr. Soames.

"Pooh, nonsense," said Gibbs, "what harm can he be about?"

"Why, I don't know; a good deal, perhaps," replied the constable. "Didn't you see that when he caught sight of us he was for turning back, and then he only walked a little bit further and came round again. What should bring him up here at this hour of the morning?"

"Ay, that I can't say," was Mr. Gibbs's reply. "He might have business, you know."

"Ay, pretty business, up here before six o'clock," answered the constable. "I'll thank you for a bit more of that ham, Mr. Gibbs."

"Why, he might say the same of us," observed the traveler, presenting his companion with a slice of ham on the end of his knife.

"That's quite a different affair," answered Harry Soames, in the intervals of mastication. "In the first place, I'm an officer, and have business everywhere. Then you told him what we are about at once, but he took care not to say a word of what he was after."

"Pooh, it's all nonsense," replied Mr. Gibbs; "I've good reason to believe that he's quite a gentleman."

"Ay, ay, because he's bought some of your d—d stuff, I'll warrant you," rejoined the constable; "but let me tell you, Mr. Gibbs, that many a rascally clerk passes for a gentleman when he comes down to the country, after having cheated his employers, as long as he's got any of their money to spend."

"You know nothing about the matter," answered Gibbs, in an offended tone, "and I know what I know. Mr. Morton's a gentleman and a man of property—I'm sure of that. Don't you see what a friend he's of Dr. Western's?"

"That's nothing to do with it," replied Soames; "for I can tell you one thing, Mr. Gibbs, and that is, there isn't a man more easily done in all England than the good doctor. I'm not the only one, I can tell you, that fancies there's something odd. One-half of the people of Mallington have their doubts; and it's only two days ago that a magistrate, who has as much cunning in his little finger as Dr. Western in his whole body, told me to keep an eye quietly upon a certain gentleman, because he had had information, though not on oath, that he isn't

what he pretends to be, and that though he gives hints of his being a great person, yet he may turn out a very little one. Hark! there goes a gun—both barrels, by Jupiter! I'll bet you a pound he's poaching Mallington manor. He'd better not let Edmonds catch him, I can tell him that, for he's not one to stand nonsense."

What further reply Mr. Gibbs might have made, on the spur of the occasion, to his companion's suspicions of Mr. Morton, was interrupted by the incident of the report they both heard; but still, although the worthy traveler believed that he had excellent reasons for supposing that gentleman to be a person of high respectability, yet such is the nature of calumny, that when adroitly put and pertinaciously supported, it still leaves a shade of suspicion even on the minds of people who have many good reasons for knowing its falsity. Mr. Gibbs began to think that Morton's conduct, especially that morning, was somewhat odd, and to ask himself if he might not be deceived—nay, if he might not have aided to deceive himself. He would not give up the young gentleman's cause so easily, however, and, after a few minutes' cogitation, replied, "I dare say you would find, now, that Edmonds has given him leave to shoot for a day."

"I don't know," answered the constable, "but one thing I certainly shall do, and that is to tell him that some one has been up here with a gun, and who it was."

"That you can do, if you like," replied Mr. Gibbs; "but I should think that poor fellow Edmonds was in no way to take notice of such things."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the constable, "one would think you were lackadaisical, Mr. Gibbs. Why, the girl has been gone a week last Tuesday, and he has had plenty of time to get over it. People do all manner of things the first day or two, but they soon learn that what can't be cured must be endured."

"Well, I should think that Edmonds was a man not easy to teach that in his daughter's case," answered Mr. Gibbs, who was, in truth, a man of some feeling himself, and what is even more rare, of some pertinacity of feeling. "I should think he was one to brood over it for ever!"

"Not he," cried Harry Soames, with a laugh; "why, I've seen him twenty times this week just going about his business as if nothing had happened; and one day when I stopped him to tell him all I had done to find Miss Lucy and Master Alfred, he cut me as short as Miss Martin cuts a yard of ribbon, saying, 'You need not give yourself the trouble, Soames. I wish to hear nothing about it,' and so he walked off, and began to order the people about rolling the lawn, as if nothing were the matter in life."

"Well, it is very odd," said Mr. Gibbs, "I couldn't lose a daughter so—but there go the guns again."

"Ay, I bet there will be a fine large basket go to London by the night coach," observed the constable; "but come, Mr. Gibbs, let us be wagging. It's not my business to watch poachers, or I would have that fellow up. He'll be caught out some day, however, and that you'll live to see if you stay at Mallington long enough."

"I shall stay till I have seen the end of this thread," replied the traveler, "if I set up a shop on my own account. However, I have a fortnight's leave yet to come and go upon, and Mr. Prior said he would come down again in a week."

"And what can he do more than I can!" asked the constable, who did not at all approve the admiration which Mr. Gibbs had more than once expressed of the thief-taking powers of the Bow-street officer. Those Londoners make a great piece of work, but they can do no more than their neighbors."

"I don't know," answered Gibbs; and without further observation followed his companion back to Mallington.

CHAPTER XLIII.

In the course of human life, as society is now organised, with all its wheels and springs and mechanical contrivances for rendering everything regular, and securing precision in all affairs, there are certain moments of recurring interest, varying in every town, and perhaps in every family, when some particular event occurs each day, breaking the monotony of ordinary existence, and affording a brief space of bustle and activity to thoughts which otherwise might go on sleeping like dormice for long months at a time. One of these moments, in almost every house in the land, is that of the post's arrival; when those little mysterious packets of white paper and black strokes call up in the breasts of those to whom they are delivered, a thousand imaginations of that which is within. And what, indeed, may not be under that seal? What strange, what sad, what joyful revolutions of feeling may not one glance of the interior produce! Where is the fancy so dull and heavy—where the heart so apathetic as not eagerly to forestall the intelligence, even while the fingers are breaking the wax, and fly through all the mazes of probability, even though certainty is close at hand.

As the reader already knows, or ought to know—for we have already told him in a preceding part of this tale to which he may have occasion to refer more than once hereafter, and, therefore, if we have forgotten it, or passed over it as an incident of no consequence, he is very much in fault, every incident herein mentioned having its due bearing and relevant connection with all the rest, and with the end of all—the post came into Mallington in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, according to the system of those days, when slow and sure and dear and good were the maxims of locomotion and commerce, instead of quick and hazardous, cheap and nasty, the great principles of the present time—the letters were not delivered, at least at the further end of Mallington, till between nine and ten; the address of every despatch being carefully examined by the postmaster, and the whole sorted and re-sorted with a deliberate slowness, which greatly retarded the process, but insured perfect regularity as the result. Thus, at Mallington House the urn was hissing on the table, Mrs. Charlton was

putting in the tea, the coffee-pot and eggs were in expectation, the partridge pie upon the sideboard was uncut, and Morton was bending slightly over the table to speak some light and casual words to Louisa, with a tone and a smile that gave them meaning to her ear—for they took very little pains to hide the feelings of their hearts from Mrs. Charlton—when in came the butler, and put down three letters to the lady of the house and two to Mr. Morton. There were newspapers besides; but the letters were looked at first, after due apology; and those received by Mrs. Charlton certainly did not seem to be of a very pleasant nature, from the effect they produced on her countenance. The two which came to her guest were of very different shapes and qualities. One was a large and voluminous packet, costing an immense sum of postage, for Rowland Hill was not then in operation. The second was a smaller epistle, and by no means displaying the neat and tidy exactness which characterised the other, either in folding, sealing, or address. It was a shabby-looking concern, with the name of the gentleman for whom it was intended, written in the right hand corner, Mallington House in the left, and Mallington underneath, in a most unsymmetrical and anomalous position. The seal was a broad patch of wax pressed down by a spade guinea, and the paper of that peculiar quality which is dealt out in single sheets at a hundred per cent. profit by the keepers of chandlers' shops at a penny a sheet to maid servants who wish to write love letters.

As Morton, however, had received a similar letter three days before, and divined whence it came, he opened it first, when his eye was greeted with the following communication:

"Sir—You behaved like a gentleman and a man of honor this morning, for I saw all that went on, though nobody saw me. So, if you like to come up into Mallington Park about eight o'clock to-night, we'll talk about the papers, which are quite safe, and I think I can get them for you. I don't ask you to come to the same place, because I think you might not like it at that hour of the night; but I'll be down in the park at that time, somewhere near the rabbit warren at the back of the house. If you'll stand out from the trees I shall see you, and I know you are too much of a gentleman to take advantage. You'll be quite safe yourself, for that I pledge my honor."

No name was signed, and after having read the letter, Morton put it in his pocket and opened the other epistle. The cover contained various papers, apparently from the hands of a lawyer, and as Mrs. Charlton quietly glanced her eye across, she saw sufficient to make her divine that it was a power of attorney. Within the whole was a small note upon neat paper, written in a nice clean business-like hand, to the following effect:

"My dear young friend,

"Allow me to call you so, and to thank you for your invitation. The partridges must wait if they will, and fly away if they won't, for I am tied to London till October. Then, by your good leave, I'll see if I cannot bring down some of the pheasants, with their long tails behind them. If ifs and ands were pots and pans we could do without the paper, as you say; but the law knows no such thing as an if. It is a positive science, my dear sir, and very positive indeed in its way. It will have all the proofs it can lay hold of; and, though too much pudding may choke a dog, the gullet of the law is much more capacious, and though occasionally it may strain at a gnat, is more frequently inclined to swallow a camel. Get the paper if you can, however, but don't give too much for it, as though it forms a link, it is but a small one; and we can prove the death by other means, though expensive ones, I fear. However, it is just as well to bring over an Italian priest and an English consul, as to bribe a British thief too high. Don't walk upon commons too late any more; for your head, I think, must show you by this time that a pitcher never goes so often to the well but it comes home broken at last. I will send you down a clerk in the course of to-morrow to take your signatures to the papers enclosed when you have looked over them, and, in the mean time, you will believe me,

"Your faithful servant,
"T. QUATTERLY.

"P.S. The clerk I send is a great scamp, so do not trust him with money. I keep him to look after insolvents and fraudulent bankrupts. Set a thief to catch a thief.

"T. Q."

Mr. Morton made no other comment upon his letters but by a smile, and put them in his pocket, but Mrs. Charlton was evidently disturbed with the contents of hers for the rest of the day, and passed a part of the afternoon writing letters. The same evening's post carried away from Mallington three neatly-written, beautifully-folded, and exactly sealed notes, addressed to "Messrs. —— and ——, jewellers, New Bond-street;" "Mrs. ——, dealer in British and Foreign lace, Conduit-street;" and "Messrs. ——, silk mercers, &c., Piccadilly."

Mrs. Windsor looked at them all with careful attention, and observed, in a murmuring tone, to herself, "It won't do much longer, ma'am, I can tell you. You'll have to play your trump, or you'll lose the odd trick. I wonder what she can be waiting for. I should think the pear was quite ripe."

When the letters were written a load seemed taken off Mrs. Charlton's mind; and after having left Louisa and Mr. Morton alone together during the whole afternoon, she appeared at dinner all smiles and gracefulness. It is a pity that she had grown a little too stout, otherwise she was certainly a very fascinating woman. After dinner, however, Morton announced that he had a little business to transact, but would be back shortly; and, going to his room, he furnished his pockets with a brace of pistols, and proceeded towards the rendezvous which had been given him by letter as we have seen. The streets of Mallington were usually more full of people at that hour than during the day, for they were an active and industrious race of beings, as the reader may have observed; and when they had done their own business, they were sure to occupy themselves with other persons'. Taking little heed of whom he met, or what faces gazed at him from the shop doors, the young gentleman walked down the hill, crossed

the bridge, and at once obtained admission by the gates into Mallington Park. Then, leaving the keeper's house and the hall to the left, he followed nearly the same course which he had pursued on his shooting excursion two days before, and was soon on the spot where he had seen the rabbits. He there paused and gazed around him, but it was now quite dark, no moon up, and the sky somewhat cloudy. The tall trees falling into thick masses, indeed, could be seen sweeping round through the dim night air, but there was no more light left than to show the grander objects at a distance, and to transform the smaller ones into strange shapes as fancy lent them form and members. Under one of the old hawthorn-trees Morton at first fancied that he saw a man seated, but presently he remembered having perceived the withered stump of an old tree in that direction under the shadow of a younger one. Then, again, he thought that he perceived a figure moving in the tall fern, but recollecting that it was the great haunt of the deer, he concluded that what he beheld was some watchful buck keeping guard over his companions; and going a little further forward into the open space, after having waited about three minutes, he asked aloud if any one was there.

The moment after he heard a slight rustle amongst the thicker trees, and then clearly distinguished a human form advancing with a quick step towards him. Morton kept his position, however, examining the stranger as he approached, and gaining every instant a stronger and stronger conviction that it was no other than Jack Williams, who had given him such serviceable assistance on the common. In a few minutes the man was by his side, and, without any attempt at concealment, addressed him at once with "Good evening, Mr. Morton; you walk late, sir."

"So do you, it seems," replied Morton; "but business brings me here, as it brought me to the common when first I saw you." He paused, and as Williams made no immediate reply, added, "When I found you here, Mr. Williams, I imagined that your coming had some reference to the business I allude to."

"Perhaps it has," answered the sailor, and then again stopped and seemed to hesitate.

Morton was not altogether pleased with this conduct, and although from the manner in which the man had aided him when injured and bleeding on Mallington common, the frank confidence with which he had accompanied him to Mrs. Charlton's house, and the apparently sincere expressions of regret for the event which he had used on that occasion, Morton had believed the suspicions of the Bow-street officer to be totally unfounded, he now could not help supposing that Williams had had some share in the outrage, if he had not actually committed it. "Well," he said, "I am here to communicate with any person regarding the recovery of my property—property which is valuable to me, though of no use to the persons who have taken it, and if you can give me such information as will enable me to regain it I am willing to reward you handsomely for the service rendered."

"We will see about that, sir," answered Williams, "but there are first one or two things to be settled. It's better that principals should deal together. Now, if I tell you who has got your pocket-book, and all it contains, will you give me your word of honor, as a gentleman, that you will never proceed against him by the law for taking it?"

"No," replied Morton at once; "I will not give you any such pledge, as it is undoubtedly my intention if he refuses to give it up to proceed against him, and punish him with the utmost severity. However, I will give you my word of honor that if he does give it up I will take no steps against him of any kind, either for taking it or any other part of the affair."

"That won't do, sir," answered Williams, in a determined but not uncivil tone; "and I'll show you why. You and he might not be able to agree about terms; then the information I gave you might put his neck in a halter, so that you would have all the advantage in driving the bargain."

"I understand what you mean," replied Morton; "but it is not at all my object, believe me, to gain the advantage you mention; and I am quite willing to pledge my honor that I will use the information you give me in no way whatever against him. If, as you say, we cannot agree about terms, I will tell you what my course will be. To send once more for a Bow-street officer, and, upon the information already obtained, direct him to apprehend all such persons as he may have just cause to suspect, but I will furnish him with no new information which I may have obtained from you, or through your means. The case shall stand exactly upon the same ground on which it stood before our meeting. If that will suit you, well and good; if not, we had better converse no more upon the subject; for my mind is made up, and I can promise nothing farther."

"That is all I meant," replied Williams; "I meant that we should start fair, and that when I have told who the man is that has got your pocket-book, and given you the means of communicating with him directly, you shouldn't be able to turn round upon him, and say, 'Now I know who you are, if you don't do just as I like, I'll hang you.' I have your word of honor, then?"

"You have," replied Morton; "but I can't help saying you seem to trust very confidently to the word of a man you don't know."

"Oh, I'm not often mistaken," replied Williams; "a real gentleman's just as soon found out as a real rogue, and I'm not at all afraid about you. But now for it. You want to hear who has got your papers—I have, sir."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton, in a grave and serious tone.

"Ay! and why should you be sorry?" asked Williams, very much struck with the young gentleman's manner.

"Because," replied Morton; "I thought better of you; because I have deceived myself in regard to your character, and, from your whole demeanor and conduct, assured Prior, the officer, that you had nothing to do with the assault upon me, or the robbery which was afterwards committed."

"You were quite right, sir; and, for once in this world, a gentleman has done me justice," replied Williams, in a tone of deep feeling. "If every one had judged so from the beginning, I

should not have done half the bad things I have done. Nevertheless, knocking you down, and taking your money, or your pocket-book, is not against me on the ship's books. I did neither the one nor the other; and I would have stopped it all if I had come up in time. The pocket-book came into my hands by accident, but having got it, I think I've a right to drive a bargain about giving it back again."

"I should have imagined," replied Morton, "that a man who shows so much good feeling upon some points as you do would have been rather inclined to restore it to its owner, when you knew who he was, and to trust to his gratitude for recompense."

"Pooh, trust to any one's gratitude!" said Williams, with a scoff; "that will never do. However, I meant to have given it back to you, but for circumstances. But the truth is, sir, I've got things to do which will make or mar me, and I must have five hundred pounds."

"Then am I to consider," asked Morton, "that such is the price you put upon the papers in your possession?"

"Yes, sir," replied Williams. "I know their value to you as well as you do, and they are worth that."

"You must know their value better than I do," answered the young gentleman, lightly, "if you put such a price upon them, for certainly I will not give it."

"Then, d—n me if I do not burn them!" cried Williams, more irritated by the half laughing tone in which Mr. Morton spoke than by his mere refusal to grant such an exorbitant demand.

"In that you'll act as you think fit," replied Morton; "but of this be assured, that the papers are not of the value to me you suppose. I have means of proving the facts to which they refer, which may, indeed, cost a certain sum, but not near so much as you require; and I am not at all disposed to pay largely for the recovery of papers taken from me by a gross act of violence, when I can do without them, though their loss may entail some trouble and expense."

The man muttered a curse of angry disappointment, but made no direct reply, and, after having waited for a minute or two in expectation of some answer, Morton proceeded to say, "You will probably think better of this, and I give you till to-morrow night to consider of it; warning you that the expense likely to be created by the loss of these papers, as calculated by my solicitor, is about two hundred pounds, and, consequently, that your modified demand, whatever it may be, must be within that sum. You can let me hear your determination before to-morrow night, after which it will be too late to make any change."

"D—n me, if I don't burn them," was Williams's only reply, and Morton, bidding him good night, turned and walked away.

He passed through the thicker trees; and entered upon the open space beyond, at the back of Mallington Hall, thinking, as he walked on, that he heard the sound of a heavy fall, as if something had dropped from one of the beeches by the way; as he came upon the little rising ground which commanded the greater part of the park, the glistening waters of the stream could just be seen over the woody ground in the bottom, affording a bright background to the slope below him. From every other point, so great was the darkness of the night, no moving object could have been distinguished; but there thrown out by the shining of the river, Morton, to his surprise, beheld the figure of a man running quickly down the hill in the direction of the park gates.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Imagination is a great and wonderful endowment. By it the powers of conception are extended first from the actual to the probable, and then from the probable to the possible. Without it no great discovery probably would ever have been made, unless by the mere effect of accident; without it few of the fine or noble enterprises which checker the dull plodding of earth's ordinary course with spots of light would ever be undertaken; without it the brightness of everything that is fine and beautiful would fade away into the leaden grayness of hard reality. It is, in fact, the light of life; and as the material world without the rays which bring its loveliness to the sense of the eye could only be felt in its harsh outline, so to the world of the mind all that exists would lose its coloring and its splendor, and sink into mere stern tangible forms, but for imagination. Yet there may be too much light; there may be lights that dazzle, lights that deceive; and that portion which serves not to illustrate acts to blind. Thus with imagination, too; unless duly regulated, it operates but in rendering indistinct, confused, and uncertain the moral vision; sometimes deceiving, sometimes blinding the eye that is opened to too broad a glare. Such is the case most frequently and most fatally in regard to the expectations of ever-aspiring man. These are almost always exorbitant, and when indulged in, are full of fearful disappointments, leading not unfrequently to reckless folly, vice, and crime. By the natural transition of which we have spoken—from the actual to the probable, and from the probable to the possible, imagination gives us the power of conceiving not only all that is, but all that may be, and if we stopped there, no harm would ensue. On the contrary, however, vanity, desire, hope, and every human passion misleads us into confounding the various modes or forms of our own conceptions—leads us to imagine that that which is likely is sure, and that which is possible is likely. When we have discovered our mistake we will not admit that it originated in our own folly or our own fault—we do not blame ourselves for neglecting to put imagination under the guidance of judgment, and we are angry with fate because it won't conform to the schemes we have laid out, or with our fellow men because they have disappointed expectations which an unrestrained imagination led passion unreasonably to entertain.

Such was the case with the man Williams, as he stood upon the spot where Morton had left him after having refused his demand. He muttered curses, he framed a thousand fierce and rash plans, and he thought alone of avenging himself upon others for a disappointment which nothing but fancy had taught him to entertain. In the pocket-book which had fallen into his

possession he had discovered papers which he had immediately perceived must be very important to the owner. He had instantly fixed an imaginary value upon them, and had not entertained the slightest doubt of obtaining the sum that he desired. He had gone on in his own mind to employ that sum in the execution of schemes he had long entertained, of which some indications have been already given in the course of this tale. He had buoyed himself up with hopes, and delighted in prospects which were all founded on the vain supposition that Morton would immediately accede to his demand. Those hopes and prospects, it must be acknowledged, were in themselves criminal. It was no scheme of a calm and tranquil life—of honest industry and domestic peace—that he laid out before him; it was no expectation, even of a relief from labor, or of a mitigation from toil, that he entertained as a consequence of obtaining a large sum by not very honest means. It was a life of enterprise and exertion that he pictured to himself—of strife, and danger, and excitement as a rover of the seas. There were, it is true, to be moments of calm repose, hours of dalliance and passion, scenes of soft enjoyment and luxurious ease, interspersed with the fierce energy of a pirate's life. But the great object and end was freedom from all restraint, the active exercise of a strong and turbulent will, the constant stimulus of peril and adventure. It must be said—not exactly in his justification, for justification there is none, but in order to put the matter before the reader exactly as it presented itself to his mind—that as habit is as powerful over thought as over action, he did not at all consider the course he proposed to himself as criminal. He had in his ship, when in the Mediterranean, seen others following the same life, and he had worked himself up to believe that any individual who chose to run the risk had as much right to declare war against the whole human race as a king against a neighboring state. He acknowledged no morality in the restraints of society. Those which he voluntarily imposed upon himself he was willing to abide by; and made it a point of honor to do so; but those laws which he had no share in framing, and which others had constructed for the general security, he would not admit to be binding upon him in any degree. I pause upon this character and upon this train of reasoning, because, under their various modifications, they are much more common than is generally imagined; and I do not think it is too much to say that one half of the crimes and vices of the world are justified in the eyes of those who perpetrate them by some such misconception of the moral obligation of the social bond. The more I have looked into it, the more I have conversed with and examined the characters of the criminal and the vicious—and I have done so a great deal for the purpose of ascertaining whether they acted upon mere impulse, or were influenced by any principles, and what—I have always found cause to believe that, though passion has been the prompter, there has still been a delusion going on in the mind, and holding up a shield between themselves and conscience, whose shaft could not fail to touch their heart, if it were left naked and undefended by sophistry.

In the case of Williams, however, it was natural that, as the objects proposed were criminal, and the means of attaining them which, as the most easy and least perilous, he had first employed, were anything but honest and just, his disappointment should lead him to meditate still more dark and violent means of effecting the same purpose; and one of his first exclamations, after venting many a bitter imprecation, was "By ——! I will have the money, one way or another! I will not be baulked and kept here for months, or perhaps shut up in prison, for fear of striking a good stroke. I did not wish to stir up these people here, or to fish in troubled waters among these dull plodding shop-keeping people of England; but now they shall find what I can do;" and, with his eyes bent down in meditation, he turned away and walked towards the farther corner of the park, near which, as before described, a stile lead over the wall to a spot where some cottages had been built beyond. His step was quick and irregular, in accordance with the irritable impatience that he felt, and the rapid footfalls caught the ear of some persons actually within the wall of the park, for some one exclaimed as he came near "It must be he, though he's devilish quick back;" and at the same moment the speaker advanced to meet him, adding, "Is that you, Mr. Williams? have you got it?"

"No, not a farthing, Bill," answered Williams; "and hang me if I don't go home and burn them all: for he shan't have them now if he would give a thousand for them;" and he added a bitter oath.

"That's unlucky, upon my life," added Bill Maltby, "and you wanted to go as soon as possible, too. Couldn't you and he make a deal of it?"

"No, by ——!" replied Williams; "he thinks to get them for nothing; but he'll find himself devilish much mistaken—go! to be sure I want to go!" he continued, pursuing in a rambling manner the subjects suggested by what his companion said: "but I'll make a sweep before I go, however; and once I'm at Portsmouth or Plymouth they may hunt long enough before they find me."

"Don't you think," inquired Bill Maltby, in a suggestive kind of manner, "that if you keep about this place long you may have Prior, or some more unpleasant customers still, down here looking after you? Prior has got some notions like a gentleman; but the greater part of these fellows are rough 'uns. I think if I were you I'd be off to-morrow morning."

"Not unless there's something to be done to-night," answered Williams, doggedly; "I will not go without the money I want—Besides," he added, after a moment's consideration, "there's no such hurry. He said he would give me till to-morrow night to consider of it; and I can keep him in play about the papers for two or three days more. But I'm resolved to have what I want, any way—Hark ye, Bill, was that Brown you were speaking to?"

"Yes," answered Bill Maltby; "he's a little in the wind, and wouldn't budge, though I told him it was you."

"All the better," answered Williams. "You

were talking to me the other day about a lot of things up at the hall. I've a great mind to try it to-night."

"We had better wait till it's daylight," said Bill Maltby, in a low tone; "then we could contrive to get the two women out of the way, and slip in without any breaking. I know quite well the room where it is all kept. We could hand it out of the window one to the other, and if we were caught it would make a difference, you know."

"I see no difference at all," replied Williams sharply.

"Oh, but it would at a trial," answered Bill Maltby. "It makes all the difference in life. If you break through a door and only take a silver spoon you're pretty sure to tighten your cravat; but if you slip in and take a thousand pounds you get off for a taste of Botany."

The fact is, that in vice, as in virtue—in baseness, as in excellence—there are numerous steps and grades. We go climbing or descending the ladder; and though the downward course is the most easy, yet we are still inclined to hesitate at the next step as we gain a nearer sight of those which are below. Bill Maltby had not yet reached the point of burglary, and he feared to put his foot upon that round. He would rather have had an intermediate step; but Williams had no such hesitation, and he replied "I think you're turning coward, Bill. Ay, and fool too. Are you not quite sure that if we tried it in the day-light we should be stopped in the middle of the work, and only get grabbed for our pains. If we get in to-night the matter's quite sure. We can lock up the women, and be off at once, so that we can be out of harm's way before any one knows anything about it."

"But suppose we shouldn't find a ship ready to sail!" said Maltby.

"Why, you don't suppose I'm going to freight a ship?" said Williams. "I'm not such a fool as that, I can tell you. A boat is the thing, and that can always be hired when one has money. Now, you say there's plenty of stuff here."

"Oh, ay," answered Bill Maltby, "to the tune of two or three thousand pounds, and a great deal of it in gold cups and such like, which could be easily packed."

"We'll beat it up altogether for that matter," answered Williams; "that's soon done. Two or three thousand pounds. That's worth fetching, Bill. Have you got a tool with you?"

"Nothing but a screw-driver," answered Bill Maltby, in a low and faltering voice; for though a share in the plunder tempted him strongly, and though a man ever ready for a scuffle, yet the idea of a new crime which would render the whole of the rest of life insecure, filled him with apprehensions that he could not banish.

"Give it to me," was Williams's only reply; and having received a large turnscrew, which Maltby drew out of his pocket, he ran his hand over it, feeling its thickness and its length, and murmuring to himself "I would rather it had been a crowbar; but this will do. Now, Bill," he said, "we had better set to work at once: but let us see how we must arrange. That fellow Brown is fit for nothing but hard work. You saw he had nearly spoiled the whole affair with the beak. I'll take the cracking the darkeners upon myself; then Tom shall come in to help me; and you, who are sharp and quick, shall keep a look-out."

"We shall all go snacks, of course!" said Bill Maltby, who did not like the idea of a smaller share of the plunder.

But Williams turned sharply upon him, replying "Of course! Do you fancy I'm not a man of honor?"

Alack and a-well-a-day, what a wonderful thing honor is! How it would astonish many a smart man about town to hear thieves and house-breakers talking of honor, which is so often on his own lips; and yet more than one of these men about town, if he were to look into his own heart, would find that at the very time he is most frequently using that sacred word he is continually violating its true sense more than even the scoundrels whom he fancies he despises. Violating it! ay, in a thousand ways—breaking his word—betraying his friend's confidence—ruining his peace—cheating him on the turf—or swindling him at the gaming-table. Would to heaven that, under the penalty of transportation and branding in the hand, no men were permitted to use the word honor but those who can prove that they possess it! for the great difference between the honor that is amongst thieves and the honor of men of fashion is, that the former is maintained towards their friends, the latter only to the eyes of the world. If it were more real, we should have fewer appeals to the pistol's mouth to prove that it exists, for that which is self-evident is never doubted.

To leave our homily, however, Bill Maltby was very well satisfied with Williams's arrangement, for the part therein assigned to himself was decidedly the least perilous, and the most profitable. He calculated that in case of resistance within the house, or discovery from without, he should be easily able to make his escape through the park, and that no proof would exist of his participation in the robbery. Thus he would have all the advantages and none of the risk; and, under this view of the case, he made no further objection to proceeding immediately to business. Accordingly, Williams and himself walked up to the corner, where Tom Brown had been left, and where he was found sound asleep with his back against the park wall. He was speedily roused, however, and a short conversation, in a low tone, ensued; in the course of which Brown showed that, with all his apparent dulness, he had occasionally a shrewd conception of the dangers and the probabilities of anything that was to be undertaken.

"No, no, Master Williams," he said; "wait a bit—wait a bit. It isn't nine o'clock yet, and Edmonds and the keepers are always on the look-out about the park till half past nine or ten. You'll be sure to have some of them upon you; but if you wait till after ten they'll be all snug and snoring. The women, too, will then have gone to bed, so you'll have no piping; and we can sit here under the wall for an hour quite well."

This argument was unanswerable; and taking up a position in which it was impossible for any one to see them without approaching very

close, these three very respectable visitors to the park sat down to while away the time till the hour approached for the execution of their scheme.

CHAPTER XLV.

Waiting is always a very unpleasant process. There are recorded instances of persons who have found expectation agreeable, but their internal frame-work must have been of a very peculiar construction; for, to the simple apprehension of at least two-thirds of the world, it must seem that if it be for pleasure that we are forced to wait, the delay must be very tedious; and if it be for pain, the anticipation must be excessively disagreeable. But the act of waiting for the execution of a dangerous and criminal scheme is apt to fill the projector thereof—at least, in many cases—with doubts, hesitations, and fears not very favorable to energetic operations. This, indeed, does not always obtain in every instance, but the effect is modified as usual by the character of the individual. Now, there were three men seated under the wall of Mallington Park, and of those three only one experienced the apprehensive hesitation to which we have referred. Williams was of too stern and determined a character to be susceptible of its influence, and he remained merely calculating the position of all the doors and windows in Mallington Hall, and endeavoring to settle in his own mind which would give him most easy ingress. Tom Brown was too dull and stolid to suffer imagination to trouble him at all upon such subjects, and he nodded drowsily from time to time, ready to act when it was necessary, but thinking little of the moment that was to come after. Bill Maltby, on the contrary, sat doubting and shrinking within himself, every instant feeling more unwillingness to go forward in the scheme; not from any sense of its criminality, but from those vague, but not less tremendous, phantoms of danger, punishment, and death, which, in the pauses of crime—when neither the spirit of adventure nor the excitement of action carries us through unthinking—come upon the heart of every man engaged in wicked deeds. He contemplated all the chances, he magnified all the dangers. A few minutes before, and he fancied he could secure his own escape, at all events; but now he thought he might very possibly be taken in running away from the spot if they should be interrupted; and then, again, he pictured by the power of fancy, his apprehension with a part of the plundered property in his possession in case they should be successful. Then came the images of a prison, a court, examination, trial, execution; the pinioning the arms—the solemn procession from the cell—the priestly exhortation—the fatal drop—the gaping multitude—the shivering touch of the cord—the choking agony—the death, and the wide awful misty hereafter! All that he had shut out from thought for years—all that he had neglected or despised—every rejected warning—every inducement to better things cast away—each awful point in the fate and future of the criminal—each anguish of the heart and of the body which follow like hell-hounds upon the course of the guilty were all present to his mind, at once growing into fearful distinctness in the darkness and silence of the hour.

It was a warm September night, but he felt it cold, a shivering sensation crept down his back, and over his limbs, he felt his arms tremble as he rested them, with his hands upon his knees; he could scarce keep his teeth from chattering in his head. A terrible thing—a very terrible thing is the expectation of crime!

The wind set from the side of Mallington, and though it was so low as scarcely to stir the trees, it at length brought, sweetly sweeping over the stream, the soft and musical tones of the village clock as it struck ten. To the ear of Bill Maltby it sounded like the knell of death, it seemed like the tolling of a funeral bell—it made the blood curdle in his veins. But Williams instantly started up and shook Brown by the shoulder, saying in a low voice, "Now, there's ten, and that d——d moon's getting up, I can see by the light aloft there. Let us get to work. You, Tom, go round by the path up above over the hill, and meet us just behind the house. I'll go with Bill and plant him where he can see all around. Come along, Bill."

Whether he doubted his companion's resolution, and determined to keep his eye upon him on the way to their scene of operations, or whether his choosing to accompany the young man was the mere effect of chance, I cannot tell; but they walked on together, Bill Maltby not daring to show his want of firmness; and, certain it is, that Williams, as they went, addressed to him, in a whisper, many a word well calculated, to use one of his own terms, "To hearten him up." He did, indeed, recover in some degree from the effects of his imaginary terrors, as soon as he was once more in activity, but still his nerve was shaken, and ever and anon as they hurried on, though the dark close walks of the wood, he started and looked round as if he fancied that some hand was stretched out to seize him, and when they emerged into the open part of the park where the moonlight was just beginning to lighten the scene, he gazed on with anxious fear, half convinced that he saw the forms of men amongst the bushes, or in the hollows of the ground. His demeanor had not passed without observation by his companion, who, though incapable of dread himself, had seen what it produced in other men too often not to recognize the indications thereof; and if Maltby had looked to Williams's face, and had been able, by the faint light of that hour, to distinguish its expression, he would have seen a scornful smile curling the corner of his stern lip at what he internally called his pitiful chicken-heartedness. The sailor made no observation, however; but, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the trees till they were within about fifty yards of the house, he crossed over suddenly to a wide-spreading elm that stood out clear from the rest near the western angle of the building, and then stopping, pointed down to a spot beneath the branches, saying, "There! stand there; you can see pretty well all round but on the east. Keep your eyes busy and your ears too." He spoke slowly and low; and then added, fixing his eyes firmly upon his companion's face, "If a man quits his post, fails to give warning, or betrays

his comrades, we shoot him through the head; and if I should not be here to do it, there are friends of mine who will."

"On my life and soul, Williams," said Maltby; "I will be as steady as a rock. Did I not first put you up to the thing?"

"Yes," answered Williams; "and then got poltroonish when it was to be done. Look to it—that's all. You shall have your full share of the booty; but if you flinch you shall have lead instead of silver, by ——!"

Thus saying he left him; and Maltby, with mingled shame and indignation—the last not in the least lessened by a knowledge that Williams's charge was just—remained gazing for a moment sullenly upon the ground. He then raised his eyes, and followed with them his companion towards the house, saw him joined by another man, and then marked the shadowy forms of both glide all along that side of the building, seeming to examine every window and door attentively. He himself carried his glance over the whole of that façade; but all was dark and sombre. No light from any casement told that there was waking life within; and except on the eastern side, where the moonlight showed the windows and even the joints of the rough stone, the whole edifice was buried in deep shadow.

Williams was long in making his selection of a point of attack, at least to the nervous anxiety of Bill Maltby it seemed so; and after having neglected for some time the task assigned to him, in watching his companion's movements, the sentinel began to gaze forth over the park. Suddenly, with a start, he heard a loud sound, as of some strong plank riven asunder; and, turning his eyes quickly towards the house, he could distinguish, though by no means clearly, the two men standing apparently closely together before one of the windows on the ground floor, near the north-eastern angle. The window shutters of that story were all external; and Maltby well understood that the operation of breaking in had begun; but the noise terrified and shook him; and he instantly once more cast a hasty glance over the park, as if that sound could have already wakened up servants and keepers. He looked first to the westward, where all was still, and nothing to be seen—not even a deer; but then he gazed to the south, in the direction of Edmonds's house, which was not to be descried, however, being hidden, as before said, by the trees and undulations of the ground. Running his eye along towards the east, his heart began to beat and his limbs to shake, for he thought he saw two or three figures, a long way off, but advancing towards the hall; and raising his hand to his eyes he endeavored to clear them of all mist, fearful lest the terror that he felt might deceive him. Now, however, he beheld the same objects more distinctly; they were clearly men; and they were coming forward rapidly. At the same moment a shivering crash met his ear, as if one of the panes of the window had been broken; and after an instant's hesitation as to whether he should at once provide for his own safety, or warn his companions, shame prevailed. He saw that the men who were advancing were yet far from the spot. There was time to save all; and, darting across, he seized Williams's arm just as it was throwing up the sash of the window which had been opened from within by thrusting a hand through the broken glass.

"There are people coming!" cried Maltby. "Run quick—there are people coming, I tell you!"

But Williams was in the fierceness of active exertion, and he replied, casting up the window, "I don't believe it—it's a lie—you are afraid, and fancy it. Run round, Tom, and look out."

But, ere the words were well uttered, the alarm bell of the hall began to ring; and, snatching up the turnscrew which had fallen down, Williams hurried to the angle and looked round. Tom Brown and Maltby were already many yards towards the wood, but the bolder ruffian stood and gazed forth for an instant ere he also took flight. Then muttering "It is true, by —!" he passed again into the shadow of the house, cut across the open space towards the trees, and was soon among the wood walks again. The alarm bell still rang out its angry peal as hard as the hands of the two frightened women in Mallington Hall could pull it, and the shouts with which the persons who were coming up sought to convey the comfortable tidings of their approach to the disconsolate damsels within, were also borne to the ear of Williams as he doubled and turned amidst the tortuous paths. Instead of flying in the same direction as his two comrades, who ran towards the common at the back of the park and Wenlock Wood, he made the best of his way to the river, and, as silently as possible, waded in, and then swam over. Passing quickly through the back lanes, he entered Mallington-street by a narrow alley, just above the surgeon's house, and then at a slow pace descended the hill towards the inn. Several persons were still moving about in the village, and one of the first whom Williams met was Mr. Soames, the constable. Nor did he fail to stop and talk with him for a moment or two in a calm and easy tone, saying that he was just going to get a dram before he went to bed. While they were still conversing they were joined by Mr. Crump, who, in a voice of some trepidation, informed the constable that he thought he heard the alarm bell of the hall ringing. He had been just undressing, with his high window open, and was startled by the sound; but he could not swear that it was the alarm bell, as the wind set the other way.

', D—n it! let us go and see," said Williams; and all three hurried down to the bridge and listened. All was now still, however; the bell had ceased its warning tones long before, for Mr. Crump had been somewhat long in getting on his clothes; and concluding that he had made a mistake, the constable and Williams returned, after waiting near the gates of the park for about five minutes. As they trod their way back, however, the clock struck eleven, and punctual Mrs. Pluckrose had closed her house for the night. Williams was not sorry that such was the case; for he had foreseen that if he entered the inn, to get the draught he had pretended to be seeking, his wet clothes might be more apparent than was agreeable; but he affected some disappointment, and, with an oath at the good landlady for her punctuality, he bade Soames good night, and walked up the hill.

While such has been the proceedings of that very respectable and interesting person Jack Williams, the three keepers, who, with Edmonds at their head, had been out later than usual, having extended their ramble on the other side of the park, where some depredations had been committed the night before, hurried up to the hall, attracted by the sound of the alarm-bell. As they advanced they clearly caught sight of a man's figure crossing towards the wood, and two of the men set off in pursuit as hard as they could run; but the course which Williams had followed deceived them, and it is only necessary to say that their hunt was vain. Edmonds, on the contrary, went straight up to the hall, and rang the door bell; but it was long ere the two terrified women would give him admission—first inquiring who he was from an upper window; and then afraid to come down lest there should be robbers in the house below. When he was permitted to enter, they both at once informed him, with all the loquacity of wonder and terror, that they had been roused by a loud noise from the lower story, and on looking out on the side whence the sounds seemed to proceed, had seen two men busily engaged in breaking into the house.

With few questions Edmonds proceeded to the spot, the women following at a respectful distance; and there he found the window broken and thrown up, the fastenings of the shutters forced off, and part even of the woodwork shivered. The park-keeper gazed at it, in silence, for a moment or two, and then returned, locking the door of that room, and of the passage beyond.

"They are gone for to-night, Mrs. Chalk," he said; "but I will leave one of the men with you when they come back; and for the future, do you see, I will sleep up at the hall myself, at least till the house is full of people again, which I hope will not be long first."

The resolution which he thus expressed seemed a very simple one, and such as might well have been expected from a man of his character; but it was the most fatal determination he could have formed.

CHAPTER XLVI.

If the reader have ever acted in the dignified situation of whipper-in to a pack of not very well disciplined fox-hounds, or performed the still more troublesome task of driving a herd of young pigs, he will have a faint idea of the difficulties which beset a romance writer who has many characters to deal with. Each and all may be absolutely necessary to the plot, each may have his particular function to perform, each may be required to bring about the grand result—but still they will run about in all manner of ways, get into all manner of places, and the unfortunate driver must hurry hither and thither to bring them into the right course at the proper moment. Now, on the day which succeeded the attempt upon Mallington Hall some five or six of our personages all require, unfortunately, our care and attention. There are Mrs. Charlton, Louisa, Mr. Morton, Mr. Gibbs, Harry Soames, and the Misses Martin; besides an episode concerning Mrs. Windsor; but, as they were all assembled in the village, we could easily manage them; besides these, however, there are Jack Williams and his fraternity, Alfred Latimer and Lucy Edmonds, ay, and even Mr. Quatterly, to say nothing of Captain Tankeryille; and as these ladies and gentlemen were scattered over the face of the earth at considerable distances from each other, we must take our old friend's seven-league boots, and hasten from place to place to deal with each separately.

At the distance of about two-and-twenty miles from Mallington, with a ridge of hills between the two places, which rendered the communication between them slow and infrequent, was a town containing some five thousand inhabitants and three distinct parishes and churches. It was a busy little bustling place, with a tolerable commerce and several manufactories; and the people minded their own business more and other people's less than was the case in Mallington, where each individual had very little business of his own to mind. In the parish of St. Stephen the Martyr, in this town it so happened that Edmonds, the park-keeper, had been born and married, and there, too, the year before he entered the service of the Earl of Mallington, had his daughter Lucy first seen the light. Her name, consequently, appeared in the parish register, which is a matter of some importance to this tale, or, at least, to this chapter. Alfred Latimer, it will be recollected, had neither been born in Mallington nor in the aforesaid parish of St. Stephen, but in the city of London; and it so happened that he knew his parish, which is what every man cannot say.

However that may be, as the parish of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the country town of which we have been speaking, extended a little way into the country, it contained in its outskirts many a pleasant little cottage; and one of these—the name of which, "Prospect Cottage," appeared in embossed letters on the front—was situated in a garden, and was the property of a gardener, who let his first-floor, furnished, to any ladies or gentlemen in want of a lodging. Why it was called Prospect Cottage is in some degree a mystery, for it commanded no other prospect than the top of the wall that surrounded it, the back of an old farm-house on the opposite side of the road, and a windmill with its appendages a little to the west. It was, indeed, in a very retired and unobtrusive situation, little to be seen itself and seeing little of anything or anybody.

In the front room on the first floor, which was neatly furnished as a sitting-room, sat Alfred Latimer with Lucy Edmonds. Poor Lucy was a good deal changed since the fatal period of quitting her father's house; she was thinner, paler, sadder; but perhaps the kind and character of her beauty was that which is increased by changes that affect detrimentally the loveliness that depends chiefly upon youth; and certainly it would have been difficult to find anything more interesting, more fair, more graceful than she looked as she sat before him to whom she had become a slave, and who had already too sadly shown her that he could become a tyrant.

She wept not—she had, indeed, given over

weeping, for she found that it irritated and annoyed him, and though it was often a terrible and bitter struggle to restrain the tears that were ever ready to burst forth, yet she had gained the mastery of them, and, with meek and patient endurance, strove to temper the bitterness of her fate. Sad she could not help being, for the voice of conscience was loud in her heart; but even her sadness provoked her betrayer, though he could find no excuse for anger, as she complied with his lightest word. He was her master, in short, and she resisted his will in nothing. Yet, with the perversity of his character, he was not pleased even with this placid obedience; he would fain have had matter for complaint, cause for quarrel. Not that he was already sated, and wished to cast off the unhappy girl whom he had so basely betrayed; for it would be a great mistake to confound the peculiar character of Alfred Latimer with the mere ordinary sensual debauchee. He loved Lucy, after his fashion, as much as he could love anything, and if he wished for cause of offence, it was not that he might have an excuse for parting with her, but solely that he might have an opportunity of tyrannizing and showing his power. She gave him no occasion, however, and his only resource was to torment her with hopes and fears about their marriage. It is true he wavered, and had wavered from the first, as to whether he would wed her or not. He had at first feared that by giving her such a tie upon him he might lose his slave, but as he saw more of her disposition he lost that apprehension; and the very bitterness and obstinacy of his character, as well as the promise that he had made to Williams, inclined him day by day more and more to keep his word. He had not forgotten the stern and severe language which poor Edmonds himself had used in speaking of his marriage with Lucy, and it seemed to him some sort of revenge to marry her in her parents' despite. He thought that he would make a great lady of her, that he would take her to Mallington in finery and splendor; but that as her father had said he would rather see her dead than his wife, she should hold no communication with her parents, but treat them as aliens for ever. Thus at his heart he had really determined to keep his word and marry her; but yet he could not refrain from leaving her in doubt upon the subject—from alarming her with affected hesitations—from reminding her that up to the last moment it was in his power to do as he pleased.

Though the banns had been published twice, and but a few days were to elapse ere they were to be published a third time, he had that very morning put her in mind that the publication was nothing, adding "You know, Lucy, we need not be married, after all, unless we like it."

Lucy's eyes were ready to run over, and her heart beat like that of a prisoner bird in the hand of one of the young tormentors of a school, but she conquered her emotion, and only replied, "Oh, Alfred, do not break my heart!"

"Why should it break your heart, silly girl?" asked Alfred Latimer. "What the better will you be for having a ring on your finger?"

Lucy shook her head sadly, as if she would have said, "I know that it can never make me what I once was—that it can never give me back peace, or virtue, or repose of heart; but yet it will do much, and God's mercy must do the rest." She would not utter such thoughts aloud, however, for she now but too well knew that they were not fitted for the ear of him who sat beside her, and their further conference was interrupted by the landlady's daughter coming to say there was a gentleman below who desired admission.

Alfred Latimer's cheek grew hot, and he felt somewhat alarmed, for there is a consciousness of peril always present to the vicious, which makes anything sudden fearful to them. He asked several questions of the girl in regard to the appearance of the person who desired to see him, and then exclaimed "Well, d——n him! show him up, whoever he is;" and then, bidding Lucy go into the inner room, he threw himself back in an arm chair, watching the door.

What was his surprise, however, when he beheld Captain Tankerville enter, with a gay familiar air, as if they had parted the best friends upon the face of the earth.

"Ah, my dear Latimer, glad to see you! I found you out, you see. 'Pon my life a very pretty looking place. What a nice garden you've got—better than the Surrey side of the bridges, by half—and where's *madame*?"

Cool impudence is certainly a very wonderful thing, for although it cannot do everything, yet it can do a great deal more, and does do a great deal more, in all the affairs of life than any one suspects. Many a man of very moderate abilities rises to the first offices in church and state by its influence alone. Every class of successful men, but one, owes it a good deal in the progress towards power, wealth, or honor. It may be asked which is the one class we have excepted! It is the very small, narrow, circumscribed class of truly great men—the colossal statues of which the world has not room for many. Thus, dear reader, if you are not conscious of possessing transcendent powers of mind and perfect rectitude of purpose, and are not endowed by nature with that splendid quality, cool impudence, content yourself with mediocrity and go on plodding, for, depend upon it, your breath is too short to walk up hill.

Though almost all men are more or less impressible by the great gift of which we have just been talking, yet some are peculiarly so, and such was the case with Alfred Latimer. We have already hinted that a foolish sort of shyness had been one of the early causes of many another fault in his career, and shy men, except under very great and trying circumstances, which bring out the energies that are sometimes latent in their nature, are almost always very much overawed by impudence in others. Captain Tankerville, in the character of bully and bravo, Alfred Latimer had shown himself ready to meet, and competent to deal with; and had he appeared in the same humor on the present occasion the young gentleman would have kicked him down stairs without the least ceremony. But his cool, easy, pleasant impudence Mr. Latimer did not know how to manage at all. At first he looked grave and even stern; but it was irresistible. Captain Tankerville saw no coldness, noticed no frowns,

seemed to have forgotten all that had passed upon the common, all talk of horsewhips, all production of pistols, all reference to bullets and powder-flasks. It seemed as if every scene had been obliterated between the sponging-house and the cottage drawing-room where he then stood, and as if he were still Mr. Latimer's very good friend and boon companion. Although such sort of forgetfulness of things that we don't want to remember, has undoubtedly an infectious operation upon those who may not be quite so much inclined to forget, yet, as in the case of inoculation for small pox, the disease is generally produced in a milder form, and people do remember a little. Even Alfred Latimer did not become altogether placable at once, and inquiring what was Captain Tankerville's business with him, made some reference to certain disagreeable passages which had taken place ten or eleven days before.

"Come, come, Latimer," cried Captain Tankerville, with beautiful frankness, "don't let's talk any more of that. I behaved like a d—d fool, and am quite ready to admit it; but the truth is I was half mad for want of money, and when a man is in that state you know he will quarrel with his best friend."

Against such frankness what could Alfred Latimer do? From inexperience of the world he was somewhat gullible, and slightly so also by natural character; nevertheless, at the present moment, his own finances were beginning to get somewhat lower than he liked to see them, and he therefore answered "I can understand that," alluding to the propensity a man in want of money has to quarrel with his best friend—"I can understand that, for, to say the truth, Tankerville, I am somewhat short of cash myself, and shan't be sorry to hear that you have come back to pay me the fifty pounds again."

This was a way of putting the matter which Captain Tankerville was not altogether unprepared for, for he was a grand calculator of contingencies, and he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with every discoverable fact concerning Mr. Latimer's family, circumstances, and situation.

"Why, not exactly that, Latimer," he replied. "I've come to pay you back part, and part is better than none, you know. I can let you have twenty pounds, for I have just made a grand *coup*, and as soon as I get any of the dust I thought of you. Here's the money; but I can do better than that for you—if you'll just listen to a little advice of mine, and follow my guidance, I think I can put you in the way of setting yourself up completely; but then, you know, you must let me have a share of the advantage."

"Let us hear what the business is," said Alfred Latimer. "You shall have your share if it can be carried through, and I'd give a devil of a deal just now to be able to command a thousand pounds."

"You can get more than that if you manage right—ay, five times as much," was Captain Tankerville's answer; "now that I know you've courage enough for anything, the matter will be easily done, for it wants but one bold stroke, which in your case would be attended with no danger, to make your fortune completely."

"Well, out with it," said Alfred Latimer; "I'm ready for anything that may do that. What is to be done?"

"Something I wonder you have not done long ago," answered Tankerville. "You know we had a talk some time ago about your sort of half sister, Miss Charlton—that is to say, your mother's second husband's daughter."

"That is not my half-sister, you know," exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "We are no more relatives than you and I are; but what next?"

"At all events she has a large fortune," said Captain Tankerville, and was going on, when his companion once more interrupted him with a shake of the head.

"That won't do—that won't do!" he said, "Her father took care of that—the old hound! He left the whole property away from her, if she married me—not a penny—not a rap would come of such a scheme, and besides—"

"I know all that," rejoined Tankerville. "I have heard the whole story; but my plan is a different one. You can drive your own bargain with any man who wants to marry her. If one won't pay down, another will."

"That won't do either," replied Alfred Latimer. "I have no power over her."

"But you may readily get it," said Tankerville, in a low voice.

"I might have got it at one time, if I had thought of it before," answered his companion, "but that chance is gone too, now. She is engaged, I am sure, to Morton, and with my mother's consent, too, or she would never have told him all her affairs."

"Do you know what this Morton is?" asked Captain Tankerville, less surprised by the intelligence than, perhaps, Alfred Latimer expected; "the people of Mallington do not seem to know anything about him."

"My mother thinks he is a poor painter," answered Latimer; "but I am sure he is not that."

"Are you sure he is not worse?" demanded Captain Tankerville; "there are strange suspicions about him in the village. I was talking only last night to a good lady of the name of Martin, who told me many doubts she had, and very reasonable doubts, too. Now listen to me, Latimer—you've a great regard for Louisa—have always been like brother and sister, and you've every right in the world to interfere, in order to prevent her marrying a man whom you have reason to think a swindler."

"But I've no reason to think any such thing," exclaimed Latimer; "quite the contrary. I think he's a man of fortune, and I'm sure of it. Ah! I see what you mean," he continued, observing a peculiar grin upon Captain Tankerville's countenance—"you would say I can pretend to think he's a swindler; but that would be no good, for he could prove the contrary in five minutes, and then I must hold my tongue, you know."

"Not if you will do as I would have you," said his companion. "You don't suppose I wish you to go to Mallington, and tell your mother and the old guardian—I forgot what is his name—that you think Mr. Morton not a proper marriage for Miss Charlton, that there are suspicions of his being a swindler, and all that. No, no, that would never do. You

must first get her into your power, into your own hands — then drive your bargain with him, and if there be any row about the matter, and it should go wrong, you've always got a good reason to give for what you have done. You can say it was all for the girl's good, that you had reason to believe that he was an impostor, that your mother and the old guardian were, for their own ends, furthering the trick, and that you had taken her away only to make her a ward in chancery. But there will be no row about the matter. He will come down with the dust fast enough when he finds you have got her in your own hands, and that there may be a great deal of difficulty in getting her out again."

"I don't think it," answered Alfred Latimer; "when I talked to him about my mother's making him pay for her consent, and showed him that it was well worth his while to do so, he replied, as proud as a peer, that he would never have any share in making Louisa's hand a matter of merchandise."

"Ay, that's another affair," replied the captain; "if he's such a high-spirited chap he'll be all the more likely to give five or six thousand pounds to get her out of your hands, especially if you keep it close where she is. He'll not call that a matter of merchandise. That will be merely setting her free."

"There's something in that," said Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I don't know how it is, I don't like to vex Louisa. She's a good kind girl as ever lived: and I shouldn't like her to think so bad of me as that I had made her unhappy just for the sake of some money."

"But you must tell her and everybody else the same story," rejoined Captain Tankerville, who internally laughed at the few remaining scruples in Alfred Latimer's heart. "You must make her think that you wish her nothing but good, and you can easily do so with her and everybody else too, for there are plenty of causes for believing this Mr. Morton to be a very doubtful sort of person."

Alfred Latimer shook his head, and laughed, answering, "You can't make me credit that."

"What will you think," said Captain Tankerville, after a momentary pause for consideration, "when I tell you that there are bills posted upon all the walls within ten miles round London, offering a reward of fifty pounds for the apprehension of a certain clerk, lately in the employment of Mr. Quatterly, solicitor, who has absconded with a large sum of money and is supposed to be concealed in the country under a false name? Now you may very well choose to believe that this Mr. Morton is that very clerk. You've seen them together. You know that Morton and Quatterly had money matters with each other, and there are many suspicious circumstances about this fellow's stay at Mallington. All this can be proved, and no one can say that you didn't believe the whole of it, so you are perfectly safe, if you choose to take Louisa from Mallington House to-morrow."

"It's not a bad scheme," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but how am I to get her away, that's the question?"

"That's easily done," answered Captain Tankerville. "I'll manage that for you, and I'll tell you how."

Just at that moment a slight noise, as if something light was falling, was heard in the next room; and Alfred Latimer, suddenly remembering the proximity of Lucy, held up his hand to Captain Tankerville, and then opening the door between the two chambers, looked in. Lucy was seated near the window, employing herself with some woman's work, and her scissors lay upon the floor beside her, as if they had fallen from her lap. Alfred Latimer closed the door again, but did not resume the conversation there.

"Come into the garden," he said. "We may be overheard here, and that wouldn't do;" and taking up their hats they walked down the stairs, and remained in conference for nearly an hour, walking up and down one of the broad gravel walks.

CHAPTER XLVII.

After leaving Alfred Latimer, Captain Tankerville proceeded into the heart of the town, and out at the other side, walking along the high-road till he came to an old and not very respectable-looking house, which was, notwithstanding, the first in the place, in coming from London. There was a tall wooden post before the door, with a square iron frame at the top, in which had formerly swung a sign; but that sign had long given way to wind and weather, and the present occupant had contented himself with painting up in large letters over the door, "The King's Arms." To whatever king those arms might have belonged they had certainly dignified no very important public-house, for though over the door it was written that good beds might be found within, the lodging it afforded did not comprehend horse as well as man, and the accommodation even for the latter was of a very limited description. Entering the door, however, Captain Tankerville turned to the right, where was a small parlor, which had not known the beautifying touch of either painter's or whitewasher's brush for several generations. The brownish yellow color, too, which is acquired by age had been deepened and heightened by the fumes of many thousand tobacco pipes; and the odor of a narcotic weed, rendered somewhat flat and strong by its antiquity, still exhaled from the panneling and from every article of furniture which the place contained, saluting the nose of the traveler, and giving him warning that he had no escape from the flavor of old smoke but by producing new.

The room had but one tenant before Captain Tankerville appeared, and this was a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, who, in spite of being respectably dressed, had a look of misery about him difficult to describe. It was not alone that his well-cut and not very old coat had evidently not been brushed for several days, nor that the legs of his trousers displayed several spots of mud up the back; but it was the attitude in which he sat, and the expression of his countenance which gave one the idea of utter wretchedness—deep, internal, consuming.

There was a handful of fire in the grate, and he had drawn his chair to the side of it, resting

his right foot upon the fender. His fore arm lay negligently on his thigh, his head drooped till it was within a foot of his knee, his shoulders were drawn forward till they almost touched his ears, the form of the bladebones being apparent through the coat behind; and he gazed upon the small glimmering fire as it wavered and flickered before him with a dull and leaden eye in which there was no comfort. Never was there a picture of more complete dejection; and if it wanted aught to render it more striking, the finishing touch was given by the glass half full of gin-and-water, which stood upon the table beside him. He had drunk a part in the vain endeavor to raise his spirits, but even in the midst had plunged into the reverie of his sorrow, and forgotten to finish the draught. What was that sorrow? The worst that can afflict humanity—crime.

The door opened with a pulley and weight; and the moment he heard the clatter that it made, he started with a look of terror and turned round. In Captain Tankerville he recognized a tormentor, but not what he most dreaded—an officer; and with an impatient jerk of the shoulder, he betook him to gaze into the fire again, at the same time raising the glass with a nervous shaking of the hand, and drinking off the contents.

"Ah, Mr. Wilkins," said the worthy captain, as he entered, "still poring and pondering, and making yourself miserable. Pooh, man! don't be a fool. If you go on this way you will get caught to a dead certainty."

"Do not call me Wilkins," answered the man, in a piteous tone, "I told you that my name is Jones. What do you want now? You promised to go away, and not to come near me again."

"Ay, I intended to do so," replied Captain Tankerville; "but I am compelled to trouble you, as the tradesmen say, Mr. Wilkins—I mean Jones. A little occurrence has just taken place which makes it absolutely necessary that I should have two hundred pounds more."

"Two hundred pounds!" exclaimed the unhappy man, "where am I to get it!"

"That won't do, my good sir!" replied the captain, "I am up to all that. The sum you took off old Quatterly's desk was eleven hundred pounds, and"—

"Hush, hush!" cried the culprit, for Tankerville had purposely raised his voice; "do not speak so loud. You know I gave you all the *gold I had*—one hundred and ninety pounds—and you said you would not take notes for fear they should be stopped."

"Well, they must do now, for want of better," answered the captain; "but I must have two hundred somehow, that's clear."

"And then you will come back and want more," rejoined the clerk, almost fiercely, "till you get the whole, and I shall be punished for your profit."

"Oh, no!" cried his tormentor, "that's a mistake. This is the last, positively; but it must be had, Mr. Wilkins, *alias* Jones. No, I can assure you that I am sorry for you, and don't wish to trouble you; nay, more, I'll put you upon a plan of getting safe out of the country as soon as you bring the money, and that's the most friendly act I can do you just now, I've a notion."

"Will you? will you?" cried the unhappy man, eagerly, "how is it—what's to be done?"

"Get the money first, and then I'll tell you," replied Captain Tankerville.

"But won't you cheat me?" replied the man; "after you've got the money, won't you cheat me?"

"See what it is to be a cheat!" said the worthy captain, in the true *Richard the Third* style. "He fancies every one as great a rogue as himself. No, no; I won't cheat you, upon my honor."

The fraudulent clerk did not certainly look quite satisfied, but went out of the room, with his head and eyes bent down, muttering to himself something in which nothing but the word "honor" was distinguishable. Captain Tankerville was not inclined to put more confidence in the clerk than the clerk was in Captain Tankerville, and it suddenly struck him that such a thing might occur to Mr. Wilkins as to get his money, walk out of the house, and convey himself away to some other place of concealment. To guard against this result the worthy captain walked out into the passage the moment after, and planted himself at the foot of the stairs. He received no interruption in his watch, but from the landlord, who inquired, "Are you pleased to want anything, sir?"

"A glass of brandy-and-water," replied the captain, who was always ready, "cold without;" and leaning his arm upon the bar, he chatted for a moment till Mr. Wilkins appeared coming down the stairs with his hand in his breeches pocket. The unfortunate man had never entertained the slightest idea of escaping from his persecutor; and giving Tankerville a sign to follow, he walked into the little parlor again. As soon as they had entered, he was drawing forth the notes, but his companion exclaimed, "Stop a bit, stop a bit, I've ordered some brandy-and-water. Wait till they bring it;" and in a minute after, a large rummer of black-looking stuff was brought in. When the landlord was gone, Wilkins immediately produced a bundle of notes, which he handed over to Captain Tankerville, exclaiming, "Now tell me, tell me what is to be done."

But Captain Tankerville had his particular taste as other men. He enjoyed the unhappy culprit's anxiety; it was a pleasant amusement to him—a relaxation from his more serious occupations. He therefore counted over the notes slowly, to see that the tale was correct, and then, looking up with a dry cold countenance as he put them into his pocket, he said, "Suppose I have nothing to tell."

"You're not such a villain," said the clerk.

"Why, you see, Mr. Wilkins, *alias* Jones," said Captain Tankerville, "it was not very fortunate for you, certainly, that just as you were getting down from the top of the coach you should stumble upon one who knew you so well; but if you ask my advice, now—the best thing you can do is to make your way as fast as you can to a seaport, and take your berth in a ship. That's the only way to get out of an island."

The poor man gazed upon him for a moment, with a look almost bewildered; but then a glance of rage came into his eyes, he lifted his head, threw back his shoulders, and rising from his seat strode towards the door.

"Hallo! what are you going to do?" exclaimed Captain Tankerville, somewhat disconcerted by these signs of an intention which he did not rightly comprehend.

"I'll tell you," said Wilkins, sternly, "I see what you're about. You intend to wring the last shilling out of me, and then inform against me for the reward; but I'll be beforehand with you, and what I am going to do is to call the landlord, give myself up to him, and accuse you as an accessory with the money upon you—I won't be tortured this way any longer;" and he stretched out his hand towards the lock of the door.

"Pooh, nonsense! I was only joking," cried Captain Tankerville, a good deal alarmed in his turn. "Come back—come back, and I'll tell you what to do."

He rose as he spoke; but Wilkins had by this time gained the courage and decison of despair; and he replied with a wave of the hand, "Sit where you are, and I'll stay here till you tell me, for I'll have no more joking when you've got my neck in a halter, and I've got your feet in Botany Bay."

Now, it is probable that Captain Tankerville, if he had not given twenty pounds of the stolen money to Alfred Latimer, might have ventured to call loudly for the landlord to have given Wilkins in charge, and to have pretended that he had only taken the sum which he had about him in order to prove the man's guilt; for Captain Tankerville was seized with one of his fits of rage at finding the worm turn upon him, and in those cases he was apt to forget everything—but his own safety. That, however, was a paramount consideration, and after about a minute's struggle with himself to conquer the strong devil within him, he said, "What a fool you are, not to see when a man is joking with you. Here have I not only been laying out a scheme for you, but actually got the means of carrying it into execution. Look here!" and he pulled out of his coat pocket a bundle of handbills—there might be a dozen or a dozen and a half—each of which contained a full, true, and particular account of Mr. Wilkins' personal appearance, and offered a reward for his apprehension.

"What has that to do with my escape?" said Wilkins fiercely, when he saw them.

"Everything," replied Captain Tankerville; "I bought these of a man who was sticking them up expressly for your sake. Now, what you have got to do is nothing but this—to go to a slopseller's, and buy yourself a flannel jacket and an apron, to get yourself a tin pot full of paste, and a paste brush, and walk away towards Portsmouth, or the nearest port you can find, sticking up a bill upon the wall, wherever you may think there are people looking after you. They are never likely to suspect a man who is seen placarding a reward for his own apprehension. It's a new go, that, my good fellow, and I think a devilish clever one;" and he laughed at his own cunning. "I'll tell you what I'd do besides," he continued, getting into the spirit of the thing—"I'd cut off a bit of that dark hair and those whiskers, buy myself a second-hand flaxen wig, and a low-crowned glazed hat. Then the devil himself wouldn't know you."

A ray of light, of the bright light of hope, shone in the culprit's eyes, and he said, "That will do—I do believe that would do. Well, this is kind of you, after all; but I don't know rightly which road to take."

"Oh, I'll tell you," answered Captain Tankerville; "you've nothing to do when you go out of the inn, but to walk along the London road for a mile, and just beyond the milestone you'll find it branch off to the right; that will lead you over the hills to Mallington."

"I can't go there, I can't go there," cried Wilkins; "that's where I was ordered to go the very morning I took the money."

"That's just the reason why you should go," answered Tankerville; "they'll never think to find you there. You might lodge there for a year without ever being found. It really makes me sick to see a fellow like you in such a fright. Why, I lived for eighteen months quite comfortably, in different parts of England, with all the beaks in London after me, without receiving one penny from any friend or relation upon earth, and yet I never wanted my little comforts. But do as I tell you, and all will go right. The first thing you do when you go into Mallington, stick up a bill against the wall of the great house at the top of the hill. Then plant another on the garden-wall of the Bagpipes Inn, down by the bridge; then you can take the coach that comes down at night, and get on to Winchester; plant a bill or two there, and get on to Southampton."

"I'll set about it directly," said Wilkins, raising his hand to the lock of the door; but then he paused, while his face became a shade paler, and he added, "You won't inform against me, after all?"

"Why, you fool, I should be cutting my own throat," replied Captain Tankerville. Should not I have to give up all I've got? Besides, I've another object in getting you safe out of the country. What it is, is no business of yours; but it will serve my purpose, and that is enough. So go along and buy the things, pack them up in a bundle, and change your clothes at the first common or wood you come to. I'll keep the landlord chatting here till you've done it all."

"I must get a five pound note changed," said Wilkins, remembering his assertion that he had given Captain Tankerville all the gold he had taken; but he had in truth no occasion to have recourse to such a proceeding, for the principal part of his booty had been a bag containing five hundred guineas. Neither did Captain Tankerville altogether believe him; but as he had means of getting the notes into circulation without appearing in the business himself, he suffered the matter to pass, and after remaining at the inn till Wilkins returned from making his purchases, he saw him pay his bill, and went with him a short distance on his road to Mallington.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Although there is something comfortable to most men in any sort of wickedness on the part of others—a pleasant little self-gratulation, as well as the titillation of that very excitable propensity called wonder—yet the fact of a knave

per's clerk having robbed his master was not a matter of so much horror and importance as to give great gratification to the general public of Mallington, when the very man who had committed the crime, dressed as a bill-sticker, placarded the walls with an advertisement of reward for his own apprehension. Had they known the trick, indeed, which was being played under their eyes, it might have made them more comfortable than it did; but as it was, though a great number of persons read the handbill, and got a little bit of marvel out of it, yet the great majority very soon forgot the affair, as they knew none of the parties concerned. There were two or three persons in Mallington, however, for whom it opened sources of enjoyment unknown to their fellow townsmen. Miss Mathilda Martin read the placard as she went down the hill; and although she was on the way to speak with Mrs. Splashman — the gay widow of a draper, who was looking forward to future matrimony—in regard to nine pair of silk stockings, for which Mrs. Splashman had never paid, yet she instantly turned back to the shop and communicated to her sister the important intelligence which she had thus obtained. As soon as she had told the story, Miss Mathilda shut her mouth, opened her eyes, elevated her eyebrows, and shook her head, with mystery as clearly written upon her countenance as ever it was upon that of a certain Babylonian lady of more than doubtful reputation.

The meaning of the look, however, was not hidden from Miss Martin herself. She translated it at once with the greatest facility, and although it contained a world of logical argumentation, which might have taken an inferior mind a length of time to follow and comprehend, she saw the inference at once, and replied without hesitation, "There can't be the slightest doubt of it. Now, Matty, it is but a public duty to go and call the attention of Soames to the subject. I wouldn't say anything direct; that isn't your business; but I'd just point out to him the bill, and then ask him if he does not think it very extraordinary that there should be such a likeness between this clerk Wilkins, and the person calling himself Morton. I'd have another look before I went, and get all the particulars."

"Oh! I've got them all as pat as the ten commandments," replied Miss Mathilda Martin. "'Five foot ten or eleven inches high, dark complection, dark hair and whiskers, rather good-looking' — I don't think him good-looking, for my part, but there are others as do, so that's nothing — 'generally dresses himself in black, and has somewhat of a military look'—there can't be a doubt of the man, I think."

"Not enough to puzzle a child," replied Miss Martin, "and when you put that and that together, and think of he's being down here and nobody knowing who he is, and his flashing his money about so smartly, and his walking out at nights, and all that, the thing is as clear as clarify."

"Well, I'll go directly," cried Mathilda, and was turning out of the shop upon her charitable errand, when her eye, being directed across the street, fell upon an object of interest. "Upon my life," she exclaimed, "there's that Mrs. Windsor. I've a great mind to call her and ask her a thing or two."

"Do, do," cried Miss Martin. "She's a despicable creature; but it will be good fun to see what she'll say."

The younger lady thereupon raised her voice, saying, "Mrs. Windsor! Ma'am! I wish to speak with you for a moment."

The housekeeper of Mallington House, thus adjured, crossed the street gravely, and entered the shop; and while she was performing this operation Miss Mathilda, with ready wit, laid out an excuse for calling her.

"Oh! Mrs. Windsor," she said, as soon as that lady came in, "I wanted to show you this beautiful piece of satin, which we've just had down from London. Isn't it a sweet thing?"

Mrs. Windsor was not in the least deceived in the world. She was a shrewd person, and knew the Misses Martin well. Casting a careless eye, then, over the piece of goods exposed to her gaze, she said dryly, "You know, ma'am, we don't deal at your shop—Is there anything else you wanted?"

"Oh dear, no," replied Miss Martin, for Mathilda was a good deal discomposed. "We only thought you might like to see it. We were talking of quite different things when my sister caught sight of you. She was just telling me of the bill that's posted up all about the place offering a reward for the apprehension of that gentleman."

"Yes, I saw it," replied Mrs. Windsor, "but as I know nothing about him, I went on and minded my own business."

"Pray, ma'am, is Mr. Morton at your house still?" asked Miss Mathilda abruptly, with a sort of hysterical titter.

"Oh, yes," answered Mrs. Windsor, not in the least discomposed; "and likely to be for some time. He's not looking for lodgings, ma'am."

"I didn't suppose he was," answered Miss Mathilda; "but since you take it so, Mrs. Windsor, I must say you've no right to think my sister and me uncivil for asking you to see a pretty thing; and as to your mistress not dealing here, we can't say we are sorry for it, for we like customers who pay, Mrs. Windsor."

"Oh, I didn't say I thought you uncivil," replied the housekeeper; "I only think you two very silly people. Good morning, ma'am," and she walked out of the shop, leaving the Misses Martin to vent their indignation for a few moments in such expressions as "Wretch," "Trull," "Despicable minx," &c.; after which the younger lady proceeded on her way, in a state of irritation which was likely to make her communication with the constable somewhat less discreet than was at first proposed. As she went down the street, however, to her great satisfaction, she found Mr. Soames himself, with his eyes raised up towards the wall, reading the important document, with Mr. Gibbs, the traveler, and one or two other persons standing beside him. Miss Martin suffered him to conclude, and then touching him with her delicate hand, she called his attention to herself, and begged to speak with him for a moment.

Mr. Soames walked aside with her somewhat unwillingly, for he knew Miss Martin to be a dangerous person, and one in whose hands anything that was said to her increased and multi-

plied and shot out branches in various directions with rapidity and fecundity truly astonishing. Miss Mathilda Martin, however, had the talent of insinuation, and she seldom began straightforward; thus her first question was "Have you apprehended him?"

"Who do you mean?" asked Mr. Soames, in a rough tone, desirous of making her speak more plainly.

"Why, the gentleman, to be sure," replied Miss Mathilda Martin, looking shrewdly over her shoulder towards Mallington House.

"Do you mean the man that the bill is about?" asked the constable, pointing to the placard; and, as Mathilda nodded her head, he added, "How could I apprehend him when I've never seen him?"

"La!" cried Miss Mathilda. "Well, I never! I thought you must have seen him often enough. 'Five foot ten or eleven, dark hair and whiskers, rather good-looking, usually dressed in black—has somewhat of a military look!' Well, there's nobody so blind as those that won't see, and if people don't choose to use their eyes and understanding, I can't help it; but I know what, if I were a constable, I should look after those as are down here, with no business or calling, giving themselves great airs, and spending a great deal of money, when no one knows where it comes from."

As she said this, Miss Martin turned away, and the constable, beckoning Mr. Gibbs, walked up the village. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Gibbs," he said, "even such a foolish old maid as that Miss Martin has her suspicions."

"Oh, hang her!" said Gibbs, "she suspects everybody. I offered them the agency of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad for the town and district of Mallington, and they immediately——"

"Well, but," said Harry Soames, interrupting him, "you acknowledge yourself that you have seen strange things, and yet you won't say what they are."

"Because I can't help thinking there must be some mistake," answered Gibbs. "He's a perfect gentleman, and I've had papers of his in my hand which make me quite sure of it."

"That might be all a trick," answered Harry Soames. "How can you tell they were his papers? If he be this scamp of a clerk, as I think, it's just as likely that he has taken some of his master's papers as the money, and then he would be sure to use them just to cover who he really is. I've a devilish good mind to go and take him up, and bring him before a magistrate on suspicion, that I have"—

"You might get yourself into a mess," said Mr. Gibbs; "and I'd wait till I saw clearer, if I were you. It's a very doubtful case, Mr. Soames—a very doubtful case, indeed. It puzzles me quite; I don't know what to make of it."

"Well, if you would tell me all," rejoined Soames, "perhaps I might help you out with it. What I want to know is, what put you in such a flusteration, and made you look so knowing the day after they attempted to break into the hall. If I take this young fellow up, depend upon it I'll call you before the magistrates to give evidence; then you'll be obliged to speak, you know, so you might as well say your say at once."

Mr. Gibbs still hesitated, however, and even in the end would not give the required explanation, but urged Harry Soames only the more eagerly to mind what he was about, and to take care he didn't get into a scrape. The constable's curiosity was but the more excited by his reluctance, and he continued to press him in various ways as they walked up the hill. "I almost thought," said the constable, "at one time that you fancied this Mr. Morton had a hand in the job up there."

But Mr. Gibbs parried the point dexterously. "Oh, dear," he said, "how could I think that! Wasn't he down himself the next day with Doctor Western, looking all about the place where they had broken in, and advising Edmonds to sleep in the house, almost as if he was giving him orders?"

"That might be all a trick, too," answered Soames. "Your cunning fellows know how to push a face. Well, at all events, there's Wilkinson, Mrs. Charlton's servant, at the gate; and I shall just talk a word or two to him about this young chap. If I could but get up some story, I would go in and speak to the fellow myself. I'll answer for it I'd soon fish out something from it."

Mr. Gibbs shook his head, doubting very much Mr. Soames's power of fishing anything out of the pond of Mr. Morton's mind; but having a certain degree of curiosity about him, as the reader may have perceived, he was willing to help the constable in this part of his undertaking, and therefore suggested that Master Harry Soames might pretend to have something to say to Mr. Morton upon the subject of his lost pocket-book. This proved a very satisfactory hint to the constable, and walking on together, they approached the footman, who was standing at the gate which opened upon the high road, with his hands under the tails of his coat.

To Harry Soames's question, however, as to whether Mr. Morton was within, the man replied in the negative, saying that he had been out for an hour; and the constable proceeded, in a quiet conversational tone, to talk of that gentleman, and his affairs; to the course of which proceeding Mr. Wilkinson opposed no impediment, having his full share of footman qualities, amongst which neither the least, nor the least frequent, is that of chattering about that which does not concern one. The palaver which ensued would not be very interesting to the reader, if given in detail, but Mr. Soames and Mr. Gibbs gathered from their friend that the proceedings of Mr. Morton were matter of some wonder and speculation in the servants' hall—that he was often out very early in the morning, and often late at night; and that, moreover, everybody in the house but Mrs. Windsor wondered what their mistress could be about, and thought it very strange indeed that Mrs. Charlton should so evidently cast her step-daughter at the head of a man of whom she knew nothing.

"I can't help saying he's quite a gentleman, certainly," said Wilkinson, "and does everything quite in gentlemanly style; but if I were a mother, Mr. Soames — which, please God, I am not likely to be — I should like to hear who he is, and what he is, and all about him, before I made him my daughter's husband. Mrs.

Windsor understands it all, I can see—Hang it, she understands everything. She's one of those still, quiet, peeping, cat-walking people who know every mouse-hole about a house; but she won't say a word, not she."

"Well, Mr. Wilkinson," said the constable, "I wish, when Mr. Morton comes home, you'd just contrive to step down and tell me, for I want to speak to him about this pocket-book of his. I think I could contrive to get it for him if I had a little more information."

The footman promised to follow these instructions, but that day passed and the next without Mr. Soames receiving any intimation that Morton had returned to Mallington House, and we must now turn to give some account of what had taken place within that mansion at an earlier hour of the same morning.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Amongst all the pleasant things of life—and the all-bountiful hand of Providence has scattered the path of our days with innumerable pleasant things if man would but enjoy them—amongst all the pleasant things of life there are few more pleasant than a walk in a flower-garden before breakfast on a sunshiny morning. To see those mute and still, though not motionless creatures—I mean the blossoms—opening their painted bosoms to the beneficent rays which give them their color and their loveliness, welcoming the calm blessing of the light as if with gratitude, and seeking, in their tranquil state of being, for nothing but the good gifts of God, might well afford a monitory lesson—for everything in nature has its homily—to us, the eager hunters after factitious enjoyment—to us, goaded on by our own passions to seek for everything that the Almighty has denied. How calm do they stand in their loveliness—how placid in their limited fruition of the elements that nourish them—how in their splendid raiment do they sparkle in the sun—how do they drink up the cup of the dew, and gratefully give back honey and perfume in return! And there are some, though but too few, who, watching them as I have said in the morning light, can gather such lessons from their fair book, and feel their hearts lifted up to God even by the contemplation of a flower. One of those who could do so was Louisa Charlton, and it had always been her custom from her childhood, whenever the sun looked brightly into her window as she was dressing in a morning, to go down as soon as she was ready and walk for some time through the gardens round the house. They were large, well-arranged, and carefully tended, for they had been the pride of Mr. Charlton's heart, and he had loved to see his flowers the finest and his fruit the best that the country could produce. After his death Louisa took the chief care of them herself, for Mrs. Charlton did not much heed such things, and to the mind of the daughter the memory of her father was associated with every different flower-bed, and tree, and shrub.

It may well be supposed that Louisa did not give up the habit of early rising, or her morning walk, when she was sure of finding the most beloved society in her own dwelling, and generally was joined ere her ramble was concluded by the companion dearest to her heart. It must not be said, indeed, that after Morton's arrival at Mallington House she took as much heed of the flowers as she had previously done, for her thoughts were whiled away to other things, not less pleasant, and of deeper interest at the moment; but still her morning walk took place, and rarely was she once round the garden before her lover was by her side.

On the day of which we have been speaking in the last chapter—namely, that on which the inhabitants of Mallington, on rising from their beds, found the placard describing the absconded clerk, which had been posted up late the day before — Louisa Charlton entered the garden about a quarter before eight, with an air less calm and tranquil than usual. Instead of proceeding on her way from path to path, and parterre to parterre, at a quiet, orderly, sober pace with her eyes—whatever her heart might be doing—busily examining, or appearing to examine, the flowers, she came down the steps, with her light foot treading the ground eagerly, and her face turned alternately to every different part of the garden, evidently looking for some one in haste. At length some moving object beyond the second row of evergreens attracted her up the middle walk, and in less than a minute her hand was clasped in Morton's as he advanced to meet her.

"Oh, Edmond!" she exclaimed, "I am so glad I have found you. The butler said you had gone out; and, as you said last night that you had some engagement to-day respecting the pocket-book, I feared that you might be already away, and I should not have known how to act."

"What is the matter, dear girl?" asked Morton, with some feelings of apprehension. "You seem agitated. Has anything alarmed you?"

"No, I am not exactly alarmed," replied Louisa; "but a little annoyed by a note I have received this morning from Alfred. He says," she continued, holding an opened letter for her lover to take it and read—"he says I am not to tell any one, and especially not Mrs. Charlton or you; but I think that, as we are circumstanced"—and the blood rose slightly in her cheek as she alluded thus vaguely to her position with her lover—"I think, as we are circumstanced, I have no right to keep anything back from you, whoever may ask it. In this case especially I cannot do so, for how I shall act will depend entirely upon what you say."

Morton took the note gravely, for there was something in the very name of Alfred Latimer that conjured up thoughts of no very pleasant character, and read it through before he replied. The words he saw were to the following effect:—

"Dear Louisa,

"I am very awkwardly situated, and much want your advice and assistance. I cannot come into Mallington to see you, for reasons; but if you would just, like a kind, good girl, as you always are, walk out through the garden upon the common, and take your way towards the windmill, about half-past eight to-morrow, I will meet you there, and you can be back time enough for breakfast. It will be doing me a very great favor, indeed, if you come; but

mind, don't say a word to my mother, and although Morton's a very good fellow, you must not say anything to him.

"Your affectionate brother,

"ALFRED LATIMER.

"P. S. Mind, not a word to Morton, for the world."

Morton gave the letter back to Louisa, and then drew her arm through his, saying, in a decided but kindly tone, "You must not go, dear girl, on any account or consideration."

"I thought such would be your opinion," answered Miss Charlton; "and, indeed, after what I have vaguely heard of Alfred's late conduct, I felt no inclination to go; but, on the contrary, so much dread that nothing but your advice and request would have induced me to do as he asks."

"No chance of my giving such advice, Louisa," replied Morton. "Were Latimer a mere wild, careless youth, who got himself into scrapes and difficulties by thoughtlessness, extravagance, or folly, I might have hesitated what to say; but as, on the contrary, he is habitually vicious and depraved—as he has shown no regard for honesty, honor, or even common decency—I must be harsh, Louisa, for the occasion requires it—as such is the character he has established for himself, I cannot but say it would be both improper and dangerous for you to meet him in the way he suggests. What may be his design or object I know not, but I doubt much that it is one at all honorable to himself, and if he retained any sense of what is right, or had any real regard for you, he would not make such a request as he has done."

"I do not argue quite so ill of him on that account, Edmond," answered Louisa, somewhat sadly; you know that we have been brought up together as brother and sister, and he might not see—indeed, I am sure he did not see any impropriety in asking me to meet him on the common, if he wished, as I doubt not he does, to obtain some assistance from me or through my means. It is his conduct to others that has made me hesitate."

"And it is that conduct, dearest Louisa," replied Morton, "which renders it wrong in him to ask you to come. Conscious, as he must be, of acts committed in this very neighborhood of the most shameless description, his proposing to one so pure, so good as you, Louisa, to meet him at this early hour, is almost an outrage."

"And yet, Morton," replied his fair companion, "I would give much to be enabled to make one more effort to recall him to better things—to give him some present assistance in extricating him from his present situation, and to—to press him"—

Louisa paused and colored, for she was now approaching a subject that, to a mind like hers, was not only painful and agitating, but which roused feelings of shame even in speaking of it with one whom she loved and trusted. After a moment's hesitation, however, she went on. "I would give much," she said, "to have an opportunity of pressing him to marry that poor girl Lucy. I have often seen her, Edmond, often spoke to her, and I am sure she was once modest, good, and virtuous. I cannot but think that some base means must have been used to render her otherwise, and I would fain urge Mr. Latimer to remove that stain, at least, from his character."

Morton laid his hand upon the soft and fair one that rested on his arm, and pressed it gently. "Ever kind and noble!" he said. "I fear that it will be vain, Louisa, but yet such feelings and such wishes must not be thwarted. For you to meet him is impossible; but as this letter shows that he can be at no great distance, notwithstanding his having eluded all search, I will endeavor to find him out, and"—

"Oh, do not risk a quarrel with him," cried Louisa, "you know not how violent and impetuous he can be, and I much fear if you were to speak with him on the subject I have mentioned, he would become furious."

"I do not propose to do so, dear one," replied Morton; "my voice would have no effect. I have abandoned all hope of reclaiming him; but yet—and I do not think that it is love which makes me fancy so—I cannot but believe that your voice might have some effect. There is something in the pleading of a woman for a woman, in the virtuous and the high for the sinful and the fallen, which is very powerful; and when all his life must have taught him to love and respect you, perhaps there may be a chance of his yielding to better purposes when proposed by your lips. What I will then do, my Louisa, is to seek him out, to avoid all matter of discussion between him and myself, and to make some arrangement by which he may come here in safety—perhaps to-morrow morning, before Mrs. Charlton is up, and speak to you in private. You can then hear what he has to say, and shape your arguments accordingly."

Louisa hesitated ere she replied, for she could not banish all apprehension from her mind of some painful collision between her lover and Mrs. Charlton's son. Although she had not, it is true, as yet seen Morton placed in any very trying and difficult circumstances, yet, from those small traits which we read, without being aware of it, as indices of the characters of those by whom we are surrounded, she had been impressed with a full conviction that Morton was not without great command over himself, even when strongly moved. But, at the same time, she saw that his reprobation of Alfred Latimer's conduct, and his judgment of his disposition, was stern and severe—more so, indeed, than seemed quite consistent with the general tone of kindness and charity which all his conversation displayed. Had Louisa, indeed, either possessed Morton's experience of the world, or the full knowledge which he had acquired of Alfred Latimer's habits, she would not have wondered at the little hope he entertained of his reformation, or at the fixed opinion which he had conceived of the natural badness of his heart. As it was, however, she feared that his feelings would display themselves somewhat too openly in any conference with Latimer; and that the latter would give way to some burst of violent passion such as she had seen him frequently indulge, which might lead to an open quarrel between them. Before, then, she suffered her lover to leave her upon the errand on which he was about to set out, she sought to take securities from him in the shape of many promises that nothing should induce him to suffer Mrs. Charlton's son to irritate or make him angry.

Morton tranquillized her upon that point, assuring her that her fears were without cause, and then left her to proceed upon his way, having received an intimation, that if he would come to a spot named, some communication would be made to him in regard to the lost pocket-book which might prove more satisfactory than the last.

Taking his way out of the gate farthest from the house, Morton directed his steps towards the point assigned, which was marked by a red-painted finger-post upon the common, about two miles and a half from Mallington House, where several of the small roads, which traversed the wide extent of moor in different directions, crossed each other. He had no very distinct notion of the locality, for he had never hitherto had occasion to visit that side of the common. The attentive reader, indeed, would probably be able to find his way to it blindfold, when he is told that the post stood about three hundred yards to the south of the lone house to which Prior, the Bow-street officer, had been conducted some time before by Bill Maltby. As Mr. Morton, however, had not heard anything but the result of Prior's expedition, and was totally ignorant of the particulars, it is not to be wondered at that, though taking the general direction in which he was told that the post was to be met with, he wandered somewhat out of the way. Thus bearing to the eastward of the direct line, at the distance of about a mile from Mallington House, he came in sight of the mill which had been mentioned in Alfred Latimer's letter, and he naturally turned his eyes in that direction. At a little distance from the mill he perceived a man pacing up and down the road, and though he could not be nearer than half a mile, he had no difficulty in recognizing the person of Mrs. Charlton's son by his peculiar gait and walk. As it was not his intention to encounter him at that moment, and he did not like to have the appearance of spying upon him, Morton turned off to the right, and, passing over the brow of one of the numerous waves of ground, descended into a hollow filled with gorse and heath, through the midst of which wound the little narrow path he was following. That path soon led him over another slope, from which he caught sight once more of the top of the windmill, with its sails whirling rapidly in the quick fresh breeze, and in a minute or two after he descended into a still more profound hollow, which, like a great furrow formed by some gigantic plough, extended straight across the moor for nearly a mile. On the left, in the direction of the mill, which was now no longer visible to Morton's eyes, and at the distance of about three-quarters of a mile from the path which he was pursuing, the highway crossed the dell, and, looking along the hollow vista in that direction, the top and body of a post-chaise as far down as the axles of the wheels, with the heads and shoulders of three or four men gathered together in a group, were apparent. The chaise was motionless; the men did not stir; and Morton thought the whole circumstance somewhat odd and suspicious. Calculating as nearly as he could, he judged that the spot where the vehicle was placed must be about a quarter of a mile from the mill, and upon considering the undulations of the ground, he became convinced that neither the chaise itself, nor the people who accompanied it, could be visible from the spot where Alfred Latimer was waiting for Louisa Charlton. Indeed, if the common there was as irregular in its surface as at the spot where he then stood, the carriage would be hidden from any one coming from the side of Mallington, till he was close upon it.

A quick suspicion passed through his mind; but Morton was not fond of suspicion, and although he knew that it was difficult to do Alfred Latimer injustice in such circumstances, he mentally said, "No; he could never be such a scoundrel!" but the moment after, he added, "At all events, I am very glad that Louisa has no thought of going."

Twice or thrice as he passed over the opposite slope, he turned his eyes towards the chaise, and still saw the same group at the same spot. Just when he reached the top, he perceived the figure he had seen waiting near the mill, coming along the road above towards the party below, and apparently beckoning to one or more of them. Satisfied, however, that Louisa was in safety, Morton did not wait to watch their proceedings, but walked on, and the minute after they were hidden from his sight.

As he went on he got a better and more general view of the country round, though without catching sight of the chaise again, and perceiving that he must have gone too far to the eastward, he took the first path to the right, which soon led him to a small sandy carriage-road, and at the end of about half a mile farther he perceived the red post to which he had been directed, standing before him, with part of the lone house which Prior had visited appearing above some trees beyond. No person was seen upon the road, however, and Morton, thinking that by one circumstance or another he might have been delayed beyond the appointed time, took out his watch to ascertain the hour. He had yet ten minutes to spare, and walking on to the finger-post, he sauntered up and down before it, but still no one appeared. Nor, indeed, had it ever been the intention of the person who called him there either to come or send, the appointment being made, as the reader may have divined, from Williams's words on a former occasion, merely for the purpose of keeping Mr. Morton in play. That gentleman at length began to suspect that such might be the case, and was about to turn upon his way homeward, when the sound of carriage wheels suddenly met his ear, coming on apparently at a rapid rate, but then stopping in a moment.

CHAPTER L.

The plan was all laid out, the preparations made, half a dozen lies were ready to be told as soon as any circumstance might require them; the post-chaise was concealed in the hollow, and, besides two or three of Alfred Latimer's usual companions, Captain Tankerville, dressed in a suit of black, to look as like a physician as possible, stood by the vehicle, to give authority to the tale which had been devised. The post-boy had been brought from a house at which Alfred Latimer knew his mother never stopped in traveling through the neighborhood, and he had been told that the object of all this care and

[illegible] was in [illegible] common, and [illegible] again under a [illegible] was to be [illegible] were asked; [illegible] restraint to be [illegible] Captain Tankerville who was at [illegible] concocting false papers to suit his purposes. He would not at all have scrupled to forge a name to the certificate, had he thought it necessary; but he judged that his own name, with M. D. appended to it, would be sufficient in the country, especially when he was present himself. Everything also had been prepared at the cottage inhabited by Alfred Latimer: a room had been furnished with nailed windows and iron bars; and the landlord had received intimation that it was the intention of his tenant to bring thither for a short time a near relation of his own, who was, unhappily, insane. The good gardener took the story upon trust, and, indeed, was not very particular who were his guests, so that his lodgings were well let; and Latimer, never doubting that Louisa would come at his invitation, thought Tankerville a very clever fellow for devising such a plan.

"I do not see," he said, "why I should not get a part of the money, as well as my mother, if Louisa is to be set up to auction," and he proceeded to calculate how many pleasant things he could do with five or six thousand pounds.

He was early at the spot appointed, and when Morton passed had been waiting nearly an hour, though the time he himself had fixed had not long gone by. As he was watching with eager and impatient eyes for Louisa's coming, he caught sight of Morton, though that gentleman was not exactly upon the road by which he expected her to appear. At first he did not recognize him, and merely gave way to a burst of impatience, from the apprehension of any stranger being near at the very moment when he was about to execute his schome. In a moment or two, however, there was something in the air and figure which showed him who it was; the firm and vigorous step, the upright and commanding carriage left not a doubt; and, on the first impulse, Alfred Latimer would have hurried behind the mill to hide himself, had he given way to it. The next instant, however, he thought "She has told him, I'll bet a guinea; and he's coming here to watch what we are about. He had better mind his own business, or he'll get half his bones broken. Perhaps she has sent him to palaver me about virtue and propriety, and all that, and to offer me money if I'll be a good boy;" and he laughed scornfully, adding, "Hang me if I get out of his way."

Thus saying, he recommenced his walk again, up and down the road, at a little distance from the mill; but he very soon perceived that, whatever was Morton's object in coming to the common at all, he had no intention of approaching the spot where he had stationed himself. His next conclusion was that he had come to watch and to find out his designs, and the consciousness of his own villanous purpose made him fancy it already in part discovered. "Curse it!" he exclaimed. "If he goes on in that direction, he will see the chaise and all the people, and that will be a fine affair. Perhaps he may have other fellows to help him, sent round behind by the lanes and the bank, and then we shall be in a net. I had better go and talk to Tankerville about it;" and off he set as hard as he could go, beckoning to his companions as soon as he got upon the brow of the hill behind which the chaise was concealed, and calling them to come to him, in order that the post-boy might not overhear their consultations.

The first who approached was Captain Tankerville, and Alfred Latimer was in full career, communicating to him his doubts and suspicions in regard to Morton, when Bill Maltby joined them. The latter caught enough of what was said to perceive the fears which the young gentleman entertained of being surprised, and he hastened to relieve him, saying "Pooh! nonsense, sir. I knew quite well he was going across the common at this time. I told you so a couple of hours ago, but only you were in such a fluster you didn't listen."

"What is he after, then?" asked Alfred Latimer, turning quickly towards him. "What business has he up here at this time?"

The question somewhat puzzled Bill Maltby, for though he had willingly enough agreed to take part in Alfred Latimer's present enterprise, and had himself found a boy to carry the note to Miss Charlton, he was not at all disposed to trust that gentleman with any knowledge of the schemes and adventures in which he and Williams had been engaged.

"What he's about is no great matter," replied Maltby, at length. "He's gone upon a fool's errand, and will have to cool his heels for an hour at the red post, by Gandy's old house, waiting for 'the man that never comes.' The truth is, he's been making a great fuss about this pocket-book of his, and had down Prior from London about it; so a party of us young fellows determined that we'd have a bit of fun out of it, and make the gentleman walk the country."

"If that's the case," said Captain Tankerville, "you had better go back, Latimer. But it must be a good deal past the hour. I shouldn't wonder if she didn't come."

"If she doesn't," replied Latimer, "that d—d fellow has stopped her."

"Why, I can't help saying he's very right," replied Tankerville, laughing; "and yet we might make him pay for it, too."

"I wish we could," replied Alfred Latimer. "I am sure he has stopped her, if she is stopped, for she would only show the letter to him; and I'd give a guinea to see his head broke for his pains."

"Perhaps we can do better than that," replied Captain Tankerville; "but do you run up again, Latimer, and see if the girl's coming. I'll think of another plan in the mean time; for it is not easy to find me unprovided."

His companion returned to watch by the mill, and Tankerville held a brief conversation with Bill Maltby, for whose talents and acquirements, although they had been but lately introduced to each other, he began to entertain considerable respect. To detail all they said to each other, even in the short space of ten minutes, and to explain all that what they said implied, would take a good deal of room, for they spoke quick and eked out their words with nods and signs.

We must therefore content ourself with such scraps and bits of sentences as met the ear of an inferior companion, young Blackmore, the gardener's son, who had been engaged by Maltby to assist that morning, but was not admitted to the full confidence of the superior vagabonds with whom he was confederated.

"Oh, no," answered Maltby to a question from Captain Tankerville, "he knows nothing of me, though I know him."

"Well, then, if we can't have the doe, we must take the buck," replied Tankerville. Then followed some murmuring, at the end of which the worthy captain observed in a louder tone, "Oh, no! I heard all. He did not say whether it was a man or a woman—not a word of it. He only said a maniac."

"But I do not see the use of it," said Maltby. "What can you do with him?"

"I've not settled all," replied Captain Tankerville, in a tone of philosophic meditation. "One can never quite foresee all the results of anything; but one must be a great fool if one cannot find some way of turning them to advantage. At all events, my good sir, at sea, when we want to catch a fish we often bait a hook with a bit of another; and, if this sweet young lady is so much in love as Latimer says, we shall find means of driving a bargain with her when we have got her lover safe in our hands. It seems to me that it does not much matter which we have, so that we have one of them."

"Well, you had better be quick," rejoined Maltby, "for I dare say he will not wait very long, and, besides, he'll show fight you may be sure, and then if there should be any one near we may get into a mess."

"You run up and call back Latimer," replied Tankerville, "and in the meanwhile I will instruct this young fellow—what is his name?"

"John Blackmore," answered the other, in a whisper; "he's a determined little devil, though he looks spooney and lackadaisical," and having given this excellent character to his friend, he set off to recall Alfred Latimer to a new scene of operations.

On his return a brief but earnest conference was held by the four respectable persons engaged in this very praiseworthy enterprise, and though Latimer, when he rejoined his companions, bore one of those dark fierce looks upon his countenance which from boyhood had followed even the slightest disappointment, he soon was seen to smile with a bitter sort of satisfaction at what Tankerville proposed regarding Morton; for your thorough scoundrel is incapable of gratitude, and, transmuted by the dark alchemy of his own heart, benefits conferred upon him become injuries. There was something in the whole scheme that he liked—it had its portion of imagination and enterprise, and, as to scruples, Alfred Latimer had long done with them.

With him, then, the whole business was soon settled; and it was only necessary to notify to the post-boy the change of their plan, as far as it behoved him to know it.

"You must drive us round by this road, and then take the second to the right till I tell you to stop," said Latimer. The man touched his hat, and the young gentleman added, "The poor man we are looking for has gone across the common."

"Ay, sir, I see him go just over there five minutes ago," answered the post-boy. "I should not wonder if he were to dodge you uncommon."

Without entering into any discussion on that point, Latimer, Tankerville, and Maltby got into the chaise, John Blackmore mounted the splinter bar, and round they drove till they came within about a couple of hundred yards of the spot where Morton was waiting; and then, leaving the chaise, while John Blackmore, instructed what he was to say, advanced along the road to engage the object of their scheme in conversation, the other three crept through the shrubs and tall furze towards the same spot.

The gardener's son came up with Mr. Morton just as he was about to turn towards Mallington, and, addressing him with an easy air, he said "I beg pardon for keeping you so long, sir; but there were people with a chaise dodging about, and I did not know what they might be after."

"Then you have come to speak about the return of my pocket-book?" replied Morton. "I hope to accept the offer I made, for this will be the last opportunity you will have of doing so."

"Cannot we split the difference, sir?" said young Blackmore, advancing closer to Morton, as if to whisper. "I think, now, you ought to consider, and if you do not you must."

Thus saying he threw himself upon him; but Morton, stepping back, with one straightforward blow levelled him with the ground. The youth, however, cast his arms round his opponent's feet and legs as he fell, and in an instant the three other men were upon their prey. The struggle that ensued was firm but brief, for Morton's chief effort was to draw a pistol from his coat-pocket, having taken the precaution of arming himself before he set out upon an expedition which might not be without its peril; but the attack upon him was so sudden that his arms were speedily pinioned; and as soon as he found the attempt to reach the weapon vain, he ceased to resist, merely saying, as his eye rested upon Mrs. Charlton's son, "I know not what are your designs, sir; but you had better consider well what you are about, before you plunge into crimes as well as vices."

Alfred Latimer made no reply but by a triumphant laugh, and they hurried their captive on towards the chaise. As soon as the post-boy was within hearing, however, Morton exclaimed, "Are you, my man, too, an accessory to this act of violence?"

"Ah, poor gentleman, I know all about it!" answered the man; and before Captain Tankerville could stop him, he added, "You're not the first madman I've druv."

"Ha! is that the story?" exclaimed Morton; "then let me tell you, you are cheated; and if you do not inform the nearest magistrate of all you have seen, you will certainly suffer for your part in this affair. I shall know you and your master;" and he read aloud the name upon the door of the chaise.

While this was taking place those who had

him in their hands had forced him forward as speedily as possible, but Morton resisted till he had said what he thought necessary, and then quietly entered the vehicle. Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer took their seats on either side of him, Maltby got upon the splinter bar, and young Blackmore, having received a whispered message from the latter, and some money from Mr. Latimer, hurried away across the common.

CHAPTER LI.

It took about three hours and a half for the chaise to carry Morton and his captors from Mallington Common to the house in the garden, and as the reader has been already informed, the road crossed through as uncultivated a district as any in the two counties. After quitting the common, indeed, it traversed several little hamlets, but no large village, and then, gradually ascending, it ran along the ridge of a bare hilly spine, used principally as a sheep walk by the neighboring farmers. At the other end, again, it entered into a more fully inhabited tract. A gentleman's house was to be seen here and there rising on the side of a hill, which gave a pleasant prospect, while groves of trees sheltered the mansion from the prevailing winds; and one or two small villages echoed to the sound of the wheels, as the chaise whirled through them, but as the road was now almost all the way down-hill, the post-boy kept his horses at a good pace, and it was not till they were within about a mile and a half of the town that any pause took place. It was by this time half-past twelve—an unpleasant hour for any one to bring a cargo of contraband merchandise through the market-place of a large town—and, consequently, Alfred Latimer put his head out of the front window, and directed the post-boy to drive round by the lanes, adding something about "the poor gentleman making a row."

Morton merely smiled; and though he saw a man coming along the road when the postilion drew up to hear what was said, he made no movement of any kind, being one of those calm but no less determined people who only take advantage of the proper opportunity more resolutely, because they have waited for it with patience. His perfect quietness and tranquillity, indeed, was not altogether pleasant, either to Alfred Latimer or to Captain Tankerville. They could not account for it themselves upon any other reason than that he had a perfect certainty in his own mind of speedy deliverance, by some process which they could not divine; and they began to entertain those vague apprehensions of dangers, against which there is no guarding, but which are very unpleasant to men engaged in a criminal pursuit. It would have been much more satisfactory, too, if he had striven and resisted, and made noise enough to have attracted the attention of the post-boy, which might, they thought, have confirmed the tale of his insanity they had thought fit to tell; but Morton disappointed them entirely, and the man having received his orders, drove round the town, through the lanes, and reached the cottage in the garden, the wall of which had in it, besides the ordinary door, a gate for the gardener's carts to enter and go forth, as occasion might require. At this gate Maltby jumped down, and drew back the bolt, giving admission to the vehicle, which instantly rolled on close up to the door of the house. He then planted himself on one of the steps, and Alfred Latimer sprang to the other, to prevent the captive of their bow and spear from holding any communication with the master of the house, who was seen at a little distance working in his garden with one of his laborers. Morton, however, alighted quite quietly, as if going straight into the house; but he turned suddenly to the post-boy, who was looking round, exclaiming, "Remember what I told you! You will be well rewarded if you do—punished if you do not!" and then walked on, followed by Tankerville and Latimer, while Maltby remained at the door to watch the proceedings of the driver.

As soon as Mr. Morton was safely deposited in the room which had been prepared for Louisa Charlton, and the door locked and bolted upon him, the two principal scoundrels who had brought him thither, held a quick and whispered consultation in the passage, in regard to what was to be done with the post-boy.

"By ——, he's devilish like to go and tell a magistrate," said Alfred Latimer; "the fellow will say to himself there can be no harm in that, whether the man is mad or not."

"Ay, that's what our friend upstairs calculated upon," rejoined the worthy captain; "and there's but one way of mending it, that I see."

"And what's that?" demanded Mr. Latimer. "I don't see how we can stop it."

"Why, give him a five pound note for his trouble," answered Tankerville; "then if he keeps the money he's art and part in the business and won't dare to say a word; and if he says a word he'll be obliged to give up the money, which, depend upon it, he won't like to do."

Alfred Latimer did not at all approve of lessening his little stock by the sum of five pounds; but, nevertheless, he saw no chance of concealment except in following the course which his confederate suggested; and consequently, after some grumbling, he advanced to the door of the house, paid for the horses, and gave the post-boy the sum determined upon, saying, "That's for your own trouble. You need not mind anything that fellow said about telling magistrates. He's as mad as a March hare, and we've got a doctor's order for what we do. Here it is."

The man only thanked him, and drove out of the gate again; but, as he went, he exchanged a glance with the good gardener; and raising his right thumb towards the left ear of the off horse, seemed to indicate a desire that the man should follow whither he was about to go. As Maltby had turned round to speak a few words with his two companions, this gesticulation escaped the notice of all but the person for whom it was intended; and the gardener advancing to shut the gates, looked out, and nodded his head, as if to signify that he understood, and would follow.

In the meantime the three respectable gentlemen who had been engaged in this pleasant affair, proceeded to the drawing-room of the cottage, where poor Lucy Edmonds was specd-

dislodged, to give freedom to their consultation. As soon as she was gone, and the door shut, Tankerville said, slapping Latimer on the shoulder, "Now, my boy, at him at once. You have got the game in your own hands, if you play it well."

"But let us consider what I'm to say," rejoined Alfred Latimer. "The first thing I shall have will be a lecture upon being ungrateful, and all that."

"Oh, don't stand any nonsense of that kind," answered Tankerville. "Treat it as a matter of business, Latimer. Tell him you know quite well he prevented Miss Charlton from coming, and so he must stand in her place. Just say to him that if he has a mind to give you a promise in writing to lay down five thousand pounds to you on his marriage with Louisa, and to give his word of honor that he will not mention anything about this affair to any one, you'll let him out at once; but if he doesn't, you'll keep him in till you settle the matter with Louisa herself."

"He'll refuse to a certainty," replied Alfred Latimer; "I know him better than you do, and he's as stiff as a rusty weathercock."

"Well, it can't be helped if he is," answered Tankerville. "Curse him! let him refuse, and we'll settle the matter with the young lady. It's always a devil of a deal easier to plough with the heifer. We must get her promise for the five thousand—I'll manage all that and hang me if I don't try to make it ten. The devil of it is, we must be quick, otherwise you see inquiries will be made, and the whole business may get blown, which would be devilish awkward. However, we are sure enough of three or four days, and I'll take upon myself to answer for bringing the young lady round in that time. You go and speak to him, Latimer; and Mr. Maltby and I will wait at the door to make sure he doesn't break your head and get out, for he's devilish strong when he likes it."

Alfred Latimer, according to this suggestion, moved upstairs, followed by his two worthy comrades, to the room in which Morton had been placed. At the door, however, he paused for an instant; for though every day, in the course of vice which he was pursuing, he was undergoing that process of hardening which gradually converts the first sheepish dabbler in roguery into the brazen-faced villain, yet when his blood was not up there was a degree of shame left in his nature sufficient to make him feel unwilling to go in and display to an honorable and gentlemanly man the whole meanness and baseness of his character. He did not choose, however, to shrink or hesitate before his two more impudent companions; and, after this momentary pause to consider what tone he should assume, he threw open the door sharply, and went in, with his brow knit into a frown.

Morton was standing at the window, looking out; but he turned round instantly, catching sight before the door was closed, not only of Alfred Latimer himself, but of his two companions. His visitor, however, determined to take the first word; and, without giving Morton time to speak, he said, with a swagger, "I can tell you what, sir, people who think that they can thwart me when I've determined on a thing, and choose to meddle with what does not concern them, will find that they may get into the wrong box. You may say what you like, but I know quite well that Louisa was fool enough to show you the letter I wrote her, and that you told her not to come; and now you taste the consequences of your interfering."

Morton gazed at him with a grave look of pity, not unmingled with contempt, "I do not understand," he replied, "what you mean by telling me that I may say what I like. I am not accustomed, sir, to say anything but that which is true, and you have had no occasion to suppose so."

"Well, did you, or did you not, tell her not to come?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, eager to find grounds of quarrel.

"I undoubtedly did," replied Morton, "and I am very glad!"

"Well, then, you see what comes of it," cried Latimer, interrupting him.

"I do," replied Mr. Morton, "and, as I was going to say, when you stopped me, I am exceedingly glad that my opinion of your character and your conduct was so strongly formed, that I advised her not to trust herself with you at a distance from home, even before I knew you would venture to such a length as to gather together three or four ruffians and swindlers, with a post-chaise, upon the common, in order to carry her away to a room freshly prepared, with iron bars to the windows, for her imprisonment under some pretence or another."

Latimer had twice opened his lips to interrupt Morton while he spoke; but, to say truth, he was puzzled for a reply, and rage did not facilitate his utterance.

"I have every right," he exclaimed at length, "to take any means I may think fit to prevent my sister from marrying a fortune-hunter and a swindler."

Morton smiled, but answered calmly, "You have no right, sir, to interfere even in the slightest degree. Fortunately for herself, and for all who have any regard for her, you are not any relation whatever to the lady whom you presume to call your sister. Her guardians and her step-mother will, doubtless, take good care that she does not, as you say, marry either a fortune-hunter or a swindler; and if it is to me you apply those terms, there is nobody that should know better than yourself that you are falsifying the truth, and attempting to cover a piece of knavery by a lie."

Had Tankerville or any other of his companions ventured to use such expressions, Alfred Latimer's first act would have been to knock him down, but there was something in Morton which cowed him; and, after hesitating for an instant, he replied, "I did not say you were a fortune-hunter or a swindler; but I do say I've a right to know who you are, and what you are, before you marry Louisa Charlton, who, if she is not my sister, is just as good, being my mother's step-daughter."

"You have no right at all," replied Morton. "To those who have a right to inquire, I am not only quite ready to explain, but have explained already."

"The devil you have!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "Then, I suppose you mean to say you've made your bargain with my mother and old Doctor Western!"

"I've made no bargain with any one," an-

swered Morton; "nor shall I make one—of that you may be quite sure. I told you so when you hinted something of the same kind in London, and I repeat it now. You mistake me altogether; and I cannot but hope and believe that you equally mistake your mother's character in attributing such objects to her."

"Pooh, nonsense!" replied Alfred Latimer. "My mother would be a fool if, when old Charlton put such power in her hands, she did not make the most of it. What did the old man do it for, if he did not intend her to gain something by it?"

"It was very strange, certainly," answered Morton, thoughtfully, "and unlike the whole of the rest of Mr. Charlton's conduct. There is no accounting, however, for old men's caprices; but it is my belief that the law will not sustain that part of the will."

"The deuce it is!" exclaimed Latimer; "then the more need I should take care of myself; and I've only one word to say upon the subject, Mr. Morton, which is this—that if you or Louisa, one or the other of you, do not agree to pay me down five thousand pounds upon your marriage-day; and if you do not give me your word of honor that no notice shall be taken of this affair; you will have to kick your heels here for a month or two, for I have got you snug, and you'll not get out in a hurry."

"In regard to my taking notice of your present conduct," replied Morton, "probably I shall not punish you as you deserve; not on your account, but on Miss Charlton's: in regard to her conduct to you, or to what she may think fit to promise you, I have no control, and do not seek to exercise any; but for my own part, as I said before, I enter into no bargain with you or any one else, and allow me to say that, by attempting to make such, you only degrade yourself without in the slightest degree forwarding your own object."

Alfred Latimer set his teeth hard, and then replied, "I'll tell you what, sir—I've got the whip hand of you, for a time at least—and I'll make you forward my object, whether you like it or not, so good morning to you," and thus saying he flung out of the room, and joined his two companions on the outside.

"Well done, Latimer!" said the gallant captain, grasping him by the arm. "We heard it all, every word, and nobody could do it better. You'll be as good as the Bravo of Venice in time. But come, let us consult on the next step," and, going down to the room below, Captain Tankerville continued (for, although he proposed to consult, he had already laid out the whole plan in his own head) "You must make me your ambassador to this fair queen of beauty and wealth," he said. "I will go over early to-morrow and represent the case to her, and I doubt not that before dinner time I shall bring you over her promise under hand and seal. Those dear creatures, the women, they are so easily humbugged, especially where a lover is in the case. Then they are always inclined to do things with an air; and but set them riding upon the hobby of generosity, and there's no knowing how far they will go."

"It's not so with all women," answered Alfred Latimer, thinking of his mother,

"Wouldn't it be better for you, captain, to go over at once?" asked Bill Maltby. "It's a good long way, it's true, but yet it's better to strike while the iron's hot."

"No, no," replied Captain Tankerville; "give her a day to fret. They'll not be able to trace him very easily—don't be afraid; and what between trying to find him out all this morning, and fretting and fancying he's murdered all night, she'll be brought down so low by to-morrow that she'll be ready to do anything that one wants, merely for the assurance that he's alive and well."

"That's Louisa, all over," answered Alfred Latimer. "I don't a bit doubt that she'll promise; but I'll tell you how you can make it quite sure, Tankerville. If you just make her think that Morton wishes it, she'll do it in a minute."

"Not a bad idea," answered Captain Tankerville; "we might write a letter for him, asking her to do it; but then you see, when she found out that that was all a fudge, she might not be inclined to keep her part of the bargain."

"Oh, yes, she would," replied Latimer, who at least understood Louisa's character well. "She never broke her word in her life."

"It will be better not to put anything on paper," said Maltby. "Captain Tankerville can just quietly hint that Mr. Morton wishes it; but wouldn't for the world ask her, and she would do it all the sooner, depend upon it. But you see, the mischief of it is, that while we are all over here, we can none of us tell what may be going on at Mallington, and a thousand things may happen to make it devilish awkward for us when we come to operations to-morrow."

This very sage observation struck his companions amazingly, and produced a discussion as to the steps to be taken, which ended by Maltby setting out for the purpose of hiring a horse and gig to proceed to Mallington, and watch all that took place in that village. A fresh call was made upon Alfred Latimer's purse for this part of the service, and Maltby promised to give due intimation of any occurrence that might be important in the eyes of his two companions.

After he was gone Captain Tankerville coolly invited himself to dine and spend the evening with his dear acquaintance of the sponging-house; and poor Lucy Edmonds was forced to endure during the rest of the day the presence and society of a man whose countenance and manners filled her with instinctive dread if not for herself, at least, for the unhappy young man towards whom she still entertained but too deep an attachment. After dinner, Latimer and his companion both drank deep, and Lucy was glad enough to quit them, and retire nominally to rest, though but little rest, indeed, could the unhappy girl find from the wearisome agitation of her own reproachful heart. The drinking still went on in the room that she left, and then cards were produced to pass away the time, for Captain Tankerville could not resist the temptation to pigeon even a confederate in crime; and Alfred Latimer, who really did play well—it was his only talent—fancied that he played better than any one else. For several games success was pretty equal on both

sides; and though Latimer did not wish to risk money, as the whole of the twenty pounds he had received from Captain Tankerville had been well nigh dissipated in the operations of that morning, the stakes were gradually increased till they amounted to a considerable sum, when fortune's balance began immediately to incline in favor of Captain Tankerville. With a heated brow and a glittering eye Latimer went on; but he still lost, and began to fancy he was cheated. The pile of money grew up on Tankerville's side of the table, and diminished upon his till he saw immediate need stare him in the face. Yet he could not stop, but went on watching the game with fierce eagerness, and thinking that he saw a card kept back, or slipped beneath when the pack was cut. He was in hopes at the very next deal of detecting the fraud, when the bell of the house was heard to ring. The door was not opened, however, and with scarcely a minute's interval the bell rang again.

"The old fellow below is asleep," said Tankerville. "I should not wonder if it is some one from Mallington. I'll go and see," but before he did so he swept up his winnings, and put them in his pocket. Then taking the candle, he walked down stairs.

Alfred Latimer listened, and heard the voice of John Blackmore, the gardener's son; then looked with a haggard eye at the small sum that remained upon the table—less than ten pounds; but that was all that he now possessed on earth; and the next moment, as he was taking it up, Tankerville and the messenger entered the room, with an expression of a good deal of anxiety in the countenance of the former.

END OF PART I.

THE STEP-MOTHER.

PART II.

CHAPTER LII.

Just at the turning of the lane which took an elbow before it entered the high road at about a hundred yards from the first entrance of the town, the post-boy stopped his horses; for we must now go back to the worthy gentleman in white corduroys, top-boots, and a red jacket, who had driven Alfred Latimer and his friends to and from the neighborhood of Mallington. We do not propose, indeed, to stop long with him, and trust not to meet with him often beyond the limits of this chapter. Not, indeed, that the genus post-boy is altogether an uninteresting genus; and as it is likely soon to become utterly extinct, we might devote a whole chapter to the development of its specific characteristics, did not the exigencies of this story require us to hurry on. There are many varieties, indeed, of post-boy: the loquacious, the taciturn, the observing, the stolid, the drunken, the grave, the smart, the slow, the impassible, the picturesque, and the poetical; but still we will not be led into a disquisition, and merely say, that of all these varieties, the post-boy in question belonged to the observing class. A mind naturally astute, rendered quicker by a considerable quantity of drubbing in infancy and boyhood, the habit of lounging about inn doors and examining all sorts of things that passed, the necessity of driving multitudes of people whom he did not know, and of gathering from various little traits in their looks and demeanor whether they would give threepence, fourpence, or fivepence a mile, and the custom of riding and tending every devil of a horse that his master chose to purchase, which begot great acuteness in discovering the peculiarities of equine character;—all these rendered him of an observing and inquiring disposition, and enabled him to judge rapidly of everything that he saw.

Having stopped his horses, then, which were somewhat hot, and very tired, he got out of the saddle, patted his bearer on the chest, just below the near shoulder; drove some flies from the off horse, who had a thin skin, and did not like to be troubled; and then turned round and looked behind him to see if Alfred Latimer's landlord was coming. He had to wait several minutes before the expected event took place; but then the worthy gardener made his appearance, plodding up the lane, and, after a significant glance between him and the post-boy, the conversation began as follows:—

"This is a rum go, Master Wilson," said the man of horses.

"Ay; I don't half know what to make of it," rejoined the man of flowers.

"Do you know much about that young chap as is lodging with you?" asked the post-boy.

"No; I know nothing at all," replied the gardener, "except that he pays his rent every week. That's my business, and I never mind anything else."

"That's a hint," said the post-boy, "that I had better mind my business, too;—but I can't help thinking, Master Wilson, that that 'ere young gentleman they've got hold on is no more mad nor you or I."

"Can't say," replied the gardener dryly; "never see him before."

"Did you hear what he said to me?" inquired the other.

"No; I heard him say something, but I didn't hear what it was," answered the gardener. "The truth is, I don't want to meddle with what doesn't concern me, and so"—

"As you get your rent, and I dare say it's a good one," rejoined he of the post-chaise with a grin, "you'd rather that your lodger wasn't disturbed in his doings. Well, it's no concern of mine either; so I'll jog on, and have a pot of beer;" and thereupon he put his foot in the stirrup, got into the saddle, and trotted away till he reached the inn.

The post-boy was now left to his own resources, cut off from the counsel which he expected to find in the gardener, and much doubting what he ought to do. The five-pound note which he had in his breeches pocket, had a snug and comfortable feeling about it, which it would have been unpleasant to part with. When a man puts on a great coat in the morning, he feels cold if he pulls it off again the same day; and it is wonderful what a warm thing a five-pound note is in a pocket that has never had such a thing in it before. The thought of the deprivation was unpleasant to the post-boy, and yet, strange to say, the very fact of his having received that five pound note caused the greatest doubt as to whether he should keep it. He knew that it had not been given him for nothing; and he had to consider that, if any disagreeable consequences arose from the detention of the gentleman reported to be insane, he was sure to be looked upon as art and part in the transaction, in consequence of his having received so large a sum without honest services performed therefor. He did not like that prospect at all. Jail, and examination, and trial, and perhaps punishment, were very unpleasant prospects to him, and, besides all this, he was at heart not at all an ill-disposed or dishonest person. He had, at bottom, that which almost every Englishman naturally possesses, from the highest-minded man of honor to the lowest scamp—a great dislike to injustice in the abstract; and he had, moreover, that which all Englishmen habitually receive—an abhorrence of any infringement of civil liberty. He thought it a very hard case indeed that an English gentleman should be kidnapped and carried off, and shutup as a madman, when he was not mad at all; and of the latter fact, in Mr. Morton's case, he had no doubt.

But then the five-pound note in his pocket felt so comfortable; and the devil, who is always at every man's elbow, ready to take advantage of

any little circumstance in his fate to lead him away from the straight path with the most persuasive arguments, kept pointing out to him how many nice things he could buy, and how many pleasant things he could do, with the sum of one hundred shillings. Upon a close calculation he found that, under any ordinary circumstances, he would have to trot four hundred miles in a posting saddle, with the pole of the chaise rubbing his leg the whole of the way, and to walk his horses back a similar distance, disencumbered of the pole aforesaid, before he could, in the course of his professional avocations, make a sum equal to the five pounds in his pocket. Honesty and prudence required him to resign it: the devil and convenience said, keep it snug; and, between them all, poor human nature was in a sad puzzle.

The internal emotions of the man will have in some way their external impression. Centuries elapse without bountiful nature producing two such frames as that of Prince Talleyrand, in whom it is recorded that no emotions were ever perceptible, or, in other words, that the soul never looked out of window. Not so with our poor post-boy, who displayed the embarrassment in which he was by various visible signs. He rubbed down his horses ten times more than was needful—he more than once broke out into an agitated whistle in the midst of his brushing. The ostler asked him where the deuce he had been so long, and he answered, "Yes — very;" and when he came to give the landlord the money for the horses, he had well nigh given him the five-pound note into the bargain. Still he could settle the matter in no degree to his satisfaction. He wished the devil wouldn't tempt him, but the devil would; and the bundles of hay were so equally divided, that, like the ass in the fable, he could move on neither the one side nor the other, so completely was his mind on the balance.

At length something occurred to relieve him. A gentleman's chariot drove up to the door of the inn, and a loud voice shouted up the yard, "Horses on!"

Now the inn possessed three pair of posters, and at that particular time but two post-boys—little crooked-legged Jemmy, whose right leg had somehow been bent into the form of a semicircle, apparently by the pole, and whom the reader who has traveled that road doubtless recollects being laid up with a severe fit of illness. The ostler called aloud, "Tom! Tom!—horses on!"

"Where's Bill?" cried Tom, which was our friend's Christian name.

"Gone to Winkington," answered the ostler. "Quick, Tom; the gemman's in a hurry, and you must go."

Now Tom, as the reader knows, had ridden forty-two miles that day, and he might be well pleased with a little repose, especially as he had had no time to get his dinner, and his stomach felt egregiously empty; but, on the other hand, he recollected that his new ride would give him time for deliberation, and also a good excuse, in case of need, for not proceeding to a magistrate's, in accordance with the injunction of Mr. Morton. He therefore only requested to have a pint of beer and some bread and cheese to take with him—the one in his stomach, and the other in the pocket of his jacket—and carrying his great coat over his arm, he issued forth to the inn door, where the ostler was already busy in putting-to the horses. The first thing he saw, on giving a glance in at the carriage-window, was an immense head, which had apparently seen many summers; but the expression of the countenance thereunto appertaining he could not well discover, for, in addition to the impediment of a pair of spectacles, the eyes were cast down, busily reading what seemed to be a law paper. The landlord was making out the ticket, but Tom, with a view to further discoveries, thought fit to approach the window and inquire, "Where to, sir?"

The gentleman looked up, and replied, "To Mallington. How far is it?"

"One-and-twenty miles good, sir," replied Tom, in a desponding tone, as if he thought he should never get there that night.

His dolorous expression seemed to strike the gentleman, and he replied, "I hope the man in the moon has not come down too soon to find his way to Norwich, for I should like very much to be in Mallington before eight."

Tom promised to do his best, received the ticket, got into the saddle, and drove away, still cogitating upon what he was to do. The journey, however, passed over quietly enough. The horses were fresh — a great deal fresher than Tom—but he himself was moved by that sort of irritating doubt which is a great incentive to locomotion; and so he kept his beasts going at a good rate, till, a little after night-fall, they entered the town of Mallington, and drove up to the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was out in a minute, the ostler made his appearance, the chamber-maid was seen in the background, and two or three heads raised themselves over the blinds of the tap and the commercial room, looking out to gather as much as the darkness would permit of the appearance and proportions of the vehicle. In the meantime Mr. Quatterly entered the inn, and was ushered upstairs; the horses were taken off, and delivered over to the tenderness of the ostler; and Tom, the post-boy, thinking he had earned a right to a little repose, went into the tap, seated himself with his whip in his hand, and called for a pint of beer to begin with. While the bar-maid was drawing it for him, he suddenly heard the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose replying to her new guest on the first landing, "I'll send the note immediately, sir; but I'm afraid it's no use, for Mr. Morton, as I hear, went out early this morning, from Mallington House, and hasn't yet returned, and they are all in a great fuss about him. There have been people out all over the country looking for him; but when last I heard he had not been found."

What Mr. Quatterly replied Tom did not hear, but the speech of the landlady made a deep impression upon him, and on the impulse of the moment he exclaimed aloud, without noticing the presence of a slang-looking, tolerably well-dressed young man, who was flirting with the bar-maid through the window, "Hang me if that isn't the gentleman they are talking of as I drive over this morning. I'll go and tell them all about it;" and up he got, with his whip still in his hand, and approached the foot of the stairs.

"No," said Mr. Quatterly, speaking to Mrs. Pluckrose, still at the first landing, "I think I'll go myself, ma'am, and inquire into this business. Let me have somebody to show me the way." But just at that moment Tom approached, touching his hat, and saying—

"I think I can tell you more about it nor any one, sir, for I knows more nor any one."

"Come up, then—come up," said Mr. Quatterly, quickly, advancing to the room towards which Mrs. Pluckrose had been leading him. "Though this business seems as dark as mutton-pie, we'll soon have some light in it."

The moment after, Tom, Mrs. Pluckrose, and Mr. Quatterly were all shut in together in consultation, and at the end of about five minutes the voice of the fair landlady was heard calling from above, "Betsy! Betsy! Send the boy down to Dr. Western to say we've heard where Mr. Morton is gone to, and beg him to step up directly. Tell the ostler to get out a chaise directly—make the boy run all the way."

The slang-looking gentleman, of whom we have spoken, had looked a little askance at the post-boy's first announcement of his knowledge of Mr. Morton's abode, and for a minute or two paused in his conversation with the barmaid to listen to what was taking place above. He lingered about, however, saying a few words to while away the time, till the voice of Mrs. Pluckrose was heard giving the above orders; but then, without more ado, he walked out of the inn, and hurried down through a lane at the back of the street till he reached a small public house, which we may say, by the way, bore not the very best reputation in Mallington. He there found seated our respectable friends Bill Maltby and Mr. Williams, to whom he communicated, in great haste, all that had just taken place at the inn.

"Get out the horse, like the devil!" was Maltby's first exclamation; and as soon as the lad had run to perform this errand, he and Williams held a short whispered consultation, at the end of which a piece of paper was procured, on which the latter gentleman wrote a few hasty lines. In a minute after the youth returned, saying the horse was out. The note was intrusted to him; and he received directions to "ride like hell!" which, as we all know that that place gets on very fast, as well as all who are traveling thither—we may naturally conclude meant as quick as he could go.

The youth departed; and in a moment after the sound of a horse's feet were heard beating the ground at full speed.

CHAPTER LIII.

As may well be supposed, the news which reached Captain Tankerville and Alfred Latimer, to the effect that their whole proceedings were made known, and that magistrates and lawyers were in pursuit of them, proved by no means palatable to those worthy gentlemen; and while the captain interrogated young Blackmore with much acumen, drawing from him a full statement of all he had seen and heard at Mallington, his companion gazed on the note, which was addressed to himself, and seemed to find therein matter for no very light meditation. After about five minutes' conference, however, Captain Tankerville made up his mind as to his own course.

"Well, Latimer," he said, "I don't know what you intend to do; but I'm off. I don't intend to be taken in my form, I can tell you; so, good night."

Latimer looked at him with a stern and haggard eye, but for a moment made no answer. At length, however, a smile of scorn, somewhat strained and unnatural, came upon his face; and he said, "you are easily frightened, Tankerville, and, I dare say, will be afraid to come back and give me my revenge when these fellows are gone. You have left me but a hundred pounds in the house; and you ought to give me my revenge at least—if your heart does not fail you."

He spoke an untruth when he pretended to possess the sum he stated, for his stock was reduced to a few guineas; but it was not without an object, as he well knew the only sure bait he could hold out to the swindler before him was money.

Captain Tankerville rose at it like a hungry trout. "Oh, dear, no!" he said—"I'll not baulk you. I'll come back as soon as I find the coast clear; but I doubt, my friend, that if you stay, you'll get nabbed, for what we have done is no joke."

"I can get bail, if I want it," replied his companion, in a cool tone; "but as you cannot, I fancy, you had better go. I shall expect you to breakfast at ten, and I'll bet you five pounds that I keep my man in spite of them."

"Done!" answered Captain Tankerville; and, with a renewed promise to return and give him his revenge, as men term the process by which they propose to plunder a dupe still further, he took his departure, and left Latimer and young Blackmore together.

As soon as he was gone, the note was examined once more with keen attention, and then Mr. Latimer inquired, "how will Williams get over, John?"

"Why, he has got a gig, sir, all ready," replied the gardener's son. "He has been showing himself a good deal in Mallington lately, just to prove to the folks that he had nothing to do with cracking the window at the hall; but he always keeps a gig ready, nevertheless; and if he tells you in the note that he's coming, he'll be over quick enough, for Jack Williams does not lose time. He did not say anything to me about it, however."

"Then you had better go where you were told," answered the young gentleman. "I cannot spare much, but there's five shillings to bait the horse, and you shall have more by and by."

He spoke in a calm, ordinary tone; but when he was once more alone that apparent tranquillity deserted him, and he walked up and down the room for half an hour in a state of agitation approaching despair. Again and again he looked at the small sum upon the table, and murmured, "What shall I do?" and then recommenced his walk with a quick and irregular step There was an ear that heard it all, and a heart that more than shared his anguish, though without knowing, without being able to conceive the circumstances, vague hints of

which showed her that he was suffering and in peril. Lucy Edmonds had the bitter pangs of self-reproach to endure, as well as sympathy and alarm for him; but he was too far plunged in vice to let such feelings add to the weight of his actual situation. She would have given worlds to have gone in and consoled him; but she had learned to fear him, too, and dared not venture; and while she was still listening to the hurried footfall, and hesitating what she should do, she heard the sound of wheels. Then a window was thrown open, and her betrayer's voice, speaking to some one over the garden-wall, inquired, "Is that you, Williams?"

Another voice answered in the affirmative, and then she caught the sound of Latimer's foot descending the stairs. The door below was opened, and then there was a pause of some minutes, after which two persons ascended to the adjoining room, and voices were heard again.

Lucy listened eagerly—not from curiosity, but from deep interest. She only heard part, however; but that part was sufficient to cause very mingled emotions. Once the light of joy rose up in her heart, and more than once terror, and anxiety, and grief took possession of her. Her lip now bore a smile—faint, indeed, although it was the smile of hope; but then again she trembled as she lay, and then turned her face to the pillow and wept. To explain the cause of such emotions, we must relate the conversation that took place in the other room; but, at the same time, it must be remembered that it was but a part, and that a small part, which Lucy Edmonds overheard, otherwise her pangs would have been more terrible than they were, and the slight gleam of hope and happiness that came upon her would have been drowned out at once in the flood of anguish.

Williams entered the room with a slow and deliberate step, and, without seating himself, stood on one side of the table, where Captain Tankerville had been placed, while Latimer remained upon the other. "I looked for you all along the road," he said, "thinking that the news might have scared you; and, indeed, when I wrote I thought it would be best for you to be off at once; but when I came to think, I saw clear enough that nobody would interrupt you till to-morrow morning, for they would be obliged to get a warrant here, as this is a different county."

"They may knock some one up," said Latimer; "and if you had not come soon, I should have gone after John Blackmore, and waited for you there."

"I called as I came by," replied Williams, "and if they do knock some one up it will take time. I must have got the start of them in setting out, by full half an hour; and those two spavined carcasses of dogs' meat that Mrs. Pluckrose calls post horses will be a pretty time upon the road, I'll answer for it. So we shall have time to talk a bit; and I want to say a word or two to you."

"Well, say away," answered Alfred Latimer, "only remember Lucy is in there;" and he pointed with his thumb to the door of the bedroom.

"Are you married yet?" asked Williams, aloud.

"No," answered Alfred Latimer; "not yet."

"Then I shan't say anything at all," answered Williams; "for you promised her, and you promised me, that you would marry her, and how can I trust a man who breaks his word so?"

"How the devil could I keep it sooner?" replied Latimer. "The banns have been published twice, and to-morrow's the third time—I intended to marry her the next day."

"Will you really?" asked Williams. "You seem devilish lukewarm about it. Will you swear you will?"

Alfred Latimer called down vengeance on his head, with a fearful imprecation, if he did not fulfill his word on the day after the next; and then added, "I'm not lukewarm at all about it—I'm more determined than ever, and was only thinking just now that I wished it could be to-night; for I've devilish little to share with her but my name, and that she may as well have as soon as possible. But what has all this to do with what you were going to say?"

"Why, a good deal," answered Jack Williams; "for I can tell you I intend to be off for Zante on Monday, and you may come with me, if you like. But you shan't come unless Lucy goes with you as your wife. There's a ship lying ready to sail in the Downs, which will take us all for a trifle; and when we are there we can follow out what we were talking of, you know."

Alfred Latimer was silent; and he gazed upon the table with bitter mortification, as he thought that the state of poverty to which he had reduced himself would prevent him from executing the wild and criminal but exciting scheme upon which he had been meditating for the last month. Williams looked at him with a calm and thoughtful face, not fully understanding what was passing in his mind, but yet seeing clearly that there was some impediment which made Alfred Latimer hesitate.

"Come," he said, at length, "if you are thinking of this other scheme you have in hand, it's all no use, I can tell you. Maltby told me all about it; and as soon as I heard of it I wondered how you could be such a fool as to be taken in by a pitiful, cowardly vermin, like that Tankerville, to try anything of the sort. He's not brave enough to do anything bold and manly; and you'll soon have all the magistrates upon you for your pains."

"He has taken me in, in more ways than that," replied Alfred Latimer; "but as to the magistrates, I don't care a pin about them, for they can but say that I got hold of this fellow Morton to prevent Louisa Charlton from marrying a swindler."

"Swindler!" said Williams, with a low laugh; "you know better than that; but, however, you had better keep out of the way, for if they get hold of you, and lay you up, it may prevent you from lending a hand to one scheme or the other. If you would take my advice, you'd just open the door, and let him out, and then come along with me."

"I should like to keep him in as long as I can," replied Alfred Latimer; "for as sure as he gets out he will have the constables after me, and very likely take away Lucy, too, before we are married. So I would rather have the

chance of the cards, and keep him where he is; for a thousand things may prevent the people from Mallington coming as soon as we fancy."

"There's some truth in that," replied his companion; "but, at all events, you had better come with me; keep yourself out of the way till it's blown over; come back, and marry Lucy on Monday morning; and then let us be off together over the wild sea to a country where there's plenty to be done, and where we may lead a life of pleasure and activity, instead of hanging on here, where man is always flogged back into a particular path by laws and customs that he hates, like one out of a pack of hounds."

Alfred Latimer shook his head sadly. "I can't, Williams," he said; "I can't. That fellow Tankerville has cheated me out of almost everything I had. That's all he's left me," and he pointed to the seven or eight guineas that lay upon the table.

"That's bad," said Williams, looking at the money with a grim smile. "I knew what would come of it, as soon as I heard you had anything to do with that fellow again. But come, sir, there's nothing without its remedy; and what I've got to talk to you about will be a remedy for this, if you've got the courage and determination I think you have. Though I am pretty well off in pocket for a single adventure, yet I haven't got enough for what I want. We must have a schooner of our own, Mr. Latimer, and that costs some money. We must strike a good stroke, before we go, that may fill our pockets, and set us off well; and I know where such a blow is to be struck."

Alfred Latimer raised his fingers, and pointed to the next room, with a caution not to speak so loud; and Williams proceeded in a lower tone. "I was disappointed," he said, "when I first tried this job; but I shan't be disappointed a second time, for I have got a key made to the little door that goes into the stable yard, and there are no bolts upon it. We should only have to get over the wall, and walk quietly in, to take care of the people who are in the house, and quietly to pack up what we want, and be off. Maltby had such a fright last time, that we won't have anything to do with him, though we must give him something to be quiet; but I only intend to have two with me, and, if you like, you may be one."

"Where is it?" demanded Latimer, in a whisper. "Is it Mallington Hall?"

Williams nodded his head, and both remained silent for several minutes; while Latimer first gazed down upon the ground, and then turned his eyes with a look of anxious and bitter inquiry to the small sum of money upon the table. At length his brow contracted; he set his teeth fast, and muttered between them, with a nod of the head, "I will go."

"That's right," said Williams, in the same low tone which they had been lately using. "There is certainly to the worth of five or six thousand pounds, and perhaps more."

"When is it to be?" asked his young companion, eagerly.

"To-morrow night," replied Williams; "but you had better come away with me to-night. All this job about Mr. Morton will make a good blind for your being absent. People will say you got out of the way on that account. Then you can come back early on Monday, marry Lucy and be off for the sea."

Alfred Latimer agreed to all that he proposed, for his fortunes seemed desperate, and, like many another man, without waiting to see if, out of the clouds and darkness that surrounded him, some light would not break to guide patience and endurance unto brighter things, he hurried on upon the path before him, heedless of the abyss that yawned beneath his feet.

"I will come," he said; "I will come — and we had better be off directly, for these fellows might arrive from Mallington and stop me. But I must take some things with me, and speak to Lucy for a minute, to tell her that I will be back on Monday."

"You had better have everything arranged for your marriage by nine o'clock," said Williams, "for the sooner you are off the better. Write a note to the parson before you go, and bid Lucy meet you at the church. Then you can start at once."

"I will," replied Alfred Latimer; "and I'll write a note, and leave it on the table, for old Doctor Western, too, telling him my mind about Louisa's marriage, or give it to Lucy to give him."

"You had better a great deal tell her to keep herself out of the way all to-morrow morning," answered Williams, "for you can't tell what may happen. We'll bid John Blackmore watch about, and let her know when the people have been here, so that she may come back afterwards. But come, be quick, Mr. Latimer. I should think they must be in the town by this time."

The two notes were accordingly written with all despatch, and, taking the one addressed to the clergyman of the parish in his hand, to carry it to Lucy, Alfred Latimer was putting his little store of money in his pocket, when Williams whispered, "Give her half of it, man—never leave a woman without money;" and agreeing to the suggestion, the young man entered the chamber beyond, and closed the door. What was said Williams could not distinguish, but he heard a low, murmured conversation take place, mingled, he thought, with bitter sobs; and when Alfred Latimer returned, his face was flushed and his manner agitated.

"What's the matter?" asked Williams.

"She fancies something," answered Latimer, "and wanted to stop me; but it doesn't signify —I swore that I would come back again, so that she believes me. Now I am ready to go. But stay, I may as well put these in my pocket," and taking out a brace of pistols from a cupboard in the room, he disposed of them as he had mentioned, and followed his companion down stairs.

CHAPTER LIV.

The summons of Mr. Quatterly was not long unattended to by Dr. Western, and in less than twenty minutes he walked into the inn of Mrs. Pluckrose, and inquired for the gentleman who wished to see him. The meeting between him and the respectable solicitor was not as that of two strangers, although they had never seen each other before; but as soon as Mr. Quatterly

announced his name, the rector shook him warmly by the hand, saying, "Very happy indeed to see you, my dear sir. But what of our young friend? Called away, doubtless, on this business suddenly; but indeed he should have given some intimation of his going, for we have all been in vast alarm about him, and one little heart in our village is well nigh breaking with terror and uncertainty; and let me tell you that heart is a treasure and not to be trifled with."

"What can't be cured must be endured, my dear doctor," replied the solicitor; "Samson was a strong man, but he could not drink out of an empty pitcher. Our friend could not give any intimation of his departure, because he did not know he was going. There was once a Scotchman set out with another, in the Crimea, to catch a Tartar. The two friends separated in their hunt for a little way, and presently one heard the other shouting, 'Sandy! Sandy! I've cotched a Tartar. 'Well, bring him here, Donald,' quoth the other. 'I canna,' cried Donald. 'Then keep him till I come,' said Sandy. 'I canna,' repeated Donald. 'Then come here yersel',' said Sandy. 'He wunna let me,' roared Donald. Now, my dear doctor, our friend was in the position of Donald. He was in the clutches of a Tartar who would not let him do anything he thought fit to do. He was not exactly in bodily fear; for I suppose he would call me out if I were to insinuate that such a thing was possible; but he was not *liber homo*."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the rector, in some consternation, mistaking Mr. Quatterly's meaning, and thinking that for some cause, just or unjust, Morton had been arrested, "how did this happen?—I hope no foolish quarrel—no duel? He went out early, Louisa said, and"—

"Wrong, all wrong," replied the old solicitor; "you are traveling out of the record, my good friend. He was neither in the hands of sheriffs' officers nor of Bow-street officers—neither of the *constabularius vulgaris*, nor of the *servieus ad clavam*, or *ad arma*; but in the hands of a set of *Macegrarii*, as I may call them, or buyers and sellers of stolen flesh. What is their object we have yet to discover; but one thing is clear: they have kidnapped him, carried him off in a post-chaise, upon the pretence that he is insane, and taken him to the town of ——, which I passed through about four hours ago—would I had known it then."

"But who can have done this!" said Dr. Western; "any of the parties, think you, to this suit that is pending?"

"Not at all, not at all," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but this young dog who, quitting his rank and station in society, chooses to associate with scamps and swindlers. Was not she a dirty slut to sell her bed and lie upon dirt? The rhyme is not correct, but that does not matter—it is no other than young Alfred Latimer, to whom he was so kind. I told him, I told him! What's bred in the bone will never come out of the flesh. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Pipkin is pipkin, and pipkin's pipkin to the last; and when he talked about reforming him and bringing him to better tastes and habits, I just hinted at the expe*dieney* of first trying to wash a black man white. There's an old story in Esop, my dea friend, about a man and a viper—but I won stop to tell it you now, for there is the roll o wheels, and it must be the chaise I ordered, s that the best thing you and I can do is to ste in, go over to ——, and ensure his liberation a fast as possible. You are a magistrate, think!"

"But not for that county," replied Dr. West ern. "Besides, my dear sir, I am not prepare for this journey. To-morrow is Sunday, an duty must, of course, be done in my church."

"Very unfortunate, very unfortunate," sai Mr. Quatterly; "but surely you could get back in time for that, and I shall require some perso to identify me as Timothy Quatterly, Esquire Who are the magistrates there? What ar their names? At all events, you'll come over as soon as possible to-morrow, for we may have difficulties, especially if they have taken care to get or manufacture a certificate of insanity which seems probable, from the account of the post-boy, who brought all the information, and who says that they showed him some sort o paper about somebody being mad, he does no well know what."

Doctor Western was somewhat puzzled how to act. He saw, indeed, that his presence migh be absolutely necessary to Morton's immediate liberation, and yet he knew not where to find any one on the spur of the occasion to do duty for him in his church, and he had also a very strong objection to traveling on Sunday, though he was not sufficiently bigoted to suffer that objection to interfere with the execution of a great duty. He was also somewhat puzzled to divine what could be Alfred Latimer's motive in committing so gross and outrageous an act; and being a thoughtful and deliberate man, he took several moments to cogitate over what Mr Quatterly said without making any reply. At length, however, the worthy solicitor, growing impatient, broke in by saying "Well, you must come to-morrow, at all events, and I will go on to-night to have all ready. I will go on with the bottle and bag, and you can come after on little jack nag. I must not forget, however, to take this post-boy with me, for I must have evidence on oath of our friend having been carried off, of the parties to the crime, and of the place to which he has been carried."

"He can be sworn before me," said Doctor Western; "it does not matter in what county he makes his deposition, provided it be properly attested."

"True, true," replied Mr. Quatterly. "We'll have him up. You shall swear him, and I'll be the clerk."

Thus saying, Mr. Quatterly rose, rolled his great body on his small legs to the door, opened it, and, going out, descended at once to the groundfloor of Mrs. Pluckrose's dwelling, where he first looked into the bar, and while the barmaid inquired "Are you looking for missis, sir?" and he himself replied "No; post-boy," he advanced to the door of the tap-room and threw it open.

"Hie! you sir," cried Mr. Quatterly, as his eye instantly rested on the post-boy. "Be so good as to come up stairs;" and he went on to mutter to himself, not venturing to say it aloud, for fear of confounding the man's comprehen-

sion, "Up-stairs, down-stairs, in my lady's chamber."

As he did so, however, he swept over with his eye the rest of the persons assembled in the room, turning himself half round at the same time, as if to depart. Suddenly he came to a full stop, and then marched straight up to a man dressed in a jacket and apron, who sat on the other side of the room, with a pot of beer before him. If any body had taken the trouble to look at that man's countenance when Mr. Quatterly's large and remarkable head first presented itself in the tap, he would have seen a hue like that of death spread itself over his cheeks and lips. Yet though evidently terrified at something, he seemed fascinated, like the bird by the serpent, and continued gazing in the solicitor's face with a vacant and stone-like stare, till Mr. Quatterly stood directly before him, saying "Oh, ho!" with a very remarkable emphasis. Then his teeth began to chatter in his head, and though he gasped twice as if in the attempt to speak, no sounds issued forth from his unclosed jaws, but there he sat, the image of conscience-stricken consternation.

Mr. Quatterly remained the space of about a minute silent, also, as if in the consideration of some deep and intricate problem, but at length he spoke in an authoritative tone, saying "Be so good as to get up, sir, and walk through that door, then take the turning to the left, and up stairs to the first landing. Post-boy, follow him close, and be ready to chevy in case he runs."

But the poor wretch had no such design. He rose as he was directed, moved like an automaton to the door, which the post-boy opened for him, walked up the stairs, and there, at the top of the first landing, stood with his head bent down, his hands clasped together before him, and the same death-like hue upon his face.

"Walk in," said Mr. Quatterly, who followed close, and, at the same time, opened the door of the sitting-room. The man obeyed; and as he entered, with Mr. Quatterly behind, Dr. Western inquired, with a glance at his habiliments, which were certainly very un-post-boyish, "is this the man?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Quatterly. "This is the man who robbed me of upwards of a thousand pounds the other day;" and, turning quick upon the unfortunate Mr. Wilkins, he inquired, "Well, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

The man found a voice this time, but it was only to murmur in the hollow tone of despair, "nothing," and, while he uttered that single but expressive word of self-condemnation, he still remained with his head bowed down, his eyes bent upon the ground, and his hands clasped together, hanging powerless before him.

"Nothing!" said Mr. Quatterly, who was evidently a good deal excited; "that's a poor excuse, sir—yet, after all," he continued, "it is perhaps the best you could make, for, in your case, the least said the soonest mended. Tell me, sir, was not I a kind master to you? Did I not pay you well? Were you ever kept out late at nights if I could help it? Did I ever make you sit up till morning copying old papers and investigating titles, if I could do the work myself? Did I ever refuse you a holiday when it was possible to grant it? Did I show myself unjust—harsh—unfeeling?"

"Never, never!" replied the man warmly. "You were all that was kind and good, and I am a fool and a scoundrel."

"There's some grace left," said Mr. Quatterly, in a loud aside, spoken over his shoulder to Dr. Western, and then continuing to address the delinquent clerk, he demanded, "and pray what do you deserve, and what do you expect?"

"Punishment," replied the man Wilkins, "though God knows I've been punished enough since."

"Ay, the heart has been at work, has it?" said Mr. Quatterly; "but tell me, sir, was it fear or remorse that smote you?"

"Both," replied the culprit earnestly; "fear, breeding remorse. In the first place I have been tormented by a fiend whom you know quite well, called Captain Tankerville. He found me out, and would not be contented till he had shared largely in the spoil I had taken from a good and kind master. He preyed upon me, threatening continually to give me up to justice, till he had obtained all he thought he could get. Then he sent me off hither in this guise on the road to the sea-coast. But here remorse came upon me, and I determined to send you back all that he had left me, except what was just enough to carry me to another land, where I intended to labor for my daily bread."

"What's that you say? what's that you say?" cried Mr. Quatterly, "you determined to send it back? It's a pity you did not put that in execution, for I much fear you would have gone on nibbling, my good friend, till the cheese was all eaten up."

"No, indeed, sir," answered the wretched man; "I've got the letter and the notes here in my pocket, all folded up and sealed ready to send off, and with them are the papers which I took at the same time—here they are."

"Let's see, let's see," cried Mr. Quatterly, and he took from his former clerk's hand a large lawyer-like packet, sealed and addressed, which he broke into at once, and took out a bundle of notes and papers which he looked over carefully, putting on his spectacles to do so. Then turning to the delinquent, he said "Here are all the documents, and six hundred and eighty-five pounds. There is somewhere above four hundred pounds wanting. What have you kept for yourself? and what did you give to that fellow Tankerville?"

"I gave him three hundred and ninety pounds," replied the man; "I spent nine pounds on my way here, and I've got five-and-twenty pounds in my bundle up-stairs."

"You've only kept five-and-twenty pounds, then?" said Mr. Quatterly. "You'll swear you gave him all the rest? you'll take your oath of it?"

"I will," replied the clerk; "I have no more, and I spent no more, but gave him the rest."

"And positively you intended to send this letter?" continued the solicitor.

The man bowed his head, saying "It would have been gone by this time if you had not discovered me."

"What do you think of all this, eh?" demanded Mr. Quatterly, once more looking over

his shoulder to Dr. Western; but the post-boy seemed to consider that the question was addressed to himself, for he advanced a step or two from the door, and pulling a long lock of hair which hung down from the front of his head over his forehead, somewhat like the hasp of a trunk, he brought his chin thereby down upon his cravat, saying, at the same time, "I think, sir, as how the young man intends to make reparation; and as for that Captain Tankerville, why, Lord bless'ee, he was one of them fellows as carried off the gentleman from the common."

"The deuce he was!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, "then the murder's out, for that fellow's up to any mischief. But are you quite sure he was one!"

"That I am, your honor," replied the post-boy, "for one of them called him captain, and t'other called him Tankerville, and them two put together, makes Captain Tankerville, I think."

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but that brings us back to the point. You boy, come hither to this table, and make a full, true, and particular statement before this gentleman, who is a magistrate, of all that took place regarding the abduction of Mr. Morton, remembering that you are upon your oath, for we must get up a Bible and swear you—You sir," he continued, turning to Mr. Wilkins, and pointing to the side of the room furthest from the window, "sit down in that corner, and don't budge a step till I tell you. If you behave well, perhaps you may get off easy. If you don't, you know the consequences. But I'll transport that fellow Tankerville, if there's law in the land; and shall be transported myself to do so."

"I don't know, sir, whether you know that the chaise is at the door," said Mrs. Pluckrose, putting her head into the room; "but I should think, surely, you would want some supper before you go."

"I want a Bible, in the first place, madam," replied Mr. Quatterly; "and then supper, if you please, for I do begin to feel hungry; but do not let us be interrupted for the next quarter of an hour;" and all the arrangements being made, the deposition of the post-boy was taken in proper form; and Dr. Western, then rising, said he would just walk up to Mallington House to relieve the apprehensions of Miss Charlton, after which he would do his best to get some one to perform the afternoon service at his church, in order that he might rejoin Mr. Quatterly on the following day.

"Take my advice, my dear sir—take my advice," said Mr. Quatterly: "talk as little about this business as possible—give no farther explanations than needful. Just put the young lady's mind at rest, and say no more. You see," he continued, advancing to Dr. Western, and laying the fore-finger of his right hand upon the lappel of that gentleman's coat, with a demonstrative air, "you see, my dear sir, there are various reasons and sufficient motives for caution in this matter. In the first place, it does not do to let our proceedings be known, lest the persons implicated should get wind of them, and hop the twig, as school-boys term it. In the next place, we are not certain what course our friend may think fit to pursue in regard to the gentry concerned in this outrage upon his person. One of them is, it appears, a very near connection of a fair lady for whom he has no slight tenderness; and, besides, even if regard for her did not restrain him, his own peculiar idiosyncrasy—which, of all the idiosyncrasies that ever I knew, is most opposed to a fuss, as I term it—would probably farther lead him to pass over the matter than to make any noise about it."

"I don't see much how secrecy can be observed," said Dr. Western, gravely, "as so many persons are aware of the particulars. Here are these two men now in the room, besides Mrs. Pluckrose, who, though a very good woman has, like other ladies, a tongue not always to be restrained."

"Mrs. Pluckrose knows nothing about it," said Mr. Quatterly; "for as soon as ever I was sure the information was really coming, and I had told her to send for you in consequence, I turned her out of the room. Then as to that man," and he pointed to his clerk, "I shall take him over with me. The other fellow, in the corderoys, has been already well cautioned, knows he may get into a scrape, and upon the whole seems to be a very sensible and well-disposed person, who understands that it is better to keep his breath to cool his porridge rather than waste it in vain gossiping. You haven't said anything to anybody yet, post-boy, have you?"

"Not a word, sir," replied the man.

"Well, then, if you take my advice," said Mr. Quatterly, "as soon as your horses are fed and rested, you'll bring them over after me, for it's as well to keep yourself out of temptation. You may talk to them in the stable, or on the road, as much as you like, and tell them the whole story if you please, for they are sure not to tell anybody again, but exchange as few words with any other beasts as possible, especially if they have but two legs."

The postboy promised to observe these injunctions faithfully, Dr. Western proceeded to execute his comfortable mission to Louisa, and Mr. Quatterly called for his supper, preparatory to setting out. He seated himself, cut off a slice of the cold beef, and put a piece in his mouth—then turned his eyes to the corner where the culprit sat as still as marble, like a statue of despair. Mr. Quatterly looked embarrassed, and felt it unpleasant to eat in the presence of so much misery. He took a glass of wine, but that did not do any better, and he looked at the culprit again with a hesitating expression of countenance. The man had not moved an inch, and Mr. Quatterly laid down the knife and fork which he had just resumed, saying, "Come, Wilkins, draw forward your chair and take some supper."

"I cannot, sir," replied Wilkins; "I have no appetite."

"The devil you haven't!" said Mr. Quatterly; "I'm glad to hear it, it's a good sign;" and bolting a few hasty mouthfuls he drank another glass of wine, descended the stairs, made Wilkins get into the post-chaise first, and following himself, was soon rolling away towards the town which he had quitted a few hours before.

CHAPTER LV.

THERE was a small tea party in Mallington, just such a one as that into which we have before introduced the reader. It is true that this little reunion—as the French call a meeting of persons who very probably never met in their life before—wanted some of the principal ornaments of the former. Mr. Nethersole was absent, the solicitor did not appear; but their two principal representatives were in the room, in the persons of the assistant of the one, and the chief clerk of the other. Mrs. Windsor was there, the two Misses Martin, two young ladies in broad bracelets and ringlets, which must have been curled upon what mechanicians call a never-ending screw. Their mother was there likewise, Mr. Crump was present, and a number of other gentlemen and ladies, with whom the writer and the reader are equally unacquainted. It was what they called themselves a small early party, beginning at six o'clock, and ending at nine. There is, therefore, no very great chance of our being detained long, though we may sit down and listen for a minute or two to the conversation which took place over the cup of tea, and the game of cards that followed.

One of the principal delights of these parties, to those who loved to see human nature under an unpleasant aspect, was the effect produced upon the temper of the Misses Martin, when the repulsive poles of those young ladies and Mrs. Windsor were brought in contact; but upon this occasion Mrs. Windsor was rather civil than otherwise to the Misses Martin. True it is that she could not altogether repress a certain degree of acerbity of manner in speaking to them, for she was a quick, sharp woman, and had a very profound contempt for them. If they had been only rogues—if they had been only slanderers—if they had only been both combined, Mrs. Windsor could have forgiven it; but she looked upon them as fools too, and that was a sort of animal for which she had a great antipathy.

The ruling topic of the day was, of course, that first introduced. Mallington had rung all the morning with the disappearance of Mr. Morton, and the Misses Martin had derived so much comfort from the fact, that they could not help endeavoring to extract a little more from it during the evening. They whispered together with the young surgeon, shrugged their shoulders, professed that they had been perfectly sure how it would turn out, and called upon one or two of their neighbors to bear witness to the fact of their prophecies having been antecedent to the event.

"Poor Mrs. Charlton!" said Miss Mathilda, "I'm very sorry for her; but I wonder that she made such a fuss about it. It would have been better to have kept it quiet, I can't help thinking—but I know Mrs. Windsor thinks that everything Mrs. Charlton does is right," continued she, with a glance of the eye to the lady of whom she spoke, "and so I shall say no more."

"Oh dear, no! Miss Mathilda Martin," replied Mrs. Windsor, turning round while Mr. Crump was shuffling the cards; "you are quite mistaken. I don't think everything Mrs. Charlton does is right. She does many things I would much rather she would not do."

"Dear me!" cried Miss Martin; "well, I did not know that before. But how does she bear it, Mrs. Windsor? for really I am sorry for her, more sorry a great deal than for Miss Louisa, for she's a girl of sense, and must be glad that before matters went too far he has been found out."

"Found out!" said Mrs. Windsor. "Gone out, I suppose, you mean, Miss Martin."

"Oh dear, no!" relied Mathilda, "my sister means found out. I don't know what you can call it, Mrs. Windsor, when there are bills posted up all over the place for a gentleman, and as soon as he sees them he takes himself off, but being found out for what he really is."

"And what may that be?" asked Mrs. Windsor. "I really don't know what you mean!"

"Why, I suppose there can be no doubt in the mind of anybody who has eyes, ears, and understanding, that this Mr. Morton who has down here is the felonious clerk that has been advertised for."

"Really, I think not," replied the housekeeper of Mallington House; "and I don't at all doubt that we shall soon hear of Mr. Morton again—I hope in safety, though I have some apprehensions on that score after what happened before."

"Oh! I dare say he's skulking about in some of the woods or places," replied Miss Mathilda Martin; "very likely over at Wenlock, where he was so fond of going; but I dare say the officers will find him out."

Mrs. Windsor did not condescend to answer, but cut through Mrs. Ramsbottom's game with a trump; and after waiting for a minute or two, Miss Martin pursued the agreeable conversation as follows:—

"I am sorry for poor Miss Louisa, too. The poor dear child has been made a sacrifice for others, that's clear. Does she take on much, Mrs. Windsor?"

"Miss Charlton has been very much alarmed, and very anxious," answered Mrs. Windsor; "as, indeed, any young lady naturally would be on the unexplained absence of such a friend of the family as Mr. Morton."

"Oh, come, Mrs. Windsor!" cried Miss Mathilda; "you don't pretend to say that's all, for we know better than that. Young people don't go about together in that way without being engaged; and if it has been suffered in this case Mrs. Charlton's much more to blame than ever I thought her."

"Your thoughts won't do her much harm," replied Mrs. Windsor, "or anybody else, or we should be an unfortunate set of people in Mallington. But, as I said before, it is very natural both for Mrs. Charlton and Miss Louisa to be anxious about Mr. Morton, as, indeed, everybody is who knew him, even to the footboy, for he is a perfect gentleman."

"A gentleman!" said Miss Mathilda. "Well, puppies don't open their eyes till they are nine days old, and some people never open them at all till they are forced. However, for the matter of that, I dare say we shall soon hear more, and then it will be seen who's right."

Mrs. Windsor played out her rubber in silence; and about nine o'clock, or a little before, took her leave, and left the Misses Martin in possession of the field. They triumphed wonder-

fully—they were eloquent—they were pathetic—they were sublime; they left nothing unsaid that could be said upon the subject of Mr. Morton, Mrs. Charlton, and Louisa; they even touched episodically upon Dr. Western, lamenting the culpable negligence of the constable, in not having prevented the escape of the fraudulent clerk; and declared that things were getting so bad there must really be some active justice of the peace appointed to insure that Mallington, which had always before been such a nice, quiet, pleasant little village, should not become a den of swindlers and ruffians; and hinted that it had never been the same place since Mrs. Charlton had first set her foot in it. By dint of oratory and perseverance they got a great many of their hearers on their side, and the day was running strong against the Morton faction when the party broke up. In the meanwhile Mrs. Windsor walked up the hill towards Mallington House, not very slow, because she thought her mistress might want her, not very quick, because she was in a meditative mood. Now, Mrs. Windsor was endowed with a quality usually ascribed to a certain small animal with a long tail accustomed to frequent the drains and minor passages of not the newest mansions in the world, which quality is a certain inherent prescience of the approaching fall of the house. By aid of this gift the housekeeper had arrived at the conclusion that Mrs. Charlton was in a somewhat tottering condition. At the same time it appeared to her that Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton were likely to build up a dwelling of a much more firm and stable construction, and she was strongly disposed to detach herself from the dilapidated and attach herself to the perfect house. The only consideration, indeed, was whether she was likely to succeed in the latter part of her object, but Mrs. Windsor had all her life been a very shrewd woman. She had been peculiarly kind and civil to Louisa Charlton at all times, with a degree of foresight which Mrs. Charlton herself had not possessed. She had never exactly taken the young lady's part against her mistress; for not only would that have been dangerous as affecting Mrs. Charlton, but Mrs. Windsor had a strong notion, and a right one, that the appearance of ingratitude towards a person whom she had so long served would be no passport to the favor of Louisa. She had, therefore, never blamed anything that Mrs. Charlton did—she had never opposed any of her unjust or unwise acts towards Louisa—but by a thousand little marked and kindly attentions, especially apparent at those times when the young lady was suffering under any of the mortifications inflicted on her by her step-mother, she had not only endeavored to soothe and comfort her, but cast an implied censure upon the conduct which required such counteraction. Thus Mrs. Windsor imagined that her chance was a very fair one, even as matters stood at that moment; and as she foresaw that a time was coming when a breach was likely to take place between Mrs. Charlton and her step-daughter in regard to the marriage of the latter with Mr. Morton, she thought several little pieces of information which she possessed, and which might be most serviceable to the two young people, might form *a link between* her and them, which would render her station in their regard quite secure. Something was necessary, however, as an excuse for deserting the interests of her mistress, and she could think of nothing better than a personal quarrel which would put Mrs. Charlton in the wrong towards herself. She saw every probability, indeed, of such a result being easily brought about, for Mrs. Charlton had been very irritable of late, and had vented a good deal of that irritability upon Mrs. Windsor, not being at all aware to what extent she was in the housekeeper's power. Mrs. Windsor had submitted hitherto in silence, because she thought it would be politic so to do; but as she calculated that a crisis was very near at hand, she now determined to submit no longer, but to retaliate in such a manner as to call forth the whole of Mrs. Charlton's spleen, without, however, putting herself in the wrong, or giving her mistress the advantage over her in any respect. One thing, too, she especially determined to refrain from, and that was from all allusion to her knowledge of Mrs. Charlton's secret plans for the future, or acts in the past, till the moment when it might be necessary to proclaim them aloud, for she was well aware that that excellent lady had sufficient art to govern her passions completely if she found it dangerous to display them, and to avoid anything like a quarrel with her housekeeper, if she believed it to be more for her interest to be friends with her.

With these resolutions, the result of which will soon be seen by the reader, Mrs. Windsor rang the servant's bell at Mallington House.

CHAPTER LVI.

He was a fool, and not a philosopher, who said that uncertainty was the just condition of man's mind. In trust, in confidence, in firm conviction, and in faith, is only to be found repose and peace. Assurance is what man's heart and understanding both require, and the very fact of the mind not being capable of obtaining certainty upon many points is a proof of weakness, not of strength.

"Oh, doubt and uncertainty, what terrible states they are amongst the perilous things and anxious circumstances of this mortal life! How the news of the battle fought, how the howling of the angry storm will fix the fangs of those two demons upon the heart of the soldier's or sailor's mother or his wife!—how they tear the breast of the absent for the loved afar—how they aggravate all pangs—how they mingle the bitter drop with many a cup of joy!

They were the companions of Lucy Edmonds through the livelong night after Alfred Latimer left her; and many a dark and terrible form they took as, with sleepless eyes, she lay and revolved the past, the present, and the future—all sad, all cloudy, all full of frowning menace. Whither was he gone? she asked herself. What to do?—what new folly, what new sin, what new crime to commit? Would he indeed return as he had said? or was she abandoned as well as betrayed—cast off upon the hard world — homeless, defenceless, powerless, fatherless? Her heart sunk low—low till it hardly beat. Was it not in his character to do

so?—was it not man's accustomed dealings with the weak?—were not all his actions, since she had seen them closely, evidences that he could so act? The very doubt was worse than death; yet she strove not to believe it, for she loved him still. She tried to shut out conviction of his faults and of his nature. Oh, no! it was impossible he could so use her, she thought; but still she doubted, and doubt was agony.

Then came the fears for him. What would be the end of such a course as he was pursuing?—what the consequences that must sooner or later fall upon his head? All was wild uncertainty; but, like the clouds of a thunder-storm, the phantoms of the future, though vague and changing, still took a thousand dark and terrible forms. Minute after minute passed away, hour after hour went by, but every minute brought some fresh pang, every hour was consumed in bitterness and dread.

At length the day began to dawn, and the faint gray light of the autumnal morning streamed in through the half-closed curtains; but it woke no joy, it brought no relief. Faint and sick at heart, weary, desponding, and filled with dark remorse, daylight brought no day to Lucy Edmonds' heart. Within it all was night. Still she lay and pondered for some time longer; but at length hearing sounds in the house, and remembering the injunctions laid upon her to go out early and remain absent long, she rose and dressed herself, and walked languidly into the other room. The maid of the house was clearing the table, and the sight of the bottles and glasses and scattered cards made poor Lucy feel sick at heart. She turned away to the window, bidding the girl bring breakfast quickly; but the moment after the latter inquired "What is to be done with this, ma'am?"

Lucy turned and saw in her hands the note to Dr. Western, which Latimer had mentioned to her ere he went. "Leave it on the table," she said; "a gentleman will call during the day for it. Ask any one who comes if his name is Dr. Western, and if he says 'yes,' let him have it."

The sight of that note, however, recalled to her mind the other which had been left with her for the clergyman of the parish, and the words and assurance that Latimer had then spoken, and she seized upon them eagerly as food for half famished hope. "Oh, yes!" she thought, "he will come back—he will keep his word—he will take away the stain from me; though he can never give me back peace, he will give me at least an honest name;" and hurrying into the other room again, she brought forth the letter and gazed upon it with one faint ray of light breaking in upon her darkened heart.

The maid brought in the breakfast, and Lucy began to say something to her, but hesitated, and then stopped. The girl was slow in laying out the things, and poor Lucy watched her as she did so, putting off till the last moment what she had to say. At length, as the girl was just quitting the room, she said, "I wish to speak with your master—presently."

The last word was added with a view to further delay, but the maid had not quitted the room five minutes when the landlord of the house appeared, inquiring "Did you want me, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir," said Lucy, hesitating and embarrassed. "Mr. Latimer will be out all to-day, but will be back to-morrow morning early, and he wished me to give this letter to the clergyman of the parish;" she paused for a moment, and then added, "Where does he live?"

The man gave her the information that she required; and then, seeing that she was embarrassed, he good-humoredly added, "I suppose it's about your marriage, ma'am. I heard the banns published for the second time last Sunday."

It was a great relief to Lucy, but yet her face turned crimson, and her heart beat so that she pressed her hand upon her side as if to stop it. "Yes," she said, when she recovered breath; "it is to take place a little after nine to-morrow, and Mr. Latimer told me to ask if you would be kind enough to—to—to go with me to the church, as I have no friends here;" and overpowered at the thought that she had no friends who would own her anywhere, poor Lucy covered her eyes with her handkerchief and wept.

"Oh, that I will, madam, with pleasure," replied the gardener. "Come, come, don't take on so. Most people have to be married once, and it's not such a terrible affair, after all. I was married once myself, and my good wife, that's dead and gone, tittered the whole time till the parson scolded her. Shall I take the note for you?"

"No, I thank you, sir," replied Lucy, wiping her eyes; "I am going out, and I promised to deliver it myself."

Though she said no more, the man still remained, as if he had something more to say; and Lucy, misunderstanding his object, inquired, "Did Mr. Latimer pay the rent last week?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," replied the gardener; "we always have a week in advance. He paid everything yesterday morning up to Saturday next; but I hope, I'm sure, that I shall have you for a lodger a long while after you are Mrs. Latimer."

"I trust so," replied Lucy, merely for something to say, "for it is a very pretty place, and the lodging is very comfortable."

"One thing I wanted to ask, ma'am," continued the landlord, after another pause; "what's to be done with the gentleman whom they say is insane—with him, I mean, whom Mr. Latimer and the rest brought in yesterday and shut up in the room where he had the bars put. He must have some breakfast and dinner, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about him," replied Lucy, with surprise; "I heard a good many people coming and going yesterday, but I was in the other room, and am not aware of what happened."

"Well, ma'am, he can't starve," replied the landlord.

"Oh, certainly not," exclaimed Lucy; "he must have all that is necessary, of course. Can you not take it to him?"

"Why, you see, ma'am, I don't like to have anything to do with the matter," answered the gardener; "besides, the door is locked, and I havn't got the key."

"I suppose this is it," said Lucy, taking a large key from the mantel-piece.

But the landlord still shook his head, saying, "I don't like to have anything to do with what doesn't concern me. But the man must have victuals, that's clear;" and he took a step back, as if to quit the room.

Poor Lucy was sadly embarrassed; she knew not what to say, or how to act, and the whole story confounded and perplexed her. "Mad!" she thought—"what can Alfred have to do with a madman?" Doubts, painful suspicions, in regard to the whole proceeding, crossed her mind, for she had lost confidence in him she loved; she could not trust to his motives or his conduct; she could not be sure that some dark scheme for wronging another as she had been wronged herself might not now be in operation. After a long pause for consideration, however, she inquired—"Is he dangerous?"

"Oh dear, no!" replied the landlord. "He seemed quite quiet. For my part I should not have thought him mad at all."

"Then I will go to him myself," said Lucy, "if you will send up the maid to go with me, and see that he does not hurt me."

The worthy host did as she required; and though, to say the truth, he had very little doubt that the gentleman up-stairs was just as sane as he was himself, yet, while he sent up the maid to accompany his fair lodger, he remained with the door open in the little parlor below, to insure that they should have assistance in case of need. In the meanwhile, Lucy, having put on her bonnet and shawl to go out, followed by the girl, and with the key in her hand, approached the door above—in some trepidation, it must be confessed. But there seemed no other means of insuring that the person within, whoever he was, should have that attention which humanity required; and without pausing to give time for fear to overpower her, she put the key in the lock and opened the door. The first object that met her eye was Mr. Morton, seated at the table, and looking straight towards her. She stood for an instant motionless and speechless, as if she had been turned into stone at the sight. Her countenance was pale, too, for fear was the first impression that she received; but the next instant the blood rushed up into her face, and, exclaiming, "Oh! heaven!" she turned, and ran down the stairs before Morton could rise to speak with her, and in another minute was out of the house. Hurrying on with a quick pace, she walked into the town, and took her way up one street and down another at random, with all her thoughts in confusion and disarray. Gradually, however, she became more tranquil, though it was a sad and dark tranquillity that fell upon her; an oppressive leaden weight, from the sad conviction that her worst suspicions of him who had so wronged herself were all too true.

Yet there was no choice before her what to do; she was the creature of his will, entirely dependent upon him. She had no means of escape from the situation in which she was placed—her fate was sealed and irrevocable. The only thing that could bring the slightest amelioration was to become his wife, and link herself to him for ever—to him whom she knew to be a villain, not only to woman, but to man. *Despair has its own* calmness, and after awhile she thought clearly and accurately of what she should do, and determined to execute all that he had enjoined. Still she had some dread of again meeting Morton, for the sight of any face that she had known in purer and happier days was terrible to her. She doubted not that he had instantly quitted the house, for she was quite sure that no opposition would be offered by the man to whom it belonged, and, looking anxiously up each street as she went, she made her way round by the least frequented parts of the town to the dwelling of the clergyman. Thence, after leaving Latimer's note, she directed her steps into the country, which was smiling in all the beauty of a fresh autumnal day. The atmosphere was peculiarly clear and bright, the leaves of the trees were just tinged with the first yellow hues of advancing decay, the distant country looked purple in the early light, and a small stream danced along by the road-side in sparkling eddies and miniature cataracts. But the face of nature had lost its loveliness for Lucy Edmonds, and every object which once would have seemed bright and beautiful to her eyes, was now only full of sad remembrances.

At the distance of about a mile and a half from the town there was a small village, and a neat church, evidently of very ancient structure; for the yews in the churchyard and the ivy upon the walls showed the growth of many centuries; and the old Norman arch of the porch, with its deep and manifold mouldings, softened and pared away by the hand of time, spoke the reign of some early king, before the house of Anjou obtained possession of the crown. As Lucy approached, the bell began to ring with a cheerful and yet solemn sound, calling the villagers to supplicate and glorify God on the appointed day of rest. But, oh! how sadly did that chime sound in the ear of poor Lucy Edmonds—what memories did it not wake of the days of youth and innocence, when she, with the rest, went forth in her Sunday attire, beneath the protection of parental love, to prayer, to praise, and to instruction. She looked up wistfully towards the church—she longed to go in with others who were bending their steps towards the gate; but her heart sank, she felt a fear and a dread, the consciousness of unworthiness was upon her, and it seemed to her at first like presumption to enter the house of God and to address the essence of all purity from amongst the pure.

She lingered, however, for a time in the churchyard, watching the passers-by, and her eye from time to time resting upon the tombstones, where, amongst homely phrases of commendations on the gone, she found many a text of Scripture full of hope and consolation.

"Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," said the inscription on one tomb; and another bore "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins." She took heart as she read, and with bent-down eyes and a slow step she entered the church with the rest. She had not known comfort before since she left her father's house, but as she prayed and listened she gained both consolation and strength. She resolved thenceforward to have, if not one

rule for her life, and, whatever might be the difficulties to which she might be subject, whatever the temptations to which she might be exposed, rather to die than to take one more step in evil.

"If he keeps his word," she thought, "to-morrow he will be my husband, and I am bound to obey him in all that is right; but, whatever be his own course, he shall not induce me to take any part in evil also, and by the repentance of my whole life I will try to atone for what is past."

With this resolution she bent her way back to the town again, and though she saw nothing of young Blackmore, who was to have given her notice when she might safely return, she went back to the house she had inhabited, and rang the bell. The door was opened by the gardener himself. "Well, ma'am, he's gone," he said, as soon as he saw her; "I couldn't stop him, you know, when you left the door open, so I thought it best to be civil."

"You did quite right," said Lucy, in a calmer tone than she could have used in the morning. "I foolishly went away as quickly as I could, for fear of hearing of that gentleman's reproaches, though I had no share in the injury that has been done him, but if I had stayed and had the power I would not have attempted to stop him."

"Why, he did not seem at all inclined to reproach any one, ma'am," said the gardener; "he seemed a very civil sort of gentleman, indeed, and not mad in the least, I'm sure. He asked a great many questions about you, and stayed half an hour, I dare say, talking with me in the passage."

Lucy did not venture to inquire what Mr. Morton's questions had been, and, for fear she should hear what might be painful to her, she answered quickly, "Oh, no, he is not mad at all. However, I should not wish to see any body if they come, and should there be gentlemen here inquiring after him, you can assure them that he is gone."

"I hope, ma'am," said the landlord, with his habitual view to his own interest, "that if Mr. Latimer should make any row about his being let out, you will acknowledge you did it, and that I had no hand in it."

Lucy bowed her head, replying, "I will do so, certainly, for it is the plain truth."

"You had better say nothing about it till after the wedding," rejoined the landlord; "and then, when you are once his wife, I dare say you'll soon get the upper hand."

Lucy made no reply, but walked up-stairs and went, for there was something in the man's words that made her feel her degradation more perhaps than she had ever felt it before.

Several hours passed by, and evening was approaching, when the maid took up a note, saying that a man had brought it from the inn. He did not know whether there was any answer, the girl added, but was waiting to see. Lucy opened it with trembling hands, thinking to find Mr. Morton's name, but glancing her eye at once to the bottom of the paper, she saw the word Western, and turning again to the beginning, she read the following lines:—

"I grieve much for you, Lucy, and believe, my poor child, that you are more sinned against than sinning. I have some reason to suppose that you have been very badly used; but if this young man is really willing to make you his wife, I will say nothing to dissuade you from consenting to a step which is the only reparation that he can offer. I do trust, however, Lucy, that the instructions you have received, the religious principles which were early implanted in your mind, and the example of your excellent parents, have not been so cast away as to admit the possibility of your continuing in a life of sin, if this unhappy young man should neglect or delay to fulfill his promises. My eye is upon you, and it will become my duty to exhort you most earnestly to quit him at once in case of any delay taking place. Should you follow my counsel, and thereby show true repentance for any error you may have committed, which I believe to be less than many might suppose, come at once to me, and no effort shall be wanting on my part to place you in a situation of comfort, and to screen you from those reproaches and that hard treatment which never yet awoke an impenitent heart, and can only add to the pangs of one that is truly penitent. You have known me from your infancy, and can trust me both as a counsellor and as your sincere friend. "R. Western."

Lucy gazed on the letter, long after she had read it, with emotions very mixed; but yet hope predominated; for that very word "friend" at the end had something balmy and comforting to her breast. At length, recollecting that the maid was still waiting to know if there was any answer, she gave her the note which Alfred Latimer had left, and bade her deliver it to the man who had come from Dr. Western. The rest of the evening passed over tranquilly, and Lucy was glad to be alone. For many days before solitude had been burdensome, terrible, to her; but now it was a relief, for the only light that she could receive—the only hope that could find place in her bosom—had been given from the high pure source that offers peace to all who will accept it.

CHAPTER LVII.

The butler opened the door of Mallington House, in answer to Mrs. Windsor's bell, and looked at her with a meaning smile as she entered, saying, in a low voice, "You'll get it, ma'am, to-night, I've a notion; for Mrs. Charlton's in a queer way; quite out of sorts with everything and everybody. She has scolded Miss Louisa till she cried, and at dinner she rowed me for the best part of an hour."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Windsor dryly, without the slightest appearance of intimidation. "I do not think she will scold me, for I have not done anything to deserve it;" and she pulled off her clogs deliberately in the little vestibule.

"Perhaps that is the very reason why she will," replied the butler, watching Mrs. Windsor in the delicate operation she was performing. "At all events, she has gone to her dressing-room, and rang for you three times, with about ten minutes between each, and she told Smith, who went up, that your conduct was too bad, and that she would put up with it no longer. So, if I were you, I would just keep

away till to-morrow, for she must be half in bed by this time, and her passion will be over before morning."

"Oh dear, no!" replied Mrs. Windsor, with a look of conscious innocence. "I shall go up directly. I could not tell she would go to bed before nine o'clock, or I would have been back earlier. She has a headache, I suppose, poor thing; and that always makes people cross."

"Why, I believe all this fuss about Mr. Morton's disappearing has put her out," replied the butler; "but for my part, if I were you, I would stay away, and let her cool; for, as far as you are concerned, all the mischief's done; but you know best."

Mrs. Windsor, however, who did know best, and found all things prepared for her, and exactly in the state she could have wished, signified once more her intention of presenting herself before her mistress at once, in so cool and satisfied a tone that the butler was disappointed.

There is certainly in the breasts of many persons a great pleasure in the communication of evil tidings; they like it, they approve of it; they take a philanthropic interest in preventing others from being too happy, lest they should become puffed up with prosperity. Now, the worthy butler had opened the door himself for Mrs. Windsor, with the express desire of letting her know that Mrs. Charlton was angry, and enjoying the apprehension he thought that piece of news would awaken; for Mrs. Windsor had too much the ear of their mistress—she had too much her own way—her place was too comfortable a one—for any of the other servants not to see that it would be greatly to her advantage to meet with a little mortification; and the benevolent butler was anxious to administer the first dose in person. The very cool way, however, in which she took it, did, as we say, disappoint him, and watching her take a candle, and walk straight up-stairs towards Mrs. Charlton's dressing-room, he said "Well, that woman has the impudence of the devil," and betook himself to his pantry again.

In the meanwhile the housekeeper knocked at the dressing-room door, and on hearing a sharp "Come in," she entered, saying, "The butler tells me, you wanted me, ma'am."

"Wanted you!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I have been waiting for you this hour. I have rang three times for you; and the answer has always been that you were out. You are always gadding about, it seems to me, and I shall not put up with this any longer. You presume upon my good nature, because you are an old servant; but my patience is come to an end, and I will have different conduct."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you had to wait;" replied the maid, in a tone of perfect civility, "but I don't see how I could help it; or what change I can make to please you."

"Do not answer me, Windsor!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I am not in a humor to put up with any insolence."

"I am not going to be insolent in the least, ma'am," replied the housekeeper; "but when I am accused of neglecting my duty, I must say something for myself. I could not tell that you would go to bed so early. I am home now two hours before your usual time, and—"

"I will not have you answer me in this way," exclaimed the lady again, with increasing vehemence. "I will be obeyed by my servants, at least, though Miss Charlton may think fit to be as insolent and self-willed as she likes."

It was too fair an opportunity for planting a hit to be neglected by Mrs. Windsor; and she instantly replied, "Ah! poor dear young lady, I am sure she is too gentle and tractable to be insolent or self-willed, whatever she may suffer."

"You impudent minx!" cried Mrs. Charlton, her eyes flashing fire, "do you mean to say I make Miss Charlton suffer? Well, upon my life, this is too bad—Oh! I can see it all. There's no use of more words. I dare say the housekeeper's room is ringing all day long with my unkindness to Miss Charlton. I'm a true step-mother, and everything Miss Charlton does is right, and everything I do wrong! All the neighborhood hears of it, I'll warrant, and not a lady's maid for ten miles round does not pity *the poor thing!* But I've seen your cogging and your flattery of her. I understand it all—worshipping the rising sun; but you may find yourself mistaken, all of you, for I'll put up with it no more, but make a clear house of you."

Mrs. Windsor had endeavored in vain to interpose a word or two, not for the purpose of allaying her mistress's anger, but of adding fuel to the fire. The torrent of Mrs. Charlton's indignation, however, gave no opportunity, for she went on with a volubility which left no space between her words. Mrs. Windsor was well aware, and had been so for many years, that the good lady was not that gentle, graceful and composed person, at all times, that she appeared in public; for more than once, even in her earlier and brighter days, she had had opportunities of seeing little bursts of passion not at all dignified or pleasant. The present indulgence, however, was somewhat more than ordinary, and if she had not been a stout-hearted woman, the housekeeper might have been somewhat alarmed; but as things were taking the exact course that she could have desired, she determined to clench the affair by a slight touch of civil contempt; and consequently, when Mrs. Charlton paused to take breath, after threatening to make a clear house of all her servants, she replied in a calm and deferential tone, "I think, ma'am, you had better consider of that first, for the servants might take you at your word. There are a good many of them, and their wages have not been paid for nine months!"

Mrs. Charlton's face grew redder than before, though it was a good deal inflamed with indignation. There was so much truth, however, in Mrs. Windsor's hint, and her finances for the time were at so low an ebb, that during several minutes she could only reply, "Well, I'm sure!" repeating the same formula more than once, without going on to state what it was she was sure of. Mrs. Windsor, in the mean time, remained perfectly calm and grave, looking in her mistress's face, with a very provoking degree of placidity, till at length Mrs. Charlton, recovering her composure in some degree, nodded her head significantly, saying "You shall go, at least, my good lady. Make up your mind to that. I did not mean the other servants; but I mean you—and you understand me."

"Oh, yes, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor. "You mean to give me warning, and I take it, though I don't deserve such treatment. But that being settled, I will only just tell you what I've been about this afternoon, which you would not hear before, though it's a matter of some consequence. I saw Mr. Spragge this morning, and he had with him a gentleman who came down from the jewellers in London. I told him that I was sure that in a week or ten days you would be able to pay everything, but he said they were not inclined to wait any longer. I persuaded him to go and see the other tradesmen, however, and talk to them; and as I didn't get any answer, I went down myself."

"And what did they say, Windsor?" asked Mrs. Charlton, in a very much altered tone, for the housekeeper's intelligence, though partly fictitious and partly true, had instantly brought her down several steps in the ladder of pride.

"Why, ma'am, I did my best," replied Mrs. Windsor, "and they consented to wait till Saturday next."

"Well, then, it must be done before then," said Mrs. Charlton, speaking to herself, and subsequently falling into a fit of meditation.

"Have you any other commands, ma'am," asked the housekeeper, after waiting a reasonable time.

"No, Windsor, no," replied her mistress; and then added, in a coaxing tone, "you should not reply when you see me angry, Windsor. You don't know how many things I have to vex me. There, go away now, and let us forget all that's past."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, dropping a low courtesy; "but I can't quite forget. You have called me an impudent minx, and you have given me warning. No mistress shall ever do so twice. I was a faithful servant to you always, ma'am, but after what you have said I am your servant no longer;" and bringing by a natural process, which some women can command, a good deal of water into her eyes, Mrs. Windsor dropped another low courtesy and quitted the room, leaving Mrs. Charlton laboring under the unpleasant conviction that she had made a great mistake in regard to her housekeeper's extent of long-suffering.

Straight from Mrs. Charlton's dressing-room the maid, with her candle in her hand and her eyes still comfortably red, took her way to the door of the drawing-room, opened it, and went two steps in; then suddenly stopped, as if in great surprise at seeing Miss Charlton and Dr. Western, who were seated on the sofa at a little distance. "I beg pardon, ma'am," she said, "I thought you were gone to bed, and came to see that all was right; but I'm really so flurried that I don't know what I'm doing."

"What is the matter, Windsor," said Louisa, who, while the maid spoke, had full opportunity of seeing the tears in her eyes; "You look as if you had been crying."

"Oh! nothing, ma'am," replied Mrs. Windsor; "it is only that my mistress has given me warning."

"You, Windsor!" exclaimed Louisa in a tone of great surprise; "you who have been with us so long. What could that be for?"

"Oh! ma'am, it is not for me to say," replied the housekeeper in a humble tone; "I dare say I was wrong, but I could not bear to hear those I respect spoken ill of, and I answered my mistress when I ought to have held my tongue. So she called me an impudent minx, and gave me warning."

"Oh! I dare say she'll think better of it to-morrow," replied Louisa, in a kindly tone. "She's angry about something to-night; she would be sorry to part with you, I'm sure."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," answered Mrs. Windsor; "but I cannot stay with her. I may be wrong in that too; but, after what she said of me and others, it's quite impossible;" and, putting her handkerchief to her eye, Mrs. Windsor, with another low courtesy, withdrew from the room. And so all that was settled quite to her satisfaction.

CHAPTER LVIII.

It must not be denied that Mr. Morton had passed a very unpleasant day and night before Lucy Edmonds opened the door of the room in which he was confined. It is not pleasant to any man to be shut up, and unable to get out, whatever be the nature of the lock which is put upon his door. It may be steel or iron—it may be the command of an absolute prince—it may be a soldier with a fixed bayonet—it may be the prescription of a doctor—but whatever it is, it is by no means agreeable. There were various aggravations, also, of the ordinary unpleasantness in Mr. Morton's case; and, for the purpose of making our climax perfect, we will begin with the least romantic one first. Alas! even heroes must eat, although, according to the account of Tasso and Ariosto, and other great poets, it is not necessary for heroines to do so; but Mr. Morton was not a hero in the usual acceptation of the word. When necessary, he could go without his dinner as well as another man, but he had a great objection to do anything upon compulsion, and to fast as much as aught else. That day, however, and the whole of that night he was forced to do so, for Alfred Latimer, with his usual selfishness, forgot that any body must eat besides himself; and had it not been for a caraffe of water which stood upon the washing-stand, the captive would have had to do without drinking, also.

Nevertheless, though all this was very disagreeable, and although Morton resolved the very next morning to knock out a panel of the door with tables, or chairs, or bedposts, or anything he could find, even at the risk of confirming any impression of his insanity which might have been given to the people of the house, yet this was not what troubled him the most. He had various important pieces of business to transact; he knew that his presence, his signature, or his directions might be needed at any time, in regard to matters that would bear no delay; he expected every day and every hour to receive news from London which might require instant decision; and he did not at all like being deprived of his liberty at such a moment. But there was another circumstance still more unpleasant to him: he thought of the feelings of Louisa Charlton, of her anxiety, of her apprehensions regarding him; he summed up in imagination all that he himself would have

felt if she had so suddenly disappeared; he added one half more for the difference between the acuteness of a woman's feelings and those of a man; and thus he made himself as uncomfortable as might be during the whole of the day when he was seized and the night that followed.

To see his door opened at all, then, was a relief to him, and when he beheld a woman's face, instead of that of Alfred Latimer and his accomplices, it was very satisfactory; for he had determined to make a struggle for liberty at all risks; and he knew that the event might be doubtful. But when he perceived who it was, other feelings mingled with those personal ones which first crossed his mind, and all the interest which he had taken in the poor girl's fate instantly revived. "Lucy!" he exclaimed, "Lucy Edmonds!"

But Lucy stayed not to hear, and the sudden glance of surprise she gave him, the look of fear and the burning glow of shame that followed, showed him at once that whatever was the cause of her coming, she had been utterly ignorant of his being there, and that she was both terrified and distressed to see him. He paused for a moment to consider rather what was the state of the poor girl's mind than what his own conduct should be. He asked himself whether she had really become corrupt in heart, notwithstanding all that Dr. Western had told him of her early life, or whether she had been made the victim, as he had suspected, of mingled fraud and violence, and was an unwilling and sorrowful partaker in the guilt of others, perhaps from weakness in herself or from the power of circumstances.

The deep blush with which she had seen him answered him, at least on one point; and, walking out through the door she had left open, he descended uninterrupted to the passage below, and, after pausing for a moment to see if any one would appear, he entered the parlor, where he heard somebody move. "Are you the master of this house?" he demanded, as the worthy gardener stood before him, not knowing very well what to say or do.

"Yes, sir," replied the gardener; "that is to say, I am the landlord—not exactly the master, for I let part of it."

"You must be aware, sir," said Morton, in a calm, grave tone, "that a very shameful and criminal act has been committed in bringing me hither. But I do not wish to speak upon that subject at present, as I shall take what measures I think fit hereafter in regard to the chief perpetrators of that act."

"Lord, sir, I had nothing to do with it," replied the gardener; "I let my lodgings, and know little or nothing about what takes place in them. I'm sure it's no fault of mine."

"Perhaps not," replied Morton; "but, as I said before, on that subject I do not intend to speak just now. Is Mr. Latimer in your house at present?"

"No, sir," replied the gardener, in a respectful manner; for there was something in Morton's tone so gentlemanly, and yet so commanding, that he felt at once that he had to do with a very superior person to his lodger. "No, sir, he has gone out for the whole day."

"And, pray," demanded Morton, "in what relation does that young person who has just gone out stand towards him?"

"Dear me, sir, that is an awkward question," said the landlord; "I never asked them any questions, not I."

"I should be obliged to you," said Morton, fully convinced that the man knew more, if he chose to acknowledge it, "to give me an explicit reply to my question. You will not injure yourself by so doing, but, on the contrary, perhaps benefit yourself. I take some interest in the young person who just now opened the door of the room where I was detained. Her father is a very faithful servant of mine, and an excellent man. I believe she is well-disposed herself, and I am afraid she has been ill-used by Mr. Latimer. Now, my only object in the questions I ask is to know her real situation, in order to make him do what is right by her, if possible, and if not, to restore her to her father."

"Oh, if that's all," exclaimed the landlord, "I can make you quite easy about that. They are to be married to-morrow at a quarter past nine. The banns will be published to-day for the third time, and I am to go with her to the church to-morrow to give her away. Mr. Latimer, when he went, left a note for the parson, appointing the time, and I dare say the young lady has gone to give it to him now."

Morton mused for a moment or two, and then inquired "Do you really think that Mr. Latimer intends to fulfill this engagement?"

"What, marry her? Oh dear, yes, sir, I am quite sure of that," was the gardener's reply. "Why he need not have had the banns called if he didn't; and why should he leave the note, and make her ask me to go with her? Besides, bless you, sir, he's very fond of her, though he does worry her now and then; and I'm sure she's as nice a young lady as ever I see."

"I trust it is as you say," replied Morton; "but nevertheless I shall take means to ascertain the facts, that if he do not fulfill his promise, measures may be taken both to punish him and to protect her. It may be as well," he continued, "when she returns not to tell her that we have had any conversation upon this subject; nor to say any thing about it to Mr. Latimer either. I will take what means I think fit, and act as I may find necessary. My hat, I think, is in the room up-stairs: be so good as to bring it to me."

The gardener obeyed with great alacrity, brushing the fine new beaver with his arm as he brought it down, and taking care to look into the hat to see if he could find any indication of the owner's name, style, or title. He discovered nothing, however, for Mr. Morton was not one of that class of men who write their names in their hats, and all he could conclude was that the gentleman was a gentleman, and quite as sane as himself.

"You will remember what I have told you," said Morton, covering his head, when the landlord came down, "and not speak about our conversation to any one. I shall probably remain here till after the hour appointed for the marriage to-morrow, and you shall hear from me again according to your conduct."

Thus saying, he walked out, passed through the garden, and entered the lane. There he paused for an instant, not very well knowing

which way to turn, for the walls on each side of the lane were high, and it was not till he had taken some twenty or thirty steps rather away from the town than towards it, that, on looking round at the sound of some voices, he perceived over one of the garden gates the weather-cock and part of the steeple of a church in the opposite direction, and, turning back, he walked at a quick pace up the lane again, when suddenly, at the turning near which the post-boy and the gardener had held their conference on the morning before, he perceived a body of four or five men advancing towards him. At the head of the party was a gentleman with a low-crowned hat, a pig-tail, and a pair of spectacles; and a large and ponderous body, with the capacious stomach covered with a very clean white waistcoat, carried on by a pair of diminutive legs, enveloped in drab breeches and gray worsted stockings. There was no mistaking Mr. Quatterly. Once seen he was known for ever, and it needed a telescope of no great power to identify him at several miles' distance.

Morton's face became certainly very joyful at the sight, and he walked straight up to his old friend, who did not recognize him, however, till he was within twenty yards. But as soon as he did, Mr. Quatterly, on the impulse of the moment, took off his hat, exposing his shining bald crown to the full light of the sun, and waved it over his head, exclaiming aloud, and totally forgetting that it was Sunday—"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Here's little bo-peep, who went to sleep—my dear sir, how do you do? I declare that though, in regard to the poor man of Tobago, you may

> 'Imagine his bliss
> When the doctor said this:
> To a roast leg of mutton you may go,'

you cannot imagine my bliss at seeing you a free man, delivered from the power of the enemy. Why, we heard that you had been arrested—detained in prison without bail, and treated with all the rigor of the law—without a *fi.-fa.*, a *capias*, or any other writ, injunction or prescript whatsoever; and here am I, with this worthy magistrate, two constables, and an assistant, ready to deliver you, should it be necessary, by *habeas corpus*."

"A thousand thanks, my dear sir," replied Morton; "but luckily no such measures will be necessary now. I am at liberty, as you see; and, although undoubtedly a most gross and scandalous outrage has been committed, yet some consideration may be necessary before we proceed to punish the offenders."

"One of them I will certainly punish," said Mr. Quatterly, "though not for this offence, my dear sir. I mean a certain Captain Tankerville, for I am determined that wild beast shall not go about the world any longer, and I will not quit this town till I have found him. I've got a string round his leg that he does not know of, and he shan't go far. As to the rest of the gentry, you can do as you think fit. I meddle with no man's charities, however absurd they may be. But now I think we had better adjourn to the inn, and discuss the matter; but first let me make you acquainted with this worshipful J. P."—and he introduced Morton in form to the magistrate who accompanied him, and who finding Othello's occupation gone, now that the prisoner was at liberty, took his leave with his satellites as they passed the corner of his own street, leaving Mr. Morton and Mr. Quatterly to go on to the inn.

Morton's first anxiety was in regard to Louisa, but it was not till the worthy solicitor had rung for breakfast, and had ordered coffee, broiled ham, eggs, and toast, made sundry observations upon the unshaved state of his young friend's chin, and begun and broken off his story half a dozen times, that Morton discovered that he, Mr. Quatterly, having visited Mallington on the preceding night, could give him information upon the subject nearest his heart. As soon as he was aware of the fact, however, he himself broke through the thread of the worthy solicitor's narrative to inquire whether he had been to Mrs. Charlton's and seen Louisa.

"No, my dear sir, no," replied Mr. Quatterly; "but I did better than present the fair lady with the person of an old lawyer. I sent her an old doctor of divinity, for which I trust she is truly grateful. Set your mind at rest—set your mind at rest. Dr. Western went up to her immediately, to tell her you were quite safe, and I came over here to insure that the tale was true. She was in a sad quandary all day, I understand—and dreaming, I have no doubt, of nothing but throats cut, and gaping wounds, together with all the sundry associations of bludgeons, and pistols, and razors, and crow-bars; but the worthy doctor, doubtless, afforded her pleasanter visions for the night, and he will be over here himself in an hour or two, to co-operate with me in your liberation. I dare say he looks forward to somewhat too much work for the Sabbath; but like the friend of the celebrated Mrs. Hubbard, when she found the cupboard bare, 'the poor dog will get none'—and now to other things."

Mr. Quatterly then proceeded to entertain Mr. Morton with a variety of details, regarding both the affairs of that gentleman himself, those of his unfortunate clerk, Mr. Wilkins, and those of Captain Tankerville; and he ended, as breakfast was brought in, by expressing a hope that Morton had not been put to inconvenience by want of the sum which Wilkins had carried off, and which had, in fact, been destined for his use. "As soon as I could make arrangements for trapping the fellow," he continued, "I set off post myself, with money in my pocket-book, deviating a little from my way to this town, information having reached me that my scamp had been seen at a village, about five miles off on the London road. He was gone, however, before I arrived, and I went on to Mallington at once; not, indeed, that it was absolutely necessary I should in person carry you the money; but I had other news to tell you, and good news too—I have every reason to believe, my dear sir, that the whole of our important affair is settled. I have done it, I think, by a *coup de maitre*."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Morton. "How might that be, my dear sir? I know that you are very skillful in diplomacy, and learned in the law; but I did not expect that we should terminate this affair for three or four months to come, especially as we are in the long vacation."

"It was by no stroke of diplomacy," replied Mr. Quatterly, "nor by any legal process.

On the contrary, it was by a proceeding quite out of all rule, and contrary to every etiquette. I begged a conference with our opponents, but seemed particularly unwilling that your worthy cousin should be present, he being a principal, and you not being on the spot. In this I calculated on the natural obstinacy of the human beast, and I was successful, for he insisted upon being at the meeting himself, saying, that you might come up if you liked it. Well, I submitted with an ill grace. I, upon your part, sole and alone; he, accompanied by his solicitors, Messrs. Clearwink and Writham, and by their junior, Mr. Dasherbald. Had a clerk at my back, it is true, and an enormous blue bag. When there, I immediately addressed my legal brethren, pointing out my objection to principals being present; that was to throw the breach of all etiquette upon them; but they stoutly maintained your cousin's right to hear all that was said; so then I immediately proceeded to business. I told them that my sole object was to save him needless litigation and expense, as I knew that his fortune would ill bear it, while yours, though too ample to be affected by any costs, would be quite as well without them. Thereupon the cousin said that he was well aware you was a rich man, but that was no reason why you should deprive him of his rights, and that he would rather plead in *forma pauperis* than give them up. I replied, that it was especially to show his learned advisers, that he had no rights at all that I had requested the conference. Our case was so clear, I said, that I had come to make what the French lawyers call a *communication des pièces*, which would satisfy them that they had no case to carry into court. When they heard this, my fraternity would have given two or three fingers to get their principal out of the way; but that was not to be done, and, without giving them more time than enough, I produced an abstract of your title, comprising a list of all documents and proofs in our possession; and I could see our friend's countenance fall most sadly, as he heard me make out my case, step by step, leaving him not a leg to stand upon. Mr. Dasherbald was in a high state of irritation, protested against the irregularity of the whole proceeding, and appealed to my sense of professional etiquette, for he had an unpleasant foresight of losing the fees on sundry briefs, if the suit was nipped in the bud. I would neither be stopped nor squabble, but went on to the end, and then cited to my gentlemen two or three instances of their own irregularity, pointing out, moreover, that having consented to the conference, and insisted upon a principal being present, their demurrer came too late. My effect was produced, however. Though very unwilling to admit it, even to himself, your opponent saw that his case was hopeless; and the only question in his mind that I could see was, whether, out of spite, he should fight out a lost battle, and die in the field—if not in person, at least in fortune—or whether he should beat a retreat with what he had got left. Even the lawyers were a little staggered, for I had taken care to let them know that the sinews of war, on the part of the adversary, were less than they even themselves supposed; so that if their bill went beyond a couple of thousand pounds, they were very likely to be minus the balance of account. I then said that, having shown them how the gentleman stood, it was for them to give him their best advice as to proceeding with a hopeless case, which, doubtless, they would not recommend. Mr. Dasherbald declared that he did not see the case was hopeless at all, and was proceeding in the same strain, when Clearwink pulled him by the sleeve, and said it might be better for them to confer apart. He then, having first whispered a word to Writham, retired with Dasherbald and Mr. Wilmot into another room; and Writham, setting his head on one side, with the insinuating look of a greyhound bitch, told me, in the gentlest tone possible, that he feared the greatest difficulty would be about their costs. I said, in reply, that there would be great difficulty, I did not doubt, in getting them from Mr. Wilmot. He shrugged his shoulders, asked who they could look to, if not to him; and added that, under circumstances, he thought they must plead, to give a chance for the said costs. Thereupon, in the good plain vernacular, I asked him if he would have them now, or wait till he could get them. He winked his eye, and said he did not know whether he rightly comprehended me. I replied that you were a man who did not like trouble—hated lawsuits and lawyers, with a few brilliant exceptions—could easily calculate what the expenses of the case would be, if carried into court—knew perfectly well that no person in England can either get his rights, or keep them without paying for them—and, therefore, would, in all probability, be ready to make a sacrifice, rather than have all the annoyance of courts of chancery and houses of peers. After this the matter was all plain sailing: their bill was to be discharged by you, if satisfactory to me; and if not, referred to arbitration, for Writham would not consent to have it taxed, and, leaving me alone, he joined his partner and the rest very soon, bringing them back into the ring, but evidently with no intention of showing fight. To save their credit, some time for consideration was demanded, I handed them over the list of documents, and they are to let me have a definite answer as speedily as possible. It had not arrived when I set out after Wilkins, and I ordered it to follow me to Mallington without delay.

"And, pray, what is become of this clerk of yours?" asked Mr. Morton. "You say you caught him at Mallington, and that he seemed very penitent. What have you done with him?"

"Set him free upon parole," replied Mr. Quatterly. "Ah, I see you think it very extraordinary; but recollect, my dear friend, I never do anything like any other man, and such a course has this great advantage, that nobody ever knows where to have me. But this fellow has promised to ferret out for me our worthy friend, Captain Tankerville, who has squeezed him like a sponge under the grasp of his own fears. And now let us sit down to breakfast, after which you shall shave yourself, and we will go to church."

Morton very willingly agreed to the proposal in all its terms, though undoubtedly had he done what inclination prompted he would have set off for Mallington at once; but he was one

of those men who do not do always what inclination prompts, and now that he knew Louisa's mind had been relieved in regard to his fate, he thought it in some sort a duty to wait for Dr. Western's arrival in order to consult with him as to Lucy Edmonds. This he accordingly resolved to do, but time passed, and Dr Western did not appear. The young gentleman and his solicitor breakfasted, went to church, returned, and waited till past five o'clock before the worthy clergyman reached the town.

Their time, indeed, was not wholly unoccupied, for when they came back from the morning service, they found Mr. Wilkins waiting for them, with the information that our highly-respected friend, Captain Tankerville, was at the inn somewhat further down the street, and that he had received one or two communications from a young man who came and went frequently between the place of his temporary domicile and a cottage just out of the town, which Morton and Mr. Quatterly instantly concluded must be that where the former had been detained. Mr. Quatterly's measures were immediately taken with his usual decision and rapidity. A magistrate was visited, information on oath filed against the worthy captain—not as an accessory after the fact to Mr. Wilkins' robbery, not as an accessory before the fact to Mr. Morton's abduction, but as a principal in having affixed other people's names to certain documents, greatly to his benefit and their loss. A warrant was at once made out, and Captain Tankerville was conveyed from a pint of sherry and a mutton chop, which he considered no bad luncheon, to the town jail, which he looked upon as an indifferent lodging.

At length, however, Dr. Western appeared, and great was his satisfaction in every respect to find his young friend at liberty without any of the steps which had been anticipated. After having satisfied him in regard to Louisa, he listened with deep interest to all that Morton had to say regarding Lucy Edmonds, and agreed to wait and be present himself in church next morning in order to ascertain whether the marriage between her and Alfred Latimer did or did not take place. Mr. Quatterly determined to remain also to look after his sheep-fold, as he termed the prison where Captain Tankerville was confined; but Morton resolved to see her he loved as early as possible on the following morning, and, consequently, after having partaken of dinner with his two friends, he set out once more in a post-chaise to Mallington towards half-past seven o'clock, calculating upon reaching that place by ten. But human calculations are all in vain. The chaise, having had more traveling than it approved of, broke down about seven miles from Mallington, and Morton had to sleep at a small public-house in the first village he could meet with, after walking some miles on foot; he did not even reach this shelter till it was past eleven o'clock, and consequently judged it much too late to go on and present himself at Mallington House.

CHAPTER LIX.

We must now turn for a while to Mallington House, and to one whom we have neglected somewhat sadly of late, although, to say the truth, there is no person on the scene in whom we take a deeper interest; but, as in nature, so in a tale, true or false, if nature be its guide, the inferior, the less interesting, the more insignificant, and the more unworthy characters, work out the fate of the higher and the nobler; and, by tortuous, minute, and often despicable means, produce great and important results, affecting persons and events apparently far beyond their reach and scope. Thus the coral insects, with their minute architecture, raise up, from the bottom of the deep Pacific Sea, whole clusters of islands, speedily inhabited by human beings, amongst whom, at no distant date, civilization is destined to flourish, and the crowning gift to be added—the knowledge of God, and the faith in the Savior. The whole human family is in fact so linked together that no one can tell how the actions of the lowest or the most remote can affect those high in station or distant by space, and as the great machine runs more smoothly on small castors than on great wheels, I have thought fit to dwell a great deal upon minor things, which, nevertheless, were not without their ultimate importance.

Yet Louisa Charlton—sweet Louisa Charlton—I return to her with pleasure, and could pause long without unwillingness, either to paint her on that eventful Saturday morning; first, as she sat and watched eagerly for Morton's return with her soft and beautiful eyes often directed towards the common from the windows of the drawing-room, and, with a graceful start, listened to any accidental sound below in hopes that it denoted his arrival; or when his long absence caused serious alarm in the whole family, to depict the struggle in her mind, the anguish, the anxiety, she felt, often corrected and subdued by the trust in God, and the chastening powers of religion. I could dwell upon all the painful emotions of her heart, all the dreadful images that terror suggested, all the dull and heavy vacancy that the very thought of losing him whom only she loved produced in her bosom. I could willingly tell, too, how she strove for calmness, how she succeeded in suppressing any vehement expression of sorrow and alarm, and how she suggested various means that others had not thought of for discovering Morton's fate.

But pictures of this kind are not always pleasant to the reader, and it may be only necessary to state that towards evening, Louisa's grief and anxiety were considerably aggravated by the demeanor of her step-mother. Mrs. Charlton herself was both extremely apprehensive and considerably annoyed at the unexplained absence of Mr. Morton. She felt really alarmed lest any serious evil should have befallen him—not in the slightest degree upon his account, but entirely upon her own. He was one of the materials which she had used in constructing and bringing to perfection a scheme which she had long nourished; and the porcelain manufacturer could not be more provoked—indeed, not half so much so, at seeing a cup or vase which he had painted with the greatest delicacy crack to pieces in the firing, than Mrs. Charlton was at the bare idea of Morton getting himself murdered at the very moment when she intended to make use of him. He might have been

hanged, shot, or had his throat cut without calling forth anything whatsoever from Mrs. Charlton but the simple exclamation of "Dear me, how unfortunate!" had it not been that she had determined on that very Saturday to bring matters to a crisis, and, Mr. Morton being abstracted from the sum total of events that she had counted upon, her whole calculations were thrown out. Nor was there any possibility of arranging and executing a new scheme within any reasonable time; and, besides the ruins of the old one were, like most other ruins, likely to present a great obstruction to any other scheme at all. Louisa, she saw, was evidently in love with Morton, and she knew too well that she was not a person easily to love again. Besides, where could she hope for such facilities? One of Louisa's guardians had been the very person to introduce the two young people to each other, and his co-executor and fellow-guardian, except in matters of accounts, was entirely ruled by Dr. Western; so that every difficulty had been smoothed down, and Mrs. Charlton had anticipated nothing but a gentle acquiescence in her wishes, as soon as they were delicately propounded to Mr. Morton, in conjunction with the information that his marriage with Louisa entirely depended upon her good will and pleasure. All these gay dreams, however, were scattered and tossed about by the disappearance of Mr. Morton, and the fair lady of Mallington House worked herself into a high state of irritation before dinner was set upon the table. Louisa's external calmness, too, served but to aggravate such feelings, and she took the very first opportunity in the course of the evening of venting her anger upon her unoffending step-daughter. Whatever Louisa had replied would not have made any difference in Mrs. Charlton's conduct, for she was determined that the young lady should be resolved to offend her, and she was offended accordingly. Having worked herself up into a high and mighty passion, she proclaimed a headache, and retired to her own dressing-room, where the scene took place with Mrs. Windsor, which we have already depicted.

In the meantime Louisa turned over in her own mind all that she had said, and examined it strictly, but found that not one word had been uttered by her which could reasonably call forth anger. Then, with a conscience void of offence, she cast the subject from her mind, and turned her thoughts to the still more painful and serious subject of contemplation afforded by Morton's continued absence. In solitude and silence—with no one to comfort, with nothing to re-assure, with no object to divert her attention—the feelings of her heart had nearly overpowered her. The tears did rise into her eyes; a drop or two had flowed over, and rested on her soft cheek, and she was struggling to keep the flood from pouring down, when the servant announced Dr. Western, and Louisa started up with hope and terror, which always walk hand in hand through the dim vale of uncertainty. The expression of the good rector's face, however, at once relieved her. There was a bright and joyful smile upon it, such as she knew his kind heart could not give, unless the tidings he bore were happy. She saw that he was the messenger of peace, and his first words proved it likewise.

"I have got good news, my love," he said; "and I am glad to find you alone, for they are for your ear only. Morton is quite well, and safe;" and he went on to tell her all that he thought necessary, remembering, however, the good solicitor's caution, and not saying more than was required to set her heart at rest.

Louisa was easily satisfied. We must not say that she was not anxious to hear all the circumstances—that she had no curiosity—that she did not ask some questions—for, of course, the subject was an interesting one to her, but still she knew Dr. Western so well that she was sure that nothing on earth would induce him to give her hopes of Morton's safety, unless he was safe, or to conceal the facts from her without necessity. He told her, too, where her lover was, and mentioned his own intention of going over the following day; but the rest of their conversation would not be very interesting if detailed here, being soon after interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Windsor, and turning, after she retired again, upon the character and conduct of that good lady herself.

"She's an old, and, I believe, a faithful servant of your family," said Dr. Western, after some discussion of the circumstances, "and unless you find that she has been really insolent to Mrs. Charlton, I can see no reason, my dear child, why you should not take her into your family when you have a house of your own—that is to say, if you desire it. But you had better inquire into the circumstances fully before you decide."

Louisa mused, for she was not quite certain of Mrs. Windsor, and, after remaining a short time longer, Dr. Western took his leave, and departed.

The next day passed. Louisa was cheerful from renewed hope; Mrs. Charlton was in a languid and somewhat dolorous mood. She lay upon her sofa in her dressing-room the whole morning, in the patience-on-a-monument style, and Louisa went to church by herself. Her step-mother called her a selfish unfeeling girl, but the words were not addressed to Louisa's ear, and would not have pained her much if she had heard them. At dinner Mrs. Charlton treated her coldly, and somewhat repulsively, but yet she could not help fancying, from her step-daughter's calmness, that she must have some assurance of Morton's safety, which was a comfort to herself also. A little after ten she retired to rest, giving a hint both to Louisa and the servants that, as agitation and apprehension had rendered her somewhat unwell, she wished the rest of the family to retire likewise, and to have the house kept quite silent.

Though by no means disposed to sleep, for Dr. Western had given her some hope of Morton's return that night, or on the following morning, Louisa willingly enough went to her own room, which her father had taken care should be fitted up with every comfort and convenience. She there sat reading and listening alternately till all hope of Morton's coming that night was over; and even afterwards, as the book she had taken up interested her, she went on with its perusal, leaning her fair head upon her hand, and mingling the thoughts of the author with

her own. The clock struck twelve; all was silent around, and it seemed the hour of all others to sit and read by the solitary lamp the pouring forth of a high spirit long passed away from earth. She continued some time longer, then, but as she felt it growing late she rose in about half an hour to seek her pillow, and only paused to look out from the window, the curtains of which were withdrawn, and gazed for a moment at the starlight sky. As she did so some sound from below, as of a person leaping the garden wall, made her look down, and she saw the figure of a man moving on the gravel walk. The next instant he stooped down, rose again, and threw some small pebbles against her window, and the moment after, as she was drawing back in some alarm, she heard a voice pronounce her name.

There was something about the figure which reminded her of Mrs. Charlton's son, and yet it seemed very different too, but the voice was, undoubtedly, his; and she came nearer to the window again, and once more looked out. She had no longer any doubt. It was certainly Alfred Latimer, though, it seemed, in very strange attire; and as soon as by the light in the room he perceived that she was again at the window, he made signs to her to open it, which, after a momentary hesitation, she did.

"Louisa," he said, in a low voice—"Louisa, come down, and open the door, there's a dear sister; I want to get in."

His tone and whole manner was agitated and wild; and Louisa replied, "I will call one of the servants, Alfred, and bid them let you in in a minute."

"On no account!" he exclaimed; "if you won't take the trouble to come down, and let me in yourself, say so at once, and I will go away again; but I wish no one to know that I am here to-night. Will you open it, or will you not!"

His tone was so sharp and menacing that Louisa felt some alarm, though she knew not well what injury he could do her if she did as he desired; but yet she hesitated a little, till reflecting that the butler slept on the ground floor, at no great distance from the door, and that the bell-rope of a large bell, which would speedily alarm the whole house, hung close by, she replied at length, "Well, wait a moment, and I will come down, Alfred."

"And you will wake no one!" he said in a tone which seemed to her mingled with apprehension.

"No," she replied; "if you do not wish it, I will not."

"There's a good girl," was the answer; "be quick, be quick, Louisa;" and, taking a candle from the table, she descended to the garden door, withdrew the chain, and unlocked it, still keeping near the bell; and then, turning the handle of the lock, threw it back.

The instant the door was opened Alfred Latimer came in, snatched the candle from her hand, and saying in a low tone, "That will do, that will do. Thank you, Louisa" he walked straight up-stairs.

Louisa stood confounded.

His face, usually florid, was as pale as death; his eyes were wild and haggard; his hand shook so that it could scarcely hold the candlestick; and his dress was no less strange than his manner. He had no hat on, and over his other clothing was drawn a smock frock, stained and dirty; and as Louisa watched him up the stairs she saw that the singular costume was completed by a pair of common leather leggings, such as those usually worn by gamekeepers and hedgers and ditchers. She had no time to observe more; but with a suspicion that he had become deranged in intellect—an event which she had often dreaded, from his wild and irregular course of life, she returned to her room, and instantly locked the door. Not above two or three minutes passed, and she was still sitting on the little sofa before her table, endeavoring to recover from the agitation into which these events had cast her, when some one turned the handle of the lock. Then came a knock, and, approaching the door, she inquired, "What is it? I cannot open the door now. I am going to bed."

"Put down your ear to the keyhole, then," said the voice of Alfred Latimer; and when she had done so, he added, in a stern tone, "Not a word to any one of my having been here, upon your life." Thus saying he turned away, and she could hear him go down stairs, open and close the door, and go out. She would not approach the window again, however, even to shut it, till she was certain that he was at a distance; but his retreating step soon died away upon the gravel walk, and, pulling down the sash, she retired to bed.

CHAPTER LX.

The constable to whom the apprehension of Captain Tankerville had been confided was a man of a peculiar conformation, both mental and corporeal. In figure he was short, fat, and squat; and the only indications of activity which his body displayed were to be found in the neat well-set leg and foot, which, in their clean stocking and highly-polished shoe, were usually displayed to full advantage. His arms were short but powerful, and furnished with a tremendous fist at the end, which, when once it got a grasp of anything, fixed upon it with iron rigidity, and if employed upon the face of an adversary brought at least double the space under its operation than could be covered by any other mortal fist. The mind was not altogether unlike the body; it had its points of obtuseness and rotundity, but at the same time it was a most vehemently active and energetic mind, and though, from a degree of fatness and heaviness, in particular respects, it often operated in a wrong direction, it was sure to go on with miraculous rapidity on any road it thought fit to follow. Often its speed and vehemence brought the worthy constable into situations which would have been extremely dangerous to other men, but nine times out of ten he carried himself out of a scrape with the same celerity which had carried him into one, and though a magistrate had often to look grave at his overstepping his authority, yet Mr. Higginthorp generally discovered in two minutes some circumstance whereby to justify his so doing.

When Mr. Morton had been gone about half an hour, and Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly

were quietly seated over a cup of tea, discussing the merits of their friend just departed, and the relative qualities of sweet Louisa Charlton, Mr. Higginthorp suddenly presented himself before them, and advancing to the tea-table, leaned his enormous knuckles upon it, saying, "I've nabbed the other fellow, your worships, and want to know what I'm to do with him."

Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly stared at each other and then at the constable—"What other fellow?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"Why, the 'complice," replied the constable. "The accessuary arter the fact."

"Who do you mean? who do you mean?" exclaimed the solicitor. "Who killed Cock Robin?"

"Can't say, sir," answered Mr. Higginthorp; "but this here fellow is him as was a coming and going arter the captain we've got in limbo. He says his name's John Blackmore; but I'd bet a dollar to a tenpenny nail that's an alias."

"In the name of fortune!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, "what did you nab him for, as you call it?"

"Oh, bless ye, sir! I always nabs 'em all," said Mr. Higginthorp; "we never can tell what may come out, and it makes all sure. It's seldom a man undertakes any of these jobs single-handed, there's most always a gang on 'em; so when I've nabbed one as I'm sure on, I nabs all that have been speaking to him particklar for four-and-twenty hours. Then, if nothing comes out it can't be helped, and there's no harm done, you know."

"But there is harm done, Mr. Constable," replied Mr. Quatterly. "Why—devil take it!—you've got no warrant against him."

"Can't help that, sir," said Mr. Higginthorp, with a low bow; "it's what I always does. It's the rule here."

"The deuce it is!" said Mr. Quatterly, "but suppose this fellow prosecutes you for false imprisonment?"

"He can't do that, sir," rejoined the constable.

"What, when there's neither any warrant against him nor any information lodged?" asked the solicitor.

"No, sir," answered the constable; "I lodges my own information, and executes my own warrant. I always does, and if so be as how it should turn out that he has had nothing to do with t'other job, why, you see, as I caught him a-playing at cards on a Sunday in a public—he's in for that, that's all."

"'Pon my life, you seem very well contented with your proceedings," rejoined the solicitor, "and put me greatly in mind of a certain Jack Horner, who

> 'Put in his thumb,
> And pulled out a plum,
> And said what a good boy am I'

We don't do these things in London, Master Constable."

"That's a pity, sir," said Mr. Higginthorp, perfectly content with his own proceedings; "but what I want to know now is what I'm to do with him."

"'Pon my life I can't tell," replied Mr. Quatterly. "You are the best judge. Where is he?"

"Down stairs, in charge of my sub," replied Mr. Higginthorp. "Shall I bring him up? Would you like to see him? He's not a bad specimen of the thing."

"Why, perhaps you had better," answered Mr. Quatterly, after a moment's consideration. "What do you think, my reverend friend? This is the fellow, I suppose, who was coming and going between that pitiful swindler, Tankerville, and your acquaintance Latimer."

"That's just it, sir," said the constable; "you've hit it, my buck; and, as for the matter of that, I shouldn't wonder if he could tell us where Latimer's to be found, so that we could nab him, too."

"On no account," exclaimed Mr. Quatterly; "there's no charge against him that I know, except that he's a fool."

"Better nab 'em all, sir," said the constable, "never can tell what may come out."

"Pooh!" replied Mr. Quatterly; and Dr. Western proceeded to ask "Pray what did you say was his name?"

"Why, as to that, I knows nothing," answered the constable. "He calls himself John Blackmore, your worship; but that's an alias, I'm sure. That cock won't fight."

"Why, I can tell you in a moment," replied Dr. Western, "whether he be John Blackmore or not."

"I'll bring him up, I'll bring him up," replied the constable, with his usual rapidity, and in an instant he was out of the room and down stairs.

"If this be the same youth that I mean," said Dr. Western, "he is, I am sorry to say, a very unworthy and profligate lad."

"Then he will not be the worse for a night's solitary confinement," replied Mr. Quatterly; but, before he could add more, young John Blackmore himself was brought into the room in the custody of Mr. Higginthorp, and a tall long-necked assistant. His face was as white as a sheet, for, like many another man, though he had the courage to commit bad actions, his resolution failed him at once under their consequences. The sight of Dr. Western, too, did not at all tend to reassure him, for he was well aware that throughout the whole of the past, the record was against him, so that those who knew most of his previous history were likely to judge most unfavorably of his present conduct.

"I am sorry to see you in your present situation, John," said the worthy doctor; but Mr. Quatterly, before he could proceed further, pulled him by the sleeve, whispering, "Let him say what he likes; as we have no intention of proceeding against him, there cannot be any harm in suffering him to commit himself. No, sir," he continued, speaking aloud; "what do you know of this matter?" and he bent his eyes sternly upon the youth's countenance, looking at him through his spectacles as if they were two microscopes which could pry into his heart.

John Blackmore hesitated and stammered, endeavoring to gain time for thought by asking in a voice naturally feeble and woman-like, "What matter, sir?"

"Don't squeak like a sucking pig, but speak out, sir," replied Mr. Quatterly, in a rough tone. "What matter! the whole matter to be sure—give an account of yourself for the last

weeks—it's your only chance, I can tell you, so speak the truth, if you can do such a thing, and tell me how many of these jobs you've had to do with, and all about them."

"I declare, upon my honor and conscience," replied John Blackmore, "I've had nothing to do with anything at all, but the bringing Mr. Morton here, and getting the boat for them when they took away Lucy Edmonds; and then I didn't know it was against her will or I wouldn't have done it."

"Ah!" said Dr. Western; but Mr. Quatterly interposed, replying, "Well, we'll talk of other things afterwards. Tell us about these two bad affairs, and, if you speak truly and sincerely, perhaps I may stand your friend."

The young man hesitated, and then said, "Why as to Miss Lucy, she went against her will. That's the fact, and there's no denying it, for I heard Jack Williams say that when they first met her as she was walking home she gave a bit of a scream and refused to go with them, so that there was as much force as coaxing in the affair, and I myself saw them when they had got her across the water, carry her more than anything else. I was not very near, 'tis true, for I was only looking out to take the boat back, but I could see that she wasn't at all willing, and went more like a dead thing than a living one."

"Poor child, poor child!" said Dr. Western.

"This is a very serious business, my good doctor," said Mr. Quatterly. "What do you know more of the affair, young man?"

"I know nothing more of that," replied John Blackmore, "because I had rightly nothing to do with it, except borrowing the boat for them; but as to the other business, why I did go up to the gentleman when he was waiting on the common, just because Mr. Latimer asked me;" and he went on to give all the particulars, of which the reader is already aware, and with which Mr. Quatterly and Dr. Western had been previously made acquainted by the account of Mr. Morton himself. The youth added nothing to the information which they already possessed, except the fact of his having been sent over on the preceding night to give information to Alfred Latimer, that both what he had done and the place where he was to be found were known, and that the magistrates were coming over with all speed. Mr. Quatterly tried dexterously to extract from him some further particulars, but it was in vain; and Dr. Western thought this somewhat irregular examination at an end, when Mr. Quatterly suddenly inquired, "Well, now about the other business, what do you know of that?"

John Blackmore, who had somewhat recovered his color as he went on, turned once more as white as a sheet; but he replied, in a low, though in an indistinct voice, that he knew nothing about it—that he was quite innocent—that he had had nothing to do with it; and though it was quite evident, from his terror and agitation, that he was not, at all events, guiltless of all criminal knowledge, it was in vain that Mr. Quatterly labored to make him speak the truth. The youth, indeed, was amazingly frightened at the idea of a halter, and had no idea of putting his neck into one by anything he might himself say. He was, therefore, as mute as a fish upon the subject of Mr. Quatterly's inquiries; and at length that gentleman, finding that he could gain nothing further from him, exclaimed, with an awful look, "Remember, you are throwing away your only chance. Will you speak, or will you not?"

The youth remained silent, and the worthy solicitor turned to the constable's assistant, saying, "Take him away, man with the long neck; but keep him safe below, while I speak with Mr. Higginthorp here."

John Blackmore was then removed, and turning quickly to the constable, the worthy solicitor demanded, "Well, Higginthorp, what do you intend to do with him now?"

"Poke him in the black hole, at all events," answered Mr. Higginthorp.

"I think you had better not," said Mr. Quatterly, with a warning shake of the head.

"Ay, but I will, though," rejoined the sturdy constable. "I'll tell you what, he's a bad un, that's clear, and I'm thinking as how he knows a trifle more than he says. So you see a touch of the solitary, no prog, and a cup of cold water, may bring it all out; and as for the rest I'll write him down in the book as one who was caught in the act of playing at cards in a public on a Sunday night. Then, if he says nothing, it can't be helped no how, and he'll be all the better for a little time to think. I've a great mind to put the darbies on him, just to take him down a bit. But he goes into the black hole any how, so there's no saying nothing against it."

"Well, you must do as you think fit about that," replied Mr. Quatterly. "The solitary, as you call it, mayn't be a bad punishment, if you can prove he's been playing at cards to-night."

"Competent witnesses," said the constable dryly. "Bless ye, sir, a night in the straw will do him all manner of good—good night, gentlemen. If I hear any more to-morrow morning early, I will favor you with it," and thus saying, he made his bow and walked out to execute his purpose.

CHAPTER LXI.

The night was dark, the moon had gone down, the sky showed not a star, when Alfred Latimer, jumping into the gig which Williams had left at the gate, drove away with him on the road towards Mallington. At first they went very slow, for the lanes at the back of the town were somewhat intricate, and the obscurity which pervaded the whole air rendered it somewhat difficult to make their way on in safety without lights. Neither of them spoke a word, for Williams was naturally taciturn, except when possessed by the wild and eager spirit of adventure, which, in the intervals between conception and execution, would sometimes break forth in descriptions full of a rude but powerful eloquence. Alfred Latimer, too, had plenty of matter for thought, and, to say the truth, his heart was as dark and cheerless as the night air through which he passed. Bankrupt in purse and reputation—contemned by those who might have loved and esteemed him—alienated from those classes of society in which he was born to move—cut off from all

chance of raising himself above that rank from which he had chosen his companions—hopeless of bettering his condition, or of improving his means, but by adding crime to vice—with nothing to look back upon in the past but wasted advantages, opportunities neglected, evil passions pampered and indulged, warnings rejected, counsels refused, and even examples slighted—with nought to hope for in the future, but a wild life of feverish pleasure, mingled with the daily peril, and the intervals of sickly lassitude,—he was going to take the first profound plunge into the dark ocean of crime, and to render the whole of the rest of life not only full of remorse, but of apprehension. Thoughtless, rash, unprincipled as he was, he could not but feel such things, and that feeling kept him silent.

At length they issued forth, and were whirled more rapidly along the road, when they had quitted the precincts of the town. The air breathed freer around them, when no longer within the walls and hedges, and the faint indistinct outline of the open country sloping up towards the hills that lay between them and Mallington, could just be caught by the eye. It seemed to Alfred Latimer like the prospect before him—dark, indistinct, and gloomy, with some shadowy traces of great things, he knew not what, rising in the vague distance, to the eye of fancy. His heart felt chilled and cold, for every man has his moments of remorse—moments when a stern conviction of the excellence, the peace, the joyfulness of that virtue which we have cast away, is forced upon us in sad and solemn contrast with a sickening loathing of the vices we have cherished. A consciousness that we are wallowing in the mire, when there are clearer streams at hand, comes from time to time upon every one who has abandoned right for wrong. Such was the case with Alfred Latimer, and though he was of all men the least inclined to indulge in anything like remorse, yet for the time the voice would be heard, the immortal spirit would speak—the tongue of conscience would not be silenced. The images of his earlier days rose up before him, whether he would or not. He thought of what he might have been—of what happiness, brightness, honor, might have surrounded his path. Memory ran back over the years gone by up to his very early youth. He recollected his mother's marriage with Mr. Charlton, and all the wild dreams of riotous indulgence with which he had pampered his fancy at the thought of her having the command of the old man's wealth. What might not that wealth have done for him? he now asked himself. It might have secured him advancement in every way, success in every pursuit, good education, a fair start in life, support at any moment of difficulty, and he could not but feel that it was he himself who had cast away all such things, and bitterly regret that he had done so. I say he felt it, not that he thought it. It was an impression—the operation of the heart more than of the mind, of the spirit more than of the intellect; and whenever he found that he was deviating into what he considered the weakness of remorse, he forced his thoughts to take the burden off his own shoulders, and cast it upon others. "Ay," he said mentally, "that old man always hated me. He might have done a great deal for me if he had liked, and if he had been a little kinder I might have been a very different person from what I am." He forgot that Mr. Charlton had been a great deal kinder than he deserved, that he found him incurably rash, headstrong, and passionate. "Yes, it is all his fault," he continued, pondering over the past. "If I hadn't known that he had hated me I dare say I should have been inclined to do everything that people wished; but he's gone to the devil now, and I dare say he's paying for it, a hard miserly old hound—not to leave me a penny, and to leave it to my mother only for her life. A few thousand pounds, that he never would have missed, would have quite set me up just now." He forgot that had he possessed them they would have all been gone long before, for there is nothing but beggary for the spendthrift.

Still, however, he brooded, and still dark regret and sorrow would make themselves felt, and the consciousness of having been a fool and a scoundrel hung vaguely over him, keeping him in gloomy silence as they rolled along, till the horse began to slacken his pace as the road wound slowly up the hill, and at length his companion spoke, remarking, "You are devilish silent, Mr. Latimer!"

"So are you, Williams," replied Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, but it's my nature, but not yours," answered Jack Williams; "and I was thinking that perhaps, after all, you may not like this job. Now, I'm not fond of having to do with waverers."

"I'll tell you what, Jack Williams," replied the young man, in a low, stern, determined tone, "I'm in that sort of way just now that I'd shoot my own father for a thousand pounds."

"No need of that," replied Jack Williams carelessly, "nor your mother either. You can get more than that without shooting any one. However, I see you are up to the thing, that's something. It's no very difficult affair after all; and once it's done, and the white coast of England left far behind us, we may lead a life such as men lived in old days, and put the wide blue sea under contribution. I know a place where I've left one that's very dear to me, in a deep cove of which, all surrounded by high blue hills, one could hide away a man of war as easily as I could hide a hazel nut in my hand. All that we shall want, however, is a good schooner and a gallant crew. There are some twenty or thirty fellows thereabout, some doing one thing, some another, who would be glad enough to come to my whistle, and many more will join us. Then we'll make our own laws, Mr. Latimer, and keep to them; and better a great deal will they be than all the long rigmaroles that a set of gabbling fools pass in what they call parliament. We've no need of all such long stories. Half a dozen simple rules will be quite enough for us, for that's a rich and beautiful country, and plenty of room for men to live amongst the orange groves and olive trees without running their heads against each other, and we'll be at peace amongst ourselves, and at war with all the rest of the world. I don't know a finer thing than on the clear starlight nights of that part of the world to stand either upon the deck or upon one of the high rocks, and look out over the glistening sea for

a white sail with a rich freight aboard. Then after her, like a swallow after a fly, and haul her colors down and bring her into port."

The vision that he called up was just what was wanted to rouse Alfred Latimer from the regret and remorse which had begun to take possession of him, and during the next two or three miles he and his companion continued to talk upon such pleasant themes till gradually their conversation reverted to the present, and the scheme which they were about to execute was now first fully made known to Alfred Latimer. At another moment, perhaps, there might have been something in the whole affair which would have shocked those few better feelings that still lingered in his heart; but despair, and the disastrous state of his circumstances, and the wild vision of a free and adventurous life of enjoyment which had been just presented to his imagination, all combined together to smother everything like doubt and hesitation, and render him more eager for the perpetration of the act, only apprehensive lest it should fail.

"It's no great harm taking all this stuff," said Williams, after they had talked the matter over, "for nobody knows to whom it belongs, and most likely the wrong person would get it after all, or else it would go among those d—d lawyers."

"I don't care whom it belongs to," replied Alfred Latimer, sharply. "I must have it, at least my share of it, and that is all I shall think of. Men have no right to hoard up money and plate, and all that sort of stuff, and keep it shut up in an old house, of no use to anybody, when there are a hundred around that want it."

If he could have seen Williams's face he would have perceived a smile upon his lip, but the night was too dark for that; and, without entering further into the abstract right of people who have nothing to rob people who have something, the other went on to say, "it will be much better, if we can, to turn all that we take into money, that we may not have to lumber ourselves with plate."

"Ay, but how is that to be done?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! there are ways and means," answered Williams; "and I sent word to a fellow in London, who, a good many years ago, used to take game and venison, and such things, off my hands, and who's now as rich as a Jew, to come down, and bring plenty of money with him, for I had got something to dispose of. I gave him a hint of the sum that would be needed, too, so he'll come prepared, and I think we had better stop to-night at the place where he's likely to be found if he's arrived yet."

"Where's that?" answered Alfred Latimer, knowing very well that on the road back to Mallington there was but one public-house, and that it, though a poor place, bore a very respectable character.

"Why, at Mr. Gatton's to be sure," replied Williams.

"Why, not the great inn, the Bell, at Sturton?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

"Ay, ay," said Williams; "there are more things done at that inn than you know of. Besides, he travels quite like a gentleman, and has got his own little goods cart, marked on the back, 'Moses Levi, draper, Burton-on-Trent.'"

Alfred Latimer laughed, and thought it a very good joke. But yet, as the Bell at Sturton was the largest inn in the neighborhood, to which the principal people of the county resorted, he could not conceive that the well-known Jack Williams would be a welcome guest to the worthy landlord. Nevertheless, there are more things between heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any man's philosophy, and so it proved in this instance.

It was about two o'clock when they drove into the yard of the Bell, but they still found the people of the house up, for there had been a club dinner there that day, and some of the respectable inhabitants, half muddled with wine, were still engaged in playing at cards in a room up-stairs. The landlord himself was in the bar, a stout, well-made, hawk-faced man; and when Williams and his companion entered, after having given the horse and gig into the hands of the ostler, the worthy host nodded to the sailor, as to an old acquaintance, displaying no sign of unwillingness at seeing him, except a shrewd glance up the passage, to ascertain who might be there besides.

"Pray, Mr. Gatton," said Williams, "has Mr. Levi come here to-day?"

The landlord nodded again, and the other went on to inquire, "Is he in bed yet?"

"No," answered Mr. Gatton, "he's up-stairs, number twenty-three."

Williams thanked him for the information; and was turning away to seek the room indicated, when the landlord exclaimed, "Williams, Williams, I want to speak with you;" and then added, in a low tone, when the other approached nearer, "I wish you could get me a dozen more of those handkerchiefs."

"You shall have them," said Williams, with a significant look;" and once more resuming his course, he led Alfred Latimer up two pair of stairs, and then along the corridor, examining the numbers over the doors as they passed. At number twenty-three he knocked, and a voice from within said in a sort of abstracted tone "Come in," upon which the two gentlemen entered. The name of Moses Levi had suggested to the imagination of Alfred Latimer the figure of a little fat, dirty, blear-eyed Jew, with all the characteristics of the Hebrew race—the large hooked nose, the wide obtuse-angled mouth, the large ear, and the sallow complection—strongly developed in his countenance. What was his surprise, then, to behold a tall well-proportioned and good-looking man of about forty-eight or fifty, dressed with scrupulous neatness, and having, besides the respectable brown coat, drab breeches, and gaiters, which might become a trader well to do in the world, a green silk handkerchief tied neatly round his throat, over the collar of a shirt white as driven snow. He was seated at a table, with a small bowl beside him, from which probably issued the strong odor of punch with which the air of the room was impregnated. But he was not alone occupied in sipping from time to time the nectar of the bowl—though a wine-glass and ladle that appeared by his side showed that such was his occasional recreation. An inkstand was nearer to him than the bowl, and a neat-looking, apparently well-kept note-book was open before him, over which he bent, pen in hand, seemingly cal-

culating his well-gotten gains. So busily was he employed that he did not look up till Williams and his companion were far in the room, but he then raised his face towards them, displaying very handsome features, though not without that peculiar, keen, and cunning look generally displayed by the race from which he sprung.

"Ah, Jack!" he cried, starting up and shaking Williams heartily by the hand, "I am glad to see you. Why we haven't met I don't know how long. This is a friend of yours, I suppose."

"Mr. Latimer," said Williams, introducing the two to each other, and Mr. Levi bowed and scraped as ceremoniously as an ambassador.

"Come, sit down, gentlemen," said Mr. Moses Levi. "We'll have some more glasses and some punch, and then we'll talk of business."

The glasses and punch were brought, and Alfred Latimer took a liberal supply, while Williams helped himself more carefully, and, after a few words upon ordinary subjects, Mr. Levi proceeded as follows:—"Well, Mr. Williams, I got your message, and, though it was rather inconvenient for me, I came down at once, because I know you never disappoint one—I suppose this gentleman is one of us, though I don't know him."

"All right," said Williams. "Have you got the money with you?"

"Why, not the whole sum," replied the Jew. "I hadn't got as much in the house. Why, five or six thousand pounds is a great amount, you know—what a job it must be!"

"How much have you brought?" asked Williams.

"Why, somewhere near upon three thousand pounds," answered his London friend.

"That won't do," replied Williams, who knew his man. "If you haven't got the whole you may as well go back again."

"Ay, but that will do to pay part," rejoined Levi; "and you can touch the rest in London, you know."

"It won't do, Moses," reiterated the other, with a shake of the head. "We must make a finish of it all at once. So if you are not ready, I must send to Solomons."

"No, no, no," cried Mr. Levi. "Don't be so hasty, Jack; if I haven't got the money with me I can get it in five minutes. I never need to send to London for money, when there's a banker in the town."

"Yes, but Sunday is coming on," said Williams, "and we must have it paid all in gold."

"Well, well, that can be done," said his respectable friend. "Leave all that to me. The money shall be ready in the twinkling of an eye."

"In short, you've got it with you, Moses, that's the fact," was Williams's very just rejoinder.

Mr. Levi did not absolutely admit the fact, but turned to another branch of the subject, saying, "If you have it in guineas, you know you must take them at their price."

"That's six-and-twenty shillings," observed Williams; but Levi exclaimed eagerly, "Seven-*and-twenty*, upon my life. I'll show you the *invoice of the last I sent* to France," and he *drew out a pocket-book*, from which he took a *paper confirming his assertion, for he had always* means at hand of proving the truth of any lie he chose to tell.

Williams had nothing prepared to rebut this evidence, and that matter was accordingly settled, after which Mr. Moses Levi asked in a low and insinuating tone, "Have you got the goods with you?"

"Oh dear, no," replied Williams coolly. "I must fetch them first from the other side of the county, but we must have everything settled, that there may be no stopping to talk about prices."

"What sort of stuff is it?" inquired Mr. Levi, thoughtfully.

"Why, all gold and silver plate, and a good many little things I shall keep," answered Williams. "Rings and trinkets, and such things."

"Well, you know the prices, I dare say, as well as I do," said the receiver of stolen goods. "Silver, three-and-sixpence an ounce, and gold in the same proportion."

"Nonsense, nonsense," answered Williams. "Solomons always gives four-and-sixpence."

"Impossible!" cried Levi, holding up his hands and eyes.

"But I know it," answered Williams.

"Not now, not now," exclaimed the Jew. "He might do so six months ago, but times are very bad at present, and no man can do it and gain an honest livelihood. Three-and-nine is the last farthing."

Williams, however, held out for at least four shillings, and gained his point; for the value of the precious metals in England at that period was higher than it had ever been before or since. Mr. Levi, nevertheless, did not give up any one point without fighting a vigorous battle; for, in general, time is of no value to a Jew, and he would have sat up the whole night debating about a sixpence, if he had seen any probability of gaining it. In regard to the gold there was as much discussion as respecting the silver, Mr. Levi declaring that it was an article very difficult to dispose of, though the exact reverse was the matter of fact. He admitted, however, that he had brought crucibles, and fluxes, and scales, and weights with him, so that any wrought vessels that might be presented to him for purchase would be made into what he called soup, or melted, before he left the house, thus losing every mark by which they could be identified. He did not, indeed, tell his companions the fact that his weights were not of the most accurate standard, but he went on so long that Alfred Latimer, having exhausted the punch, got tired and drowsy, and was proposing to retire to bed, when some one knocked at the door, and Mr. Levi, putting by his pocket-book, bade them come in. The figure that appeared was that of the landlord, who closed the door, and, walking slowly up to the table, said, addressing Williams, "I thought it just as well to tell you, Jack, that Harry Soames, the constable from Mallington, has been over here this afternoon, asking a number of questions about you, and whether you had lately been seen in Sturton, and when—it's no harm knowing, you know."

"Oh, no," replied Jack Williams, in a careless tone; "if he asks again, give him my compliments, and tell him I shall be very happy to see him when he calls. Perhaps, I shall call upon him some day."

The landlord laughed with a meaning chuckle, and Alfred Latimer gave an intimation that it was his intention to go to bed.

"Why, I am going to bed, too," said Mr. Gatton, "for I'm tired; but I'll send the chamber-maid, sir," and he went away.

"We must be off before daylight to-morrow, Mr. Latimer," said Jack Williams, "for it wouldn't do for Soames to find you and I together. I'll wake you in time, however," and so they parted for the night.

CHAPTER LXII.

ALTHOUGH as yet we have left Alfred Latimer behind the rest of the characters of our true history, and, with the exception of the glimpse which we gave of him on the night of Sunday, when he visited for a few minutes his mother's dwelling, have only traced his course up to a late hour on Saturday night or Sunday morning—an omission which we shall speedily proceed to remedy—we must once more change the scene, and inflict a light punishment upon the reader, such as the excellent laws of England often did permit formerly, and sometimes do permit still, to be inflicted upon perfectly innocent people. We mean to say that we will put him for a short time into the black hole. Now, the black hole of the town of ——, to which young Blackmore had been very appropriately conveyed, was of a peculiar construction. In former times there had stood in the very centre of the market-place a large triangular pile of old small dilapidated buildings, used chiefly as low shops, some of which were only opened on market days; the remaining portion of these edifices had been occupied as tenements by the poor of the place, and supplied to every crowd collected, upon whatsoever occasion, a numerous accession of dirty ragged urchins, full of fun, mischief, and stentorian lungs. All magistrates, but especially town councillors, have a great and laudable dislike to the poor, and more particularly to poor boys—they hate their rags, they hate their fun, they hate their mischief, as they ought to do—and these buildings were, moreover, an eyesore to some architectural geniuses amongst the civic authorities. The age being an age of improvement, and it being in general admitted that the poor ought to have no houses to live in, the magistrates—they called themselves the town—bought these ancient buildings of their proprietor, gave notice to quit to the tenants, and announced their intention of enlarging and improving the market-place by their demolition. The scheme was carried into effect; but it suggested itself to an architect, who was brother-in-law to the mayor, that the public square would look very bare and shabby without some edifice in the centre, and, as the town was much troubled with birds of a certain feather, it was resolved to build a cage for them. But in pulling down the old houses, a number of cellars had been discovered. Some were filled up before the bright idea of the cage presented itself, but one or two remained, and the architect determined to employ one of these as a black hole, for more refractory prisoners, immediately below the building above. Being a man of genius, and having a touch of classical knowledge, he designed his cage upon the model of a Temple of Mercury; but whether it was in allusion to the wings of the messenger of the gods, or to the care he was known to take of thieves and pickpockets, the mayor and common council could never discover. This temple was accordingly raised upon a flight of four stone steps, up which the destined inhabitants of the place, who were certainly not tenants at will, usually walked very unwillingly; but just at the portico—for it, too, had a portico—was a small iron-bound door, which led by a narrow staircase some ten feet down into the cellar now denominated the black hole. The name was not ill-bestowed for black and dreary, most assuredly, it was. Not that it received no light, for there was a sort of spiracle above which admitted just sufficient to allow the prisoner to grope about, and see something of the misery of the den to which he had been consigned. It gave enough air, too, to allow a man to live with some oppression of chest, but in a very small degree, if at all, mitigated the damp unwholesome stench. It was, in short, a capital place for getting up a typhus fever, and had more than once proved very successful in that respect when the tenant took up his occupancy on a Saturday evening, and remained there till the magistrates met at noon on the Monday. The comforts of the dwelling consisted of a liberal supply of straw, which went on accumulating from week to week as fresh bundles were imported, as much cold water as a captive could make the constable bring him, and a sufficient portion of dry bread to prevent him from starving. The mayor, on one occasion, boasted that a prisoner in the black hole never cost the town more than twopence-halfpenny per diem, but that mayor was a great political economist, and some other functionaries did not do so well.

In this black hole, then furnished as we have described, young John Blackmore was safely lodged on the night of Sunday, after having been interrogated by Mr. Quatterly. He very soon found that even his father's cottage, which he had been accustomed to consider the most disagreeable place on earth, might have afforded him a much more agreeable lodging than that which was now provided for him. He would have preferred with the water which the constable and his man supplied, an admixture of gin—not being at all aware that the English had happily and appropriately applied to that liquor the Persian name for a bad spirit. The straw also scratched him, and annoyed him, and the odor of the place was anything but pleasant to his olfactory nerves. But all these sensations were as nothing, when compared with those which succeeded, when left alone in the darkness of the night; with nothing to converse with but his own thoughts, which were certainly not the most cheering companions he could have had.

For some time the various noises in the town enlivened him a little. Carts rolled along, with cheerful voices talking; even a carriage was heard whirling through the market-place, and then receding with a slowly-diminishing sound, like the distant roar of thunder, fading away into the rustle of the sea upon a pebbly shore. A party of merry lads sang a gay song, which

he had often sung in other days, and for several minutes their voices were heard echoing through the streets, faint and more faint, like the memories of youth. Then came a pause, broken only by the church clock striking, solemn and high up towards the sky, like the voice of an angel in the air, warning man of the rapid course of mortal time. Then there was a dead silence; but it, too, was at length interrupted by the uproarious merriment of a drunken Saturday night party reeling home to their miserable wives. After that all was still.

The air seemed heavy with thought. It oppressed him, weighed him down. He tried to sleep, but he could not. He fancied that he would be game to the last; he said, "D—n them! they shan't frighten me;" but to whomsoever he meant to apply the pronoun "they," it was not any other individual who frightened him—it was himself. He had not support within, he had nothing to rest upon in his own heart. All that the sad camera-obscura showed him was weakness past, evil committed, vice encouraged, but no good thing. The warnings of his father, an honest, upright, humble man—the lessons of his mother, a pious kind-hearted, though somewhat too good-natured woman—were remembered, it is true, but remembered only as having been despised, neglected, violated. It was all vanity and vexation of spirit. He tossed about upon the straw for some time in terrible mental anguish. He made a struggle for firmness and for fortitude. He wavered, he hesitated; but gradually solitary thought—like time wearing away the masonry of some ill-constructed building—undermined all his powers of resistance, and starting suddenly up, he exclaimed "Hang me if I do not tell all. Why the devil should I lie here, like a dying dog in the straw, and very likely get myself scragged into the bargain, for a set of fellows who don't care a pin about me! Even Latimer could only afford to give me five shillings for riding over all that way to warn him! I'll take care of myself, or they will bring me in as an accomplice;" and thus saying he found his way up the stairs and knocked loudly at the door above, fondly fancying that the constable was there on guard. Nobody answered, however, for Mr. Higginthorp was by that time at least half a mile distant, soundly snoring in his bed, and dreaming of captions, and warrants, and arrests, mingled with a confused crowd of poachers, and felons, and the class which may be called misdemeanorites. From the inside of the cage no reply was returned but by the hollow voice of emptiness, and young Blackmore knocked again harder than before, saying to himself "The old codger's sound asleep."

He soon became aware, however, that there was nobody there—that he was left totally alone in the midst of the market-place—that if he was ill he might be ill—that if he died he might die, without any one to assist, to support, or to comfort him. He sat down upon the steps, and, leaning his head upon his two hands, had well-nigh given way to tears. But who can tell all the horrors of that night as he lay in the desolation of captive wickedness, calculating upon the events of the morrow. Most likely, he thought the constable would not come again till it was time to take him before the magistrates; and what might not happen in the interim? Others more guilty than himself might be detected, caught, induced to turn king's evidence, and thus cut him off from all the merit of confession. He had been warned by the solicitor that he was casting away his last chance, and now he thought it was done; that very likely the opportunity was lost for ever, and that his own obstinacy had sealed his fate. There was nobody near to hear the confession that he longed to make—the earth was round him like a living grave—the bars, the bolts, the stonework kept him in, and prevented him from executing what fear, if not penitence, prompted; and he felt as we might suppose the spirit of the dead must feel when a life of impenitence is at an end, and the dark irrevocable barrier of the tomb dropped between mortal crime and the backward path of repentance and amendment. Oh, how he writhed under the tortures of his own fancies!—how fear took a thousand shapes to augment his anguish!—how everything horrible within the range of possibility was presented to his imagination, during that long dark sleepless night of silence and solitude! It seemed as if the hours of darkness would never come to an end; and had it not been for the striking of the clock, he would have fancied that day had dawned long before it really appeared, and that there was no means whatsoever for the blessed light to visit his dungeon. Even though he heard the hours strike, impatience got the better of reason, and made him think that it must be day-break a full hour before the sun really rose.

At length a faint gray stream of light began to pour forth the spiracle we have mentioned, and painted a long ellipse upon the floor, or rather upon the pavement of the place. At first it was so dim that he thought his eyes deceived him, but gradually it grew brighter, and then changed from gray, through a sort of dove-colour, to a rosy hue, and he could hear a distant bird singing sweetly. It was certainly day, and the light revived some hope, though faint—faint, indeed, for he was exhausted in mind and body with the terrors he had suffered. All firmness was gone—all thought of resistance was at an end; he was prepared to say anything, to do anything that might deliver him from such horrors as he had endured, and those still more terrible which he anticipated. But the constable did not come, and he listened eagerly for sounds, seated upon the straw, with his hands clasped tight over his knees. At length the noise of a foot-fall caught his ear, heavy and slow. It was that of a townsman passing to his work; and getting as near to the spiracle as he could, the prisoner called to this to tell the constable that somebody wanted to speak with him at the cage. The man heard him not, however, or at least took no notice, he knew nobody was likely to call him, and on plodded with the same slow heavy step, without the least interruption.

"They can't hear me," said young Blackmore, "I am shut out from every resource. What shall I do! what shall I do!" and wrung his hands in bitter despair.

Then again he crept up the steps, and sat watching for any opportunity. Seven o'clock

struck—eight o'clock—it was approaching nine, when a brisk active step was heard, and then the rattle of a key, the drawing of a bolt, and the creaking of a door. The step then sounded close at hand, and before the door at the top of the steps could be opened, the unhappy lad knocked hard, exclaiming "Mr. Constable! Mr. Constable, I want to speak to you."

The next moment the door was thrown back, and the gruff voice of Mr. Higginthorp exclaimed, "What the devil are you knocking for? What do you want, you young blackguard?"

"I want to tell all," exclaimed John Blackmore, "I want to ease my mind."

"I've a notion you're a bit too late, my kiddy," answered Mr. Higginthorp, "you should have spoken last night;" and then he added, at a venture, "Ah, people are after them fellows, and, I dare say, have caught them by this time. Some of them will stag, in course, and may, perhaps, be beforehand with you."

"I don't care," cried young Blackmore, "I will tell all, to put myself at rest."

"Stop, stop a bit," cried Mr. Higginthorp, "I mustn't hear nothing till I've got sum'un to witness that I warned you properly."

"No, no, let me tell," cried the youth, almost frantically, "I want no warning."

"It won't do, young cove, it won't do," replied the constable, "I knows better. We must have everything in order. I'm not going to be hauled up and rated for pumping a prisoner, not I. There, go down a bit—go down, I say, or I'll pitch you down head foremost. I'll soon call Neddy, and he shall hear what I say. He's only there just in t'other street opposite."

Driven back into his den, the unhappy youth remained waiting at the bottom of the stairs for about five minutes, at the end of which time he was called up again into the cage to the presence of our friend Mr. Higginthorp and his long-necked assistant. The door was shut and locked, and the constable, in the first instance waving his hand to enjoin silence, addressed a sort of prefatory discourse to his companion in the following terms: "You see, Neddy, this here young man, as we nabbed last night, declares his intention of making a full confession. But I wouldn't hear a word, not I—not a single syllabus, till you were present to bear witness that I uses no inducement whatsomever to make him do that same, but that I warns him, on the contrary, that what he says will be taken down, and may be used agin him—not that I say it will, because I thinks—howsomever, that's nothing to nobody what I thinks; and so now, being warned, you may go on, young man, if you likes; and if you doesn't like, why you may let it alone or not as the case may be; but whatever you says, tell nothing but the truth, for you may chance to have to take an oath to it, which would be mighty awkward if it wasn't true—Stop a bit; bring me that stool, Neddy, and hold the ink here that I may dip my pen. Wait a minute, I am not ready yet," and he wrote at the top of the paper in a good clerkly hand, using the stool for a table, "The confession of John Blackmore, junior, taken before us, Thomas Higginthorp and Edward Scraggs, constable and sub-constable of the town of ——, on this —— day of ——, in the year of our Lord ——"

"Now go on if you likes."

"Well, I declare I have nothing to do with it whatever," said young Blackmore."

"He declares he has nothing to do with it whatsomever," wrote Mr. Higginthorp, reading the words aloud at the same time.

"And I only heard it by accident one day when I was in a public-house with Maltby and Jack Williams."

"He only heard it promiskus when he was in a public with Jack Williams and—what was the other gentleman's christian name?" inquired Mr. Higginthorp.

"William Maltby," replied the youth, and Mr. Higginthorp put it down.

"They were talking at first very low," continued young Blackmore, "and then they talked louder, and I soon made out that Mr. Williams intended to break in this very night, into Mallington Hall, and take away all the plate and stuff they could find."

"Was that this ere night as is passed, or that ere night as is coming?" asked Mr. Higginthorp.

"That that's passed," answered the lad; and Mr. Higginthorp proceeded to write down, reading aloud at the same time—"Jack Williams and William Maltby intended to break in—"

"No, no," cried young Blackmore, eagerly, "I did not say Bill intended to break in; for Williams said he wouldn't have him; that he was not up to the mark for such a job. That was what made them speak so loud, for they had well nigh had a bit of a row about it. But Williams said he would give him a couple of hundred for his share, and he'd have no risk; and that he'd get Mr. Latimer to help, who was up to anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter."

"Manslaughter!" said Mr. Higginthorp, writing.

"Then, here, on Saturday night," continued Mr. Blackmore, junior, "I was sent over as fast as I could gallop with a note to Mr. Latimer, from John Williams himself."

"What did you gallop upon?" demanded the constable in a sagacious tone.

"Upon a horse, to be sure," replied the youth, peevishly, beginning to fancy that Mr. Higginthorp was making a jest of him, and feeling his situation no joke.

"It might have been an ass," said the constable gravely. "However we'll impound the horse. Go on."

"Why, then I found Mr. Latimer and Captain Tankerville together; but the captain soon cut his stick, and not long after Jack Williams himself came over with a horse and gig, and Mr. Latimer went away with him, for I watched. What they've done I don't know; but what they went to do I can very well guess."

"We must have no guess work," said Mr. Higginthorp. "Facks—facks is what we wants; so if you've got any more on 'em you may bring 'em out. That's to say if you likes. I holds out no inducements—not I. It must be a woluntary confession to be of any good to you, or me either."

The unfortunate lad added a few more particulars of no great importance, and then, looking up piteously in the constable's face, he inquired, "Now I've told the whole truth exactly as it is. Do you think there is any chance for me?"

"Why, I can't exactly say," answered Mr. Higginthorp, scratching his head; "howsomdever, you see, young man, you are but a cessory before the fack, and not arter, which is something in your favor. Then you made full confession before examination—that's summat more. No, I don't think they will deal hard with you. Perhaps they may take you as king's evidence, and then you've a chance of promotion to be a general informer in course of time. However, I says nothing about that—I promises no man nothing; but I think, now you've cleared your stomach, we may leave you in this here cage, where you'll be safe enough—you can't get out. But I must run away now and tell the magistrate—here, read that over, Neddy, and put your sig, then I'll do the same and be off. When I'm gone you can get him a basin of cocoa and a roll, to keep his spirits up. One should always fatten informers, as one does hens to make them lay the better;" and with this sage axiom, Mr. Higginthorp took his departure, having first seen his assistant read the paper over after a fashion and put his signature, which looked more like the print of a bird's claw that had hopped into an inkstand than the handwriting of a human being.

When he and his companion were gone, and young Blackmore had partaken of his cocoa and his roll, the youth began to suspect, from various signs and symptoms which had betrayed themselves in the worthy constable, that previous to the confession just made, neither Mr. Higginthorp nor the magistrates had known anything of the proposed robbery at Mallington Hall, and that consequently he himself had very probably put his friend's neck in a halter for which he was not a little sorry. It was too late now, however, to amend his error, and consequently he determined to carry the matter through with a bold front.

CHAPTER, LXIII.

The housekeeper's room at Mallington Hall was one of those small square lofty chambers which our ancestors of the reign of George I. and George II. occasionally stuck into any spare corner, with which they had nothing else to do. It had certainly not been intended originally for the purposes to which it was now applied, for it was elegant in its decorations, and in the better and newer part of the house. The paneling, to which in the other rooms the wider extent of the walls gave symmetry and due proportion, here ran up tall and slender, each long parallelogram surrounded by its wreath of carved flowers, looking like a tall old maid at a ball—prim, stiff, and rigid, notwithstanding all the gay ornaments of lighter and more graceful things with which they were decked. It was a very comfortable room, however, having but two windows and one door—a great advantage in these northern climes, where we have wind enough and cold enough, without making more apertures than necessary to let them in. It was well carpeted, too, and the huge fireplace, with its massive mantel-piece, well supplied with logs, was blazing brightly, and crackling cheerfully; but yet, on the night of *the Sunday* which we have been lately speaking of, good old Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, as she sat before the fire, was in anything but a merry or even a tranquil mood. There was some wind stirring, and occasionally the paneling cracked or the tall window rattled, and whenever such was the case the good old lady started and looked round, expecting to see neither ghost nor hobgoblin, but some more terrible apparition still, of flesh and blood, armed with cold steel and leaden bullets against the scanty remains of life which yet were hers. Once when the gust was more vehement than ordinary, and, like an importunate beggar, clamored loudly for admittance, she suddenly stretched out her hand, and seized the bell, forgetting that the girl, who was her only companion in the house, could render her but little effectual assistance, or perhaps thinking that if she was to be murdered, she had better be so in the presence of respectable witnesses.

Though the gust died away, good Mrs. Chalke still held the bell-rope in her hand, as if to be prepared against the worst; and, at length, after some consideration, she gave it a gentle pull. In a minute or two after, a quick pair of feet were heard coming along the passage, and the housemaid appeared, with a face of agitation and alarm, as if she expected to behold some horrible spectacle. In fact, the nerves of both the poor women had been so sadly shattered by the late attempt upon the house that they felt themselves, like the diminished garrison of a besieged city, in a constant state of apprehension, lest some undefended point of the works should be forced by the enemy without their knowing it.

"What o'clock is it, Sally?" asked Mrs. Chalke, turning to the housemaid.

"Lord ha' mercy, ma'am!" exclaimed the latter; "I thought something was the matter; and though I must be about the place, I feel quite in a twitter as soon as ever I am left alone. Then those long passages frighten me out of my life every time I go through them."

Sally had not answered the housekeeper's inquiry, however, and Mrs. Chalke repeated it, obtaining for a reply the information that it was a quarter past ten by the clock in the kitchen.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the housekeeper, "what can make Mr. Edmonds so late? I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh, I dare say not, ma'am," rejoined Sally. "You know he's always out long on Sunday nights, looking after the game; for he says that bad characters are always more about then than on any other day."

"That's what I'm afraid of," replied Mrs. Chalke; "and while he's looking after the game we might all have our throats cut."

"Dear me, ma'am! don't talk so," said Sally; "I declare you make my blood quite cruddle. I havn't slept a wink one blessed night since those fellows tried to break in; and I dare say they would murder me first, all along of my having been the one to ring the alarm-bell, which spoiled their sport."

"No, they would murder me first," said Mrs. Chalke, jealous of the dignity of her office. "They would murder me first for the keys; and, besides, I dare say they know nothing

about who rung the bell. It must be a terrible thing to have one's throat cut. I've had no stomach for mutton ever since."

Sally, who did not see the connection between mutton and housebreakers, gazed in Mrs. Chalke's face with a lack-lustre look, partly of stupidity and partly of horror, thinking that the worthy housekeeper was becoming slightly deranged, and repeating the word "mutton!" in a tone of doubt and inquiry, till Mrs. Chalke replied, "Yes, mutton to be sure. Don't butchers cut sheep's throats as housebreakers cut ours."

"Dear heart!" replied Sally, "so they do," and she put her hand under her chin as if to ascertain whether the operation had been actually performed upon her.

Just at that moment, however, the bell rang sharply and suddenly, and both the good women started and both screamed; after which it suddenly struck Sally that it must be Edmonds himself, who had slept at the house constantly since the night of the attack. Communicating this supposition to Mrs. Chalke, she hurried to the door, while the housekeeper followed, with a flat candlestick in her hand, laying strong injunctions on her fair companion not to turn key or draw bolt till they had ascertained who was the visitor.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Sally, putting her mouth down to the lock.

"Who's there?" cried Mrs. Chalke, adding as a caution to the maid, "Don't put your head there, girl. He might shoot you through the keyhole."

Almost at the same moment, however, the well-known voice of Edmonds answered, "It's I, Sally—let us in," and joyfully the door was opened, and poor Edmonds, with a face haggard and worn, both with bitter care and fatigue, entered the hall.

"Dear me, Mr. Edmonds," said Mrs. Chalke, "I'm so glad to see you. I began to think you wouldn't come to-night, and we were in such a trepidation."

"Oh, you need not have been afraid," replied the park-keeper, "you might be sure I would come, Mrs. Chalke. It's a duty to my employer, and I won't fail in my duty, whoever does. But I thought it best to take a longer round to night with my men than usual, for I heard about six o'clock from Blackmore, the gardener, that he had seen some fellows of whom I have strong suspicions, driving this way from Sturton this morning. I could find nobody, however, and I knew all their lairs, so they couldn't well cheat me if they were in the park or any where near it. I am very tired, however, for I've gone good twelve miles besides my walk in the morning. I wonder what tires me so soon. I am not the man I was, or three times as much wouldn't tire me; but one breaks down like an old tree. First goes one branch and then another, and each leaves a gap where the weather pours in and rots the whole core.

While he thus spoke, he paused in the hall, addressing the beginning of his speech to the housekeeper, and ending it apparently to himself—with his eyes fixed upon the stone pavement, and his head bent forward in an attitude of melancholy thought. He looked sad and somewhat wild, and Mrs. Chalke, remarking the expression of his countenance, and thinking that the weight of his sorrows must have been greatly aggravated by corporeal fatigue, begged him to come into her sitting-room and take a glass of ale and something to eat.

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you," said Edmonds, "I will come and sit down a bit, and perhaps take a jug of beer, for I am weary and thirsty; but I can't eat anything, for I have no stomach now. I shall go to bed soon, for I hope to sleep to-night. It's a long time since I slept."

The good lady, however, when once he was seated by her fire, and the jug of strong ale, with which she intended to strengthen both the inner and the outer man, placed beside him at the table, attempted to while away the time by asking questions, although, to say sooth, Edmonds was very little inclined for conversation. It is a mistake, however, that many people make, who think that they can wean us from our sorrows by calling our mere words to indifferent topics. As well might they think to relieve a mother's mind by taking her on some trifling errand from the cradle of her sick babe. The heart and the thoughts are still with our sorrows, whatever subject may employ our words.

"You were talking about your employer, Mr. Edmonds," she said, "he seems a very nice sort of gentleman, but I should like to know who he is."

"He is a very kind, good-hearted man," answered the park-keeper, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "As to who he is, that's no business of ours, at least at present. We shall have all in plenty of time, I dare say," and he put the jug to his lips and drank a deep draught of beer.

"Ay, now, Mr. Edmonds, you are very cunning," said the old lady, with a laugh. "You would fain persuade me that you know no more than I do; but I'm quite sure that you know all about it."

Edmonds assured her that she was mistaken, but the old lady laughed again, and shook her head, saying "I know, I know," and as Edmonds made no reply, but thought it not worth his while to undeceive her, she was going on in the same strain, when suddenly, with a great start, she exclaimed "Goodness gracious! what's that? Didn't you hear a step?"

The next instant the cause of the phenomenon she had remarked because evident by Sally, putting in her head and inquiring "Wouldn't you like a toast with your beer, sir?"

"How can you frighten one so, girl?" cried Mrs. Chalke, in a petulant tone; "I declare I thought it was the robbers broke in."

"No, I thank you, Sally," replied Edmonds; "but havn't you any common beer. This ale is too strong."

"There is not a drop in the house, sir," replied the housemaid; "but as to its being too strong, it will do you no harm. It's every drop of it pure malt and hops. Home made, I can assure you, just before my lord died."

These last words threw Edmonds into a new fit of meditation. "Ay," he said thoughtfully, "it was a bad day for Mallington Hall when he died, though he used to take no notice of the place, and shut himself up with his books and papers, just as if the park had been a desert.

But things have gone wrong ever since, and we never know, you see, Mrs. Chalke, what it is to have a good thing till we lose it. A good master is a good thing, and he was a good master, for he was always very reasonable and inclined to do what was right and proper, when people told him how."

"Well, I hope this young gentleman will be as good as he," said Mrs. Chalke. "When do you think he'll take possession, Mr. Edmonds?"

"I don't know, I don't know," answered Edmonds; "I tell you, my good dame, you are mistaken. I am just as ignorant about all these things as you are;" and Mrs. Chalke, finding that she could make nothing of him, rose, saying, "Well, now you are come I shall go to bed and sleep in peace. I shouldn't have winked an eye all night if you hadn't been here. You had better have your gun with you in your room—there it stands in the corner. Don't forget it, there's a good man, for if they were to get hold of it they might blow all our brains out."

"No fear, no fear," answered Edmonds, turning his back to the fire, "I will warrant it. There is nobody to be afraid of within five miles of the house, unless they be in Mallington, and there are sharp eyes looking out for them there, too. You may rest quietly enough—nobody will disturb your sleep."

"She has no daughter?" continued the poor park-keeper, murmuring to himself, as soon as Mrs. Chalke was gone. "I wish I were dead, though it is a sin to say so, with all the blessings that God has still given me. I wish I could think of other things;" and after pressing his hand upon his brow for a moment, he took up the jug of beer again and emptied it at a draught. The quantity it had contained was not sufficient to have any effect upon his intellect; but still the beer was very strong, and he himself weary and exhausted. It seemed to soothe him—to render him, perhaps, a little more drowsy than before, and after standing before the table a minute or two, he took up the candle which Mrs. Chalke had left, and walked slowly away towards the chamber which he had lately tenanted on the ground-floor, leaving his gun behind him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

We must now treat of a very uninteresting person and his uninteresting history; but as there are other things necessary to the constitution of a wholesome plum-pudding besides plums, so there are other than interesting people necessary to the construction of a tale like this. On the Saturday, an hour after noon, Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington, received a summons to the house of Mr. Middleton, the magistrate, which, as the reader knows, is situate at the distance of about a mile and a half from the village. As he had a liking for the active exercise of his profession, and doubted not that some pleasant opportunity of performing his functions was about to be afforded him, Mr. Soames trudged over willingly enough, and on presenting himself was kept for about *a quarter of* an hour in the hall, while voices were heard talking in a little room at the side, which Soames knew to be Mr. Middleton's own especial den, whence issued many of those brilliant decrees with which the justices of peace in those days used to astonish the weak minds of persons learned in the law. At the end of that period the door of that room opened, and Miss Mathilda Martin issued forth, while the voice of Mr. Middleton was heard to say, "Thank you, Miss Martin, thank you; I always was sure he was an impostor. I will look to it, I will look to it."

Miss Martin passed Mr. Soames without deigning to speak to him; but she bowed her lofty head, with an air of conscious deserving, and immediately after the constable was called to the presence of the magistrate, who as he entered inquired of the servant who ushered the man in whether Sir Simon Upplestone had arrived.

The servant answered in the negative, and Mr. Middleton, seating himself again with an important air, remarked, "I fear, Soames, we may be accused of neglect of our duty in suffering this young man to remain so long in Mallington under such suspicious circumstances."

"Is it Mr. Morton your worship was talking of?" asked Soames, though he very well knew that such was the case.

"To be sure, to be sure," answered Mr. Middleton; "he is the only person to whom the terms I have used could apply. From all the circumstances I have heard, and, indeed, I may say, from what I have seen, I have not the slightest doubt that he is neither more nor less than a swindler, and will ultimately be identified with the clerk who has absconded from London, and for whose apprehension a reward has been offered."

Harry Soames scratched his head, and as Mr. Middleton was well aware that he was not a man dull of comprehension, while he himself was perfectly convinced that his own statements were the most pellucid that judicial perspicuity ever put forth, he could not conceive what made the constable hesitate in this unwonted manner. He accordingly asked, "What is the matter, Soames?"

"Why, I was thinking, your worship," said the constable, "that Gibbs could tell us more of the matter, if he liked."

"And who the devil is Gibbs?" asked Mr. Middleton, solemnly.

"Why, the traveling perfumer man, your worship," answered the constable. "He who has been down here so long hanging about with his fragrant Balm of Trinidad. He has let out to me more than once that he knows summut of Mr. Morton, and t'other day he shook his head, and looked wonderful knowing. But the difficulty will be to make him speak."

"We'll grant a warrant against him," said Mr. Middleton. "He may be art and part in the offence, for what we know."

"Better summons him as a witness, your honor," said Soames. "A warrant would be a stopper, I should think."

"Perhaps it might—perhaps it might," replied the magistrate, sagaciously. "We will summons him as a witness. Get me down 'Burn's Justice,' Soames. There it stands, on the shelf behind you. I expect Sir Simon Upplestone

But things have gone wrong ever since, and we never know, you see, Mrs. Chalke, what it is to have a good thing till we lose it. A good master is a good thing, and he was a good master, for he was always very reasonable and inclined to do what was right and proper, when people told him how."

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"She has no daughter?" continued the poor park-keeper, murmuring to himself, as soon as Mrs. Chalke was gone. "I wish I were dead, though it is a sin to say so, with all the blessings that God has still given me. I wish I could think of other things;" and after pressing his hand upon his brow for a moment, he took up the jug of beer again and emptied it at a draught. The quantity it had contained was not sufficient to have any effect upon his intellect; but still the beer was very strong, and he himself weary and exhausted. It seemed to soothe him—to render him, perhaps, a little more drowsy than before, and after standing before the table a minute or two, he took up the candle which Mrs. Chalke had left, and walked slowly away towards the chamber which he had lately tenanted on the ground-floor, leaving his gun behind him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

We must now treat of a very uninteresting person and his uninteresting history; but as there are other things necessary to the constitution of a wholesome plum-pudding besides plums, so there are other than interesting people necessary to the construction of a tale like this. On the Saturday, an hour after noon, Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington, received a summons to the house of Mr. Middleton, the magistrate, which, as the reader knows, is situate at the distance of about a mile and a half from the village. As he had a liking for the active exercise of his profession, and doubted not that some pleasant opportunity of performing his functions was about to be afforded him, Mr. Soames trudged over willingly enough, and on presenting himself was kept for about a quarter of an hour in the hall, while voices were heard talking in a little room at the side, which Soames knew to be Mr. Middleton's own especial den, whence issued many of those brilliant decrees with which the justices of peace in those days used to astonish the weak minds of persons learned in the law. At the end of that period the door of that room opened, and Miss Mathilda Martin issued forth, while the voice of Mr. Middleton was heard to say, "Thank you, Miss Martin, thank you; I always was sure he was an impostor. I will look to it, I will look to it."

Miss Martin passed Mr. Soames without deigning to speak to him; but she bowed her lofty head, with an air of conscious deserving, and immediately after the constable was called to the presence of the magistrate, who as he entered inquired of the servant who ushered the man in whether Sir Simon Upplestone had arrived.

The servant answered in the negative, and Mr. Middleton, seating himself again with an important air, remarked, "I fear, Soames, we may be accused of neglect of our duty in suffering this young man to remain so long in Mallington under such suspicious circumstances."

"Is it Mr. Morton your worship was talking of?" asked Soames, though he very well knew that such was the case.

"To be sure, to be sure," answered Mr. Middleton; "he is the only person to whom the terms I have used could apply. From all the circumstances I have heard, and, indeed, I may say, from what I have seen, I have not the slightest doubt that he is neither more nor less than a swindler, and will ultimately be identified with the clerk who has absconded from London, and for whose apprehension a reward has been offered."

Harry Soames scratched his head, and as Mr. Middleton was well aware that he was not a man dull of comprehension, while he himself was perfectly convinced that his own statements were the most pellucid that judicial perspicuity ever put forth, he could not conceive what made the constable hesitate in this unwonted manner. He accordingly asked, "What is the matter, Soames?"

"Why, I was thinking, your worship," said the constable, "that Gibbs could tell us more of the matter, if he liked."

"And who the devil is Gibbs?" asked Mr. Middleton, solemnly.

"Why, the traveling perfumer man, your worship," answered the constable. "He who has been down here so long hanging about with his fragrant Balm of Trinidad. He has let out to me more than once that he knows summut of Mr. Morton, and t'other day he shook his head, and looked wonderful knowing. But the difficulty will be to make him speak."

"We'll grant a warrant against him," said Mr. Middleton. "He may be art and part in the offence, for what we know."

"Better summons him as a witness, your honor," said Soames. "A warrant would be a stopper, I should think."

"Perhaps it might—perhaps it might," replied the magistrate, sagaciously. "We will summons him as a witness. Get me down 'Bott on Justice,' Soames. There it stands, on the shelf behind you. I expect

every moment," he continued, after having looked into the magistrate's text-book for some minutes. "He's a poor foolish fellow, it is true; but he will serve to countenance what one does. In the mean time, you go down, and bring up this man, Gibbs. Tell Skinner to send up some one to act as our clerk; and take measures to prevent this young vagabond from making his escape."

"Lord bless your worship!" replied Mr. Soames, "he has been off from Mallington House, ever since early this morning."

Mr. Middleton looked aghast; but Soames consoled him the moment after by informing him that he had good reason to believe Mr. Morton was only over at Sturton, and then proceeded to execute his mission, which occupied rather more than an hour.

He returned with Mr. Gibbs, who, to do him justice, came very unwillingly, trying hard by the way to gather from the constable what the magistrates wanted. But Mr. Soames was as prudent and renitent as a prime minister. He would not say a word, either of small or great importance, and Mr. Gibbs was ushered into the presence of the two magistrates, perfectly ignorant of their object in sending for him.

"Now, Mr. Gibbs," said Sir Simon Upplestone, "tell us what you know of this matter?"

"I don't know what the matter is, sir," answered Mr. Gibbs. "I only know that the fragrant Balm of Trinidad is incomparable in its qualities, nourishing and strengthening the hair, encouraging the growth of eye-brows and whiskers, restoring the supreme ornament of the human person to a glossy black or brown hue, when it has become grey with time or care, and invigorating and restoring the graceful natural curl, when, either by the effects of tropical climates, or"—

"Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Middleton, "that's not what we are talking about. Sir Simon, we must put the question in another form, and carry on the examination regularly. Now answer, Mr. Gibbs—you know a person who calls himself Morton?"

"I have that honor, sir," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"Not a great one, I fancy," rejoined the magistrate, who piqued himself upon saying smart things. "Now, answer me truly, for we shall swear you to your deposition. Have you any reason for believing that this Mr. Morton, as he calls himself, is ever known by any other name?"

Mr. Gibbs was confounded, and knew not what to answer. He would have fain plunged into the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, in difficult circumstances, and when he had nothing else to say, had often proved to him an invaluable resource. But in the present instance he did not know how to bring it in, and in the confusion of the moment, replied, "Perhaps I have."

"Take that down," said Mr. Middleton, addressing one of Mr. Skinner's young men, who had come up to act as clerk. "He has reason to know that he occasionally goes by another name."

"Now, Mr. Gibbs, what is the other name he goes by," demanded Sir Simon Upplestone bluntly.

"That I can't exactly say," replied Mr. Gibbs.

"'Tis quite sufficient, Sir Simon, 'tis quite sufficient," said Mr. Middleton. "He may have half a dozen other *aliases*. His going by another name is a proof that he's a swindler. He may call himself colonel this, or lord that, or captain the other, but what is that to us? Now, Mr. Gibbs, I say again, answer truly. Did you ever see this young man in any peculiar situation which would induce you to doubt his respectability, or know of his frequenting bad characters, or—or anything of the kind? Remember, we have good information, Mr. Gibbs."

With the question thus put Mr. Gibbs did not know well how to deal. He had doubts, it is true, in regard to Mr. Morton, but, at the same time, all that he had seen of that gentleman's demeanor had so thoroughly impressed him with the notion that he was what he seemed, that he neither liked to explain those doubts or their causes unless under compulsion. After some hesitation, then, he replied, "Why, you see, sir, I came down here to sell, either by wholesale or retail, the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, which, if you will allow me to say, is one of the most sovereign"—

"Pooh! no more of such nonsense," cried Sir Simon Upplestone. "The question is very plain, Mr. Gibbs. Will you answer it, or will you not? There is such a thing as contempt of court, sir, and compounding of felony, and misprision of treason," &c.

"In one word, Mr. Gibbs," added the other magistrate, "if you do not deal candidly with us, we may beg you to take another position, and, instead of allowing you to be a witness, may treat you as an accessory."

All Mr. Gibbs's firmness melted away at the threat, and, finding that the fragrant Balm of Trinidad had failed him, he replied in a humble tone, "why, gentlemen, I was only going to tell you how all the matter began; but if you want to hear the beginning, I can only say that when first I came down here, I was knocked down and robbed, and I am quite sure that I know the man who did it—a fellow well known in these parts, called Jack Williams."

"The greatest rascal and poacher that ever lived," cried Sir Simon. "Why, he killed me thirty pheasants in one night six or seven years ago. Go on, Mr. Gibbs."

"Well, gentlemen, I have watched him ever since as close as one man can watch another, being quite certain I should catch him out at last. I heard a great deal of his hanging about Mallington Park, and so I used to go there of a night to see what he was about. I always took a brace of bosom friends with me, but still I thought it best to keep out of his way, and so I used now and then to get up into a tree. Well, one night, when I was in a beech, with low branches, that I could climb easily, I saw him meet another man there, and have a long conference with him, though I could not hear what it was about; but I saw that they often looked towards the place where I was, and I began to be in a leetle bit of a fright. At length they parted, and when Williams took round to the other side of the wood, as if to cut me off that way, the other came straight up towards the tree where I had perched myself; thinking

that I should fare ill between both, I determined to give them leg bail, and, dropping down at once, I took to my heels across the park, only having just time to see that the one who was coming up was Mr. Morton.

"Ho, ho!" cried Sir Simon Upplestone.

"Ah, ha!" cried Mr. Middleton; "and pray what night was that, Mr. Gibbs?"

"'Twas about a week ago," answered Mr. Gibbs; "but I've got the date down at home."

"Wan't that the night that they tried to break into Mallington Hall?" demanded Harry Soames, who had remained in the room.

"Pre[illegible]," answered Mr. Gibbs; and this reply elic[illegible] two new notes of admiration from the mouth e[illegible]ach of the magistrates.

"Well, I [illegible]nk, Sir Simon, that we have perfectly enou[illegible]nformation, with that which I communicated to you before, to justify us in issuing a warrant, and having this young man apprehended. Fill up a warrant, Mr. Masters," he continued, turning to the clerk; and then, addressing Soames, he proceeded as follows:—"You will get a horse at the Bagpipes, Soames, and ride over immediately to Sturton, where you will endeavor to find out this Mr. Morton, who, you think, is there. You can make inquiries after Jack Williams, too; but that is a matter for after consideration. I suppose there is no chance of this Morton coming back to Mallington."

"Why these fellows have sometimes the impudence of the devil," answered Mr. Soames; "and I should think he had got hold of too good a thing there to let go easily, unless some one bites his tail."

This delicate allusion to an operation sometimes performed to bull terriers when they have got each other by the throat pleased mightily the two magistrates, who were both of them practically acquainted with country sports, and who neither of them had been at all pleased with the footing on which Mr. Morton had been received by Mrs. Charlton.

"We'll bite his tail, and make him let go his hold, I'll warrant you," replied Sir Simon Upplestone, laughing. "You only find out where he is, that's all."

"We must think of some means of catching him, if he does come," said Mr. Middleton; "but leave that to us, Soames, and be off to Sturton as fast as possible. You, Mr. Gibbs, hold yourself in readiness to attend and give evidence, whenever you may be called upon;" and the clerk having made the traveler sign his deposition, the whole party broke up.

The two magistrates retired to the drawing-room to converse with the ladies, filled with importance by the transaction in which they had just been engaged.

It is a grand consolation to extraordinary event in the lives of country magistrates to have to hunt down a swindler, or a thief, or a highwayman. Something [illegible] crams them full of business, excitement, and conceit at the time, and is often dwelt upon afterwards as amongst the most remarkable of their recorded deeds at petty or quarter sessions. To Mr. Middleton and Sir Simon Upplestone it was almost as good as a fox-hunt; and wonderful was it how their hearts expanded with the most benevolent feelings to all immediately around them, in consequence of the business they had just been transacting. The thought of catching, imprisoning, and sending for trial such a person as Mr. Morton, made them more courteous and polite than they had ever been known before; and Mr. Middleton insisted upon Sir Simon's staying to dinner, after which, and a due imbibation of very excellent old port, they parted, Mr. Middleton declaring that he must write a note to Mrs. Charlton, warning her of the character of her late guest, and requiring her to detain him if he should present himself at Mallington House.

To tell the truth, the worthy magistrate was not quite in the proper state by this time to write a letter, either of civility or business, for the lights began to multiply themselves in his eyes, and his tongue was not very glib at its office. Nevertheless, the note was written, and given to a servant, with orders to take it to Mallington House early the next morning. The effect that it produced will be shown hereafter.

CHAPTER LXV.

Towards six o'clock on Sunday morning, a gig, containing two individuals, rolled out of the yard at the Bell Inn, at Sturton, and took the way towards Mallington. It was still dark, for though a light line of gray was to be seen in the sky, the sun had not risen high enough to give much light to the world, and the streets of the town, though it was generally a gay-looking, bustling place, looked dreary and deserted in the misty dawn. The horse which dragged the vehicle, though at so early an hour, looked anything but fresh and ready for his work, and his pace, especially at first, was slow and tedious. At about a mile, or a mile and a half from the town, however, when he had become warm, he stepped out at a better pace, and went on so rapidly that of all the many in carts and cars which were met by the two contained within the gig, Jack Williams fancied none would recognize him, wrapped up as he was in great coats and handkerchiefs, for he would not believe that there were any whose memory was sufficiently powerful to recall a face or figure which they had not seen for six or seven years, and it so happened that they passed no one with whom he had renewed his previous acquaintance. But men almost always miscalculate in counting upon such things, and worthy Mr. Williams did so in the present instance, for not only was there one, but, on the contrary, several, who not only remembered him instantly, but knew his whole fate and character, and could tell a number of deeds that he had done in the wild and reckless season of youth.

He would rather, certainly, have had the road to himself, but yet he did not believe that any of those who were going to the early morning service at Sturton would think it worth their while to talk of himself and his companion. He did not much care, indeed, what they said of himself, for he counted upon his own boldness, decision, and skill so to conceal his movements, after his arrival at the scene of his projected enterprise, as to throw out suspicion, at least till he was clear of the country; but the fact of Mr. Latimer being with him puzzled him a little, and he more than once asked his com-

panion, as they passed by cart or gig, whether he knew the people in it. Alfred Latimer still answered "No;" but, nevertheless, Williams selected the roads which ran nearest to Wenlock Wood, and when he came to a turning leading direct from Sturton to the wild heath at the back of Mallington Park, he drew in the rein, saying, "I think you had better get out here, Mr. Latimer, and while I go on and put up the gig, make the best of your way to the cave. I'll just see how the land lies, and what is going on at Mallington, and then come back and join you there—you can find it, I dare say."

"Upon my life, I don't know," replied Alfred Latimer. "I never was there but once, you know, and it's not easy to find."

"That's the good of it," answered Jack Williams, with a smile which he intended to be encouraging; "but if you wait somewhere thereabouts I won't be long. You can keep amongst the bushes till you see me, if you don't find the cave."

"Bring something to eat and drink with you," said Alfred Latimer. "Such work doesn't do for an empty stomach—a bottle of wine would not be amiss."

"A bottle of brandy is better," rejoined Williams; "it goes further, and carries more spirit with it."

"I shan't need that," answered Alfred Latimer, nodding his head significantly; and, well satisfied with the dogged determination that he saw, Williams drove away.

When he was gone the unfortunate young man—for well may those be called unfortunate who are led on by Satan and their own bad passions from one crime to another—took his way on the road into the heart of the wood. By this time day had risen high, the chilly mist of the morning had passed away, the sky was clear and bright above head, and the air fresh and invigorating. At any other time, or with any other thoughts within his bosom, Alfred Latimer might have found the morning wood walk exhilarating and full of joy. But there is something in the breast of crime discordant with the beauties of nature—it has no part in the harmony of God's creation; and perhaps the freshness of the dawn itself, the innocence, it may be called, of infant day is that which jars most harshly with it. Alfred Latimer took no pleasure in the scene. The varying tints afforded by the lesser shrubs by his side, and the older boughs above, had nothing beautiful to his eye. The glimpses of the sky, the occasional catch of the distant landscape, where, for a moment, the trees broke away, gave him no delight; the rocky banks with their rugged faces, now imitating the human countenance, now taking some grotesque form of rough-hewn chair or table, or canopy, called up no imaginations in his mind. Even the sports and habits of youth were forgotten. A hare started suddenly away from his path, and ran on before till it found its accustomed track into the wood—a large pheasant flew whirring up through the thin branches of a withered larch, and skimmed over the tops of the trees—a squirrel darted across the road, and, with dropping tail and extended arms, swarmed up the trunk of a tall fir—but he saw them not, or heeded not if he saw, and with eyes cast down, and arms folded on his chest, he walked on, musing of what was to come.

It was not that he hesitated—it was not that even then he would have gone back if he could—it was not that he gave way to fear or to remorse. The time was not yet come for that; such feelings might have agitated him in the night, and did so, indeed, as he drove with Williams to Sturton the evening before. But now, in the calm air and the bright light, he walked on, nerving his heart and preparing himself for a deed more dangerous, though, perhaps, less wicked than those he had performed before. He thought it all over: how it was to be done—at what hour it was to take place—when they were to enter the park—where the house. He wondered whether they should obtain as much as Williams had calculated upon; he even felt a certain grudging at the thought of giving any part of it to one who did not share in the enterprise. In short, he brooded over the meditated crime, and though it cannot be said he longed for the moment for accomplishing it, yet he wished the day were done, for he disliked the tediousness of thoughtful expectation less than the risk and excitement of execution.

At length he came to the spot near which he knew the cave must be, and, remembering the locality pretty well, easily found his way to it. It seemed as if no step had passed its entrance since he was last there. There was the blackened place where the fire had been, the broken bottles, the well-polished bones. Nothing had been touched, and a rabbit running out and making its way to its sandy burrow opposite, at the sound of his footstep, showed him, that at the present moment, at least, the cave was tenantless.

Sitting down near the entrance, for some time his mind followed the course it had been previously pursuing; but, as if weary of such a subject, it would not rest long upon it. He did not wish it to stray thence, however, and he pictured to himself the inside of Mallington Hall, and laid out the scheme of their night's proceedings. He had often rambled over it in other years, when the old lord was away, and knew every room, and passage, and hall; he could have trod it blindfold; but then his thoughts rested at the vestibule, near the great doors, and he remembered that it was there he had first seen Lucy Edmonds, when she came up one day with some message from her father to the old housekeeper, and how he had walked home with her and talked of a thousand things; and some of the purest feelings he had ever felt—some of the sweetest, revived for an instant. He fancied still, as he had fancied then, that he might have been very happy with Lucy for his wife in some flower-covered cottage, and a middle station. He paused upon a image longer than he wished to do, but there was a fascination in it which he could not resist. Its very contrast with his situation, thoughts, and purposes, at the moment, had something that fixed his spirit upon it. It was like the memory of a well in the desert, and even while he was thus thinking, the voices of some merry children passing on their way from the common towards Mallington caught his ear, and gave more reality to the dream of early days.

Starting up, he walked further back into the cave, almost fancying that they could see him,

and he felt that there was a dark barrier between him and them, which would make it painful for him that the eyes of innocence should rest upon him. Then he plunged into a wide abyss of wild and troublous thoughts. We will not attempt to trace them, for it was a labyrinth without a clue, one branching into another, as if interminably; but their nature, and that to which they tended, may be judged by the words with which they closed, and which they actually uttered in a murmur. "It's no use," he said, "it's no use, I'm too far in now to go back, so why should I think of it?" and once more approaching the mouth of the cave, he looked out and listened. "Williams can't be long!" he thought, for his own reflections had been wearisome to him, and it seemed as if his companion had been gone for more than an hour, ere, in reality, he had been in the cave one half of that time.

At length a step sounded upon the path, and he drew back, for he felt sure that it was not that of Williams. It was lighter, quicker, more youthful; but the instant after, as he stood in the shadow, and looked out upon the trees, which concealed the entrance from the neighboring path, he saw Maltby come round and approach his retreat. Not knowing how far Williams had confided in him, he retired quite to the back of the hollow; but when the man came near the mouth, it soon became apparent to Alfred Latimer that the other was seeking him, for he set down a basket with which he was burdened, and looked in, saying, "D—n it! he is not here. Williams said he must be here long ago."

"Ah, Maltby, is that you?" said the young man, coming forward. "Is Williams coming?"

"Presently," replied Maltby. "He's gone to see Tom Brown, and he'll come as soon as he's arranged things with him; but he sent me up with this basket for you, as he thought you might want your breakfast, having had none when you left Sturton."

"I could have waited," replied Alfred Latimer, making his way into the basket, "but I'm devilish hungry, it is true."

"Take care, take care," cried Maltby; "there's a powder flask underneath; for he says that you did not bring any with your pistols."

"They are loaded," answered Alfred Latimer, with a nod of the head, "and I don't think any man who stands two shots from them, will ever have to stand another."

"Ay, but it's always as well to be ready and prepared," answered Maltby. "A man's hand shakes sometimes, you know."

"I don't think mine will," answered Alfred Latimer; "but what the mischief is this?"

"Some black crape for your faces, that's all," replied the other, "in case you should be seen."

"Ay, upon my soul, that's well thought of," said the young gentleman. "Under this they won't easily know one; and those two old women are too well acquainted with my face. Oh, here's the brandy! Bill, will you take a glass?"

"No, I thank you," answered Maltby. "I'll be off to Mallington again. I've got the horse and gig to see after, and I'm to bring them up to the back of the wood at eleven. Good day, *Mr. Latimer*;" and he turned back through the wood, leaving the young gentleman once more alone.

There had been something dry and bitter in his manner, which Alfred Latimer did not altogether like; but for about a quarter of an hour he occupied himself with the ample provision of food which the basket contained, and then examined the rest of its contents, which consisted of the powder flask already mentioned, a bundle of picklocks and skeleton keys, and a short bar of steel. When all this was over, however, his thoughts turned again to Bill Maltby's demeanor, and vague apprehensions began to take possession of him. "Williams has trusted him too far," he thought. "I should not wonder if he were to peach, and get us all into a trap. He was always a pitiful scamp, though a devilish good boxer. At all events, I'm sure, if he were hard up he would turn king's evidence, and hang us all."

In these pleasant reveries he passed another hour, till at length Williams himself appeared, and Alfred Latimer at once communicated to him the suspicions which Maltby's manner had inspired. His companion, however, easily quieted him on that score, saying that the youth was a little sulky on account of the quarrel they had had some days before; but that he would not peach for his own sake, as then he would lose all the money he was to have; and as to his turning king's evidence, he might do what he liked, for they would be out of the country before that could do them any harm. "It is only the fools who stay on in England," he continued, "who are nabbed. If a man takes all his measures beforehand, and bolts at once, he is quite secure."

These assurances quieted Alfred Latimer; but, nevertheless, the passing of that day was long and tedious. They sometimes talked, but more frequently remained plunged into deep fits of silence, and meditating the coming hour; but Williams was well pleased to see that, though his young companion had become unnaturally grave and stern, there was no sign of wavering, no apparent hesitation; not even a thought of shrinking from the enterprise before them. When he spoke it was almost always of what they were to do—how they were to act; and if he varied the topic, it was but to notice some passing sound; such as the bell of the distant village church, as it rang to summon the people to prayer and instruction.

Thus they saw noon and evening pass, and gradually the sun went down, leaving the sky all red and glowing for full half an hour after he had sunk from the sight. All then became darkness; the stars, indeed, appearing, first faint and then brighter, but the air below in the valley by the river becoming somewhat dull and misty as the sun went down.

"Tom Brown can't be long now," said Williams at length. "I'll go out and see if he be coming," and accordingly he walked away into the wood, while Latimer remained with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes half closed. It would have been a sad dark spectacle, if one could have looked into his bosom at that moment. At length he rose suddenly, went up to the basket, and drawing forth the bottle of brandy set it to his lips. He took a long draught, and had scarcely done, when Williams

and the ruffian from the common came into the cave.

"We must wait an hour or two yet," said the former. "Tom here tells me, sir, that there are a number of the good folks about, and that Edmonds is out with his men, scouring all the place round; so we must be still. When does the moon rise, Tom?"

"She's up now, only you can't see her for the hill," replied the ruffian.

"Ay, but at what hour does she come up?" asked Williams. "I see she's risen plain enough, by the light, but I want to know what o'clock it is?"

"Oh! about ten," answered Alfred Latimer; "but if you wait a little you'll hear Mallington clock strike. I heard it a little while ago, but did not count. It must have been nine, however."

A few minutes after the clock was heard to strike ten, and it was then agreed to wait another hour, in order that all might be still, and the sober folks of the neighborhood retired to rest.

Eleven struck, and then, taking the keys, the powder-flask, and the bar out of the basket, with hardly a word spoken, they issued out into the wood, threaded the narrow paths, approached the scene of their destined crime from the side of Wenlock Common, and paused for an instant close to the park. A few words of final arrangement then passed, and one by one they leaped the wall, and Alfred Latimer stood within Mallington Park.

CHAPTER LXVI.

The fine old fable of the three warnings represents but too faithfully how the worldly and the gay shut their eyes and bar their understanding against every intimation of the approaching termination of existence, and how frequently such warnings are given and unattended to. Nor is conscience less constant or less varied in the various means she employs to admonish us of the end and tendency of every evil act we commit. Few men, if any, can say that they have fallen into crime unwarned, and most have heard the awakening voice raised in many different tones to call them back from evil unto right. The persevering monitor employs every method, neglects no inducement, and often, very often, at the very last moment thunders in our ears the tale of approaching retribution.

Alfred Latimer, as we have seen in the last chapter, sprang over the paling, and stood within the enclosure of Mallington Park. When he had done so he gazed around him for an instant, and a sudden change came over his countenance. It seemed to him as if he had awakened in a moment from a dream, as if all that had passed during the last week had been a troubleous vision, and that now for the first time he unclosed his eyes to the reality. He asked himself where he was, what he was doing, why he came thither; and he seemed confounded and bewildered as his heart answered the question, and he found himself hurrying forward to an act, the consequences of which might be discovery, apprehension, trial, and an ignominious death. He could scarcely believe it true. All the inducements, all the sophistry, all the passions that had hitherto prompted him seemed to have died away suddenly in the cold night air, and there he stood marked out as a mere robber, without the power of summoning up the evil spirit to support him with false reasonings, and palliate the extent of his guilt.

It was an awful moment, but it was quickly over, for Williams almost instantly touched his arm, saying "Come along, what are you stopping for? You are not going to show the white feather now?"

It might be that he spoke from having at some former time experienced such sensations himself; it might be that he divined what was passing in his young companion's heart by that intuitive perception which some men have into all the modifications of character. However that might be, he undoubtedly addressed himself to the thoughts which were present to Alfred Latimer's mind, and the words he used were those best calculated to negative the effect produced by the newly-raised voice of conscience. The young man merely replied "Oh dear, no!" and followed him instinctively through the nearer trees, across the warren, and towards the back of Mallington Hall. Often had he trod those paths, often had he traversed those woods in happier days. Sometimes he had watched for Lucy there, occasionally with angry feelings at her delay, occasionally with the natural impatience of an eager and impetuous spirit; but he had never felt as he did then—he had never known thought to be such a burden as it seemed during the next five minutes. The load, however, became intolerable, and he cast it off, forcing his mind away, and not daring to own even to himself that which he mentally called a stupid weakness. "Show the white feather!" he repeated to himself more than once. "Oh, no! that's out of the question; but I wish I had not got into this business—there's no use thinking of it, however. Here I am, and it must be done;" and advancing to Williams' side, who was a step or two before, he asked him something in a whisper.

"Hush!" said the depredator, in a low tone; "I thought I heard a whistle;" and creeping slowly on for about a quarter of a mile further, he looked out into the more open part of the park, still keeping himself beneath the shadow of the trees. At some two or three hundred yards' distance was a large clump of old elms, in advance of another portion of the wood, and Williams thought he saw something underneath them. After waiting for a minute he whispered to his companions, "Be ready to be off like a shot!" and then ventured a low whistle. It was answered the next minute, and the form of a man came out for a single instant into the moonlight, then retreated again, and was lost to the eye.

"That was like Maltby, wasn't it?" inquired Williams; and the gruff voice of the man Brown replied, "Ay, that's he."

After a short pause the whistle was repeated in the opposite wood, and Williams observed, "He is coming round. We must show him where we are." Thus saying, he uttered another whistle merely a single note, to which

there was a reply somewhat nearer than before.

"Did you expect him here?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I thought he was to bring up the gig at the corner of the park."

"Ay, but he was to let me know if he heard anything fresh," was the ruffian's answer; and, after waiting for a few moments longer, they plainly heard a rustle in the wood, and the fall of a footstep. Williams put his hand in the pocket of his jacket, and drew out a pistol; but the next instant Malthy's voice was heard inquiring, "Where are you, Williams?"

"Here, here!" answered the other. "Is there any danger ahead?"

"No!" answered Maltby, coming up. "They are all gone quietly to bed; for I've been watching for this last half hour, and saw the lights put out in the different rooms."

"And what's the matter?" inquired Williams, sharply.

"Why, I thought you'd like to know," answered the young man, "that Edmonds sleeps at the house every night; so that unless you get hold of him first you may have a devil of a work."

"Ah!" said Williams, "how did you hear that, Bill?"

"Why, it was old Blackmore told me," answered the young man. "I went down this evening to ask where his son was, for he's never come back to the old place, and the old man took it kind, and was more civil than ordinary. I don't know whether he had any notion that I was in for the other affair that wouldn't answer, and mean't to give me a hint that it was no use to try again; but he told me quite of himself without my asking."

"Perhaps it isn't true," said Williams.

"Oh, yes, it is," rejoined the other, "for I went up afterwards to Mother Witherton at the lodge, and I found out from her that Edmonds sleeps in the little room near the library, where he can hear both ways what's going on at each side of the house."

"He shan't hear me till he sees me," answered Jack Williams, with a laugh; "but we must make him fast first, that's clear. I don't want to hurt him if he'll be quiet and hold his tongue; but, if not, I can't help it. Have you got the flint and steel, Brown? We may as well light the dark lantern, as there's likely to be more work than we thought."

A flint and steel were soon produced from the pocket of the worthy gentleman to whom he last spoke, and the dark lantern was speedily opened, lighted, and closed again.

"Now Bill, run and get the gig; quick, for I am determined this shall go through to-night," continued Williams.

"Hadn't you better cross the water with the punt, and start from the other side?" asked Maltby; "I left it on this side on purpose. There are some people still about at Mallington, and if I go rattling over the bridge in the gig I shall be sure to have folks looking at me."

"That's true," answered Williams; "and you're right, Master Bill. You can bring it down at the end of the lane, and then nobody will see it come or go."

This being agreed upon, Maltby slunk away through the woods again, and his three companions crept silently and stealthily on towards Mallington Hall. When they had reached the point of the wood nearest to the mansion they paused once more and gazed over the whole building. All was dark, however; no window showed a light; and, proceeding from one detached tree to another, they approached nearer and more near till they were within about fifty yards of the outbuildings and enclosed courts at the back of the house.

There was a large old walnut-tree grew close to the wall, and stretched its long and rugged arms over into the stableyard, and, once under its branches, their proceedings were quick and easy. Willams swarmed up the tree in a minute, walked along one of the thick overhanging boughs, and reached the top of the wall. He then aided his two companions to mount, and jumped lightly down upon a pile of straw and rubbish below. The other two descended as rapidly and noiselessly, and then, taking their way across the court, they approached a small door in the main building. Jack Williams had laid his schemes well. Applying the false key to the lock, he turned it with little or no sound, and then feeling for the latch, he raised it, pushed the door open, and listened. Every one held their breath; but all was as silent as the grave, and turning the shade of the lantern, Williams and his companion looked in. Nothing was seen, however, that could alarm them. A long narrow stone passage, with one or two empty tubs lying against the wall, was all that they saw, and Alfred Latimer, now plunged fully in, and knowing that all chance of retreat was out of the question, whispered to Williams, "I will show you the way. I know it well, and can find it in the dark, so you had better shade the lantern again."

"Not yet," said Williams in the same tone; "we may stumble over some of these d——d things in the passages. There is no one here to see, and in the great hall we shall get the moonlight through the windows, I should think."

Without reply, Alfred Latimer passed him and went on, drawing one of the pistols from his pocket, however, and cocking it.

"He's a bold young devil," murmured Jack Williams to himself as he followed, while Tom Brown came behind in silence. Thus proceeding they reached the end of that passage, turned into another at the left, and mounted three or four steps, for the house was built upon an irregular foundation. They then passed between the kitchen and servants' hall, the butler's pantry, and what was called the still-room, beyond which came a pair of folding-doors covered with baize, and having a stone staircase on the left hand. Here, however, they were brought to a sudden stop, for the folding-doors were bolted on the other side.

"Come up here," said Alfred Latimer. "This leads into the corridor above, then we can get down by the great stairs to the room where Edmonds sleeps."

"Better be at the plate-room at once," murmured Tom Brown.

"No, no!" replied Williams sharply, "that would ruin us altogether. We should have the women ringing the bell, and the man upon our backs. We must secure them all first; but let

us put the crape over our faces, for there's no need of his knowing who we are."

This was soon done; and Alfred Latimer, when he gazed through the dull veil that was spread over his eyes and fastened behind his head at the countenances of his two companions, similarly disguised, fancied that it was impossible any one should recognize them. Then, after having taken off their shoes, the whole party mounted the stairs quietly, and passing along the corridor above, descended by the great staircase to the hall. All was still silent and tranquil, but when, passing through a passage at the back of the library, they approached a door at the end, they thought they heard a noise, and they stopped, Jack Williams approaching Alfred Latimer's side, ready to spring like a tiger upon any one who might come forth.

As they listened, however, the hard regular breathing of some one in a profound sleep was heard, and Williams whispered, "He's as sound as a hedgehog; but if he should wake, is there any other door to the room?"

"None that I know off," answered Latimer, without raising his voice.

"Then I'll soon send this one in if it should be fastened," rejoined Williams. "Here, Tom, hold the lantern while we try."

Poor Edmonds, however, had not taken the trouble to lock his door, and it opened easily at the first touch. The light of the lantern spread faintly round the chamber, showing to the eyes of the criminals the whole of the scene within. Edmonds was lying on the half tester bed on the other side of the room, partly but not wholly undressed, with his head pillowed on his arm, and still asleep. The slight sound of the opening door did not fully waken him; but either that noise or the light of the lantern caused him to turn somewhat on the bed and murmur a few indistinct words to himself. At this movement Williams suddenly drew a rope from his pocket, and sprang forward. Alfred Latimer followed, and both threw themselves upon the poor fellow, as he was starting up, roused by the noise they made. He was, as we have said, a powerful man, and he struggled for an instant vehemently with his assailants; but it was in vain he did so; and before he could put forth one half of his strength, he was overpowered, and his arms pinioned tightly behind. Not a word was spoken on either part; for Edmonds well knew that it was in vain to call for help, and the other two were not anxious that their voices should be heard. When the struggle was over, the park-keeper stood before his two opponents, gazing upon them sternly, while Alfred Latimer pushed the crape farther up over his forehead, from which it had been partly removed, and Williams laughed low, though perhaps with better feelings than might be supposed, for his triumph was more that he had succeeded without unnecessary violence, than that he had overcome in a contest where the odds were so greatly on his side. The man Brown stood dully at the door, with the lantern in one hand and a pistol in the other, quite ready to use the latter, if by any chance Edmonds had obtained even a temporary advantage.

"Well, my men, well!" exclaimed the park-keeper at length: but then suddenly he stopped, and, after a brief pause, added "But it's of no use—the game's up. It signifies not asking questions, or saying a word. I'm helpless now."

Neither Williams nor Alfred Latimer replied, but the former drew the latter aside, and whispered. "Stay you here and keep guard over him, sir," he said. "I can trust you, and you can trust me. But that fellow Brown, we cannot be sure of him, if our eyes are off him; and he is not unlikely to kick at us going over the house alone. Will you stay?"

He spoke eagerly and anxiously, and though the young man disliked the task, and would rather have had a share in anything more active, he replied, "Well, I will stay; but do not be long—you know where the women sleep. I should not wonder if all this noise had wakened them."

"No fear, no fear!" answered Williams; "but I will light the candle first;" and taking up the candlestick from the table, he carried it to the lantern, saying to Brown, after he had secured to Alfred Latimer the means of seeing while away, "come, my lad, we will go, while he remains on guard."

"Come along," answered Brown, in a louder tone than needful; and leaving the captive and his guard together, the two hurried along the passage and up the stairs to the top of the house. Williams had already made himself aware of the room in which the old housekeeper slept, and he was not long in finding it; but as he went he looked round for the rope of the alarum bell, which he at length found passing along the wall of the corridor through the flooring to the story below.

"Stand fast by that, Tom," he said; "and if the other woman comes while I am securing this one, seize her tight."

He then advanced to the door, and turned the handle; but it was locked, and a voice immediately demanded, in the accents of terror, "Who is there?"

"It's I—Edmonds," said the man, counterfeiting as well as he could the tone of the park-keeper; but without waiting for reply, he set his broad shoulder against the slight door, stretched his foot out to the other side of the narrow passage, and with this purchase pushed against the woodwork with all his strength. There came immediately a crashing sound, as of breaking wood, and then a shrill scream, evidently from two voices.

"Here, Tom!" exclaimed Williams, "they are both in here, bring the light!" and while Brown hurried up he applied his strength again with another effort, and the door was burst violently into the room.

Another shriek instantly succeeded; but Williams exclaimed fiercely, "Silence, or you shall pay for it with your lives! No one is going to hurt you if you keep still; but if either of you say a word more, or offer to stir, I will blow your brains out. Have you got any cord?" he continued, turning to his companion. "Tie that one while I do the same for this—silence, I say; if you would live a minute longer!" and calmly and deliberately he fastened the housemaid's arms behind her, while Brown, setting down the lantern, did the same office for the terrified old housekeeper.

"Now bring them along into another room," said Williams; "this door won't keep them in, and if they get out they'll be at the bell with their teeth, if not with their hands."

"I won't indeed, Mr. Robber," sobbed poor Mrs. Chalke; "that I won't. Take all I have, and spare my life. I'll do nothing at all, but be as quiet as a mouse."

"Silence!" said Williams, sternly; "bring them along, my lad. We'll make sure of them," and, dragged along the passage, the two trembling women were taken to a room looking to the park side of the house, where they were thrust in, and the door locked upon them.

"Now, Tom, to the plate-room," said Williams; so far all is right."

"Ha, ha!" cried Brown, with a joyful laugh, "this is capital!" and away they both hurried down the first flight of stairs to the large corridors and spacious rooms of the best sleeping floor.

"The room at the end," said Williams, thoughtfully, as if repeating a lesson he had learned. "It must be that one just over where the man slept;" and walking straight forward to the end of the long passage which ran between a long range of bed-chambers on either side, with occasional intervals to admit the light from the west, he paused opposite to a strong plated door at the further extremity.

"Here it is!" he said, gazing at it, and holding the lantern to the heavy lock. "It will be no easy job to get in, I fancy—I'll try the pick-locks first, however."

Thus saying, he took out the bunch of keys from his pocket, and tried one after the other without any success till the last was used, when the bolt of the lock was forced back. To the surprise of both the men, however, the door remained fast; and after some further examination, they discovered another keyhole higher up. On that the pick-locks proved ineffectual, and the small bar of steel which Williams had brought with him was next employed. Pressed between the door and the post, just opposite the refractory lock, it soon wrenched back a part of the iron plating, and tore off a portion of the wood. A large splinter was then forced away, showing the lock firmly shot into the plate opposite; but with the swallow-tailed end of the crow Williams contrived to push it back, and then, thrusting a hook into the keyhole, pulled the door open with ease. A number of large chests hooped with iron stood before them, but these offered no very serious impediment. Some were opened with the skeleton keys, others broken into with the crow-bar, and a far greater quantity of that sordid dross for which men so often risk their soul's salvation was exposed to their eyes than even their greedy hopes had ventured to expect.

"There, give me the bags," cried Williams; "he has got some more below, run and fetch them. We will only take what is most worth while, for there is more here than we can carry."

"Let us take all we can," said Brown; "I can carry a good deal, and we may as well fill our pockets and the bags, too," and thus saying he thrust his hand into a box where a number of guineas appeared piled up in regular rows, and grasped as many as he could.

"Hark!" cried Williams suddenly, and at the same moment the report of a pistol rang through the house. Williams snatched up the lantern; and, hurrying out, both ran down stairs as fast as they could.

CHAPTER LXVII.

We must now, dear reader, return for a short space to the room below, where we left Alfred Latimer and Edmonds, the park-keeper, in order to explain the cause of that unexpected sound which disturbed Williams and his companion in their course of pillage. No task, perhaps, could have been inflicted upon the unhappy young man more painful than that which he had undertaken to perform. Activity was at that moment a need; it was the only means of shutting out thought; it was the only veil which could hide from his own eyes the sight of what he had become. He felt that he was a felon; that the great moral Rubicon was passed; that the barrier had fallen behind him which for ever excluded him from a return to society; that all he had done before was light and venial compared with the deed of that night. But he would fain not have pondered upon his state; he would have hurried on in any course to escape reflection; he would even have willingly plunged into new crimes to escape from the dark impression of the one he had committed. It may seem strange that such should be the effect of remorse, but such is always the case when remorse is without repentance; and repentance is not either the fear of earthly punishment, or the consciousness of guilt; it is the deep and overpowering sorrow of the believer for having offended God. Remorse without repentance is despair. Such was what Alfred Latimer felt. He never thought of his offence to God. He was conscious of guilt; but he looked to no repentance—to no atonement—to no reformation. It was in relation to its effects upon himself, and in that alone he considered the crime he had committed; and with the spirit of Cain, he was ready to insult the Almighty by any new crime with sullen daring, from the very sense of the depth to which he had fallen. The hardening of the heart which so frequently follows wickedness, is surely a natural part of its punishment.

But there he stood condemned to inactivity, keeping guard over one whom he had already injured, and whom he hated because he had injured him. He glared at him through the black crape that covered his face with feelings difficult to describe—fierce, yet dull—ferocious, yet, in some degree, timid. He was angry with him for keeping him there, though it was not poor Edmonds's fault, and, with all the sophistry of the criminal heart, he went on in the same spirit to pile accusations in his own thoughts upon the other's head, striving to cast off a part of the burden of his guilt upon any other person in order to free himself from its overpowering weight.

"Ay," he thought, "curse him! if it had not been for him I should not have been what I now am. I should never have done this thing—I should not have been here at all. If he had not refused to let me marry Lucy when I offered

honorably, all would have been right. My mother might have made a piece of work at first, but that would have soon blown by, and Louisa would have helped us—I know she would—and we should have all been comfortable. And now what has come of his cursed obstinacy and ill-temper. Here I shall very likely get hanged, and I dare say he would help to convict me. I wonder if he suspects anything? He looks at me devilish hard."

He longed to question the poor fellow, but did not dare to speak, though he thought once or twice that he could disguise his voice, so as not to sound familiar to Edmonds's ears. He hesitated, however, standing half way between the bed and the door, with the cocked pistol in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon his prisoner.

After waiting thus for about three or four minutes, while Edmonds remained sitting on the edge of the bed, still half bewildered with all that had just taken place, there came a crash as of breaking wood, and then a shrill scream. Voices were next heard speaking, and then some shrieks louder and more distinct than before. Edmonds started up, and advanced a step, exclaiming, "The bloody villains are hurting the poor women—a set of scoundrels!"

Alfred Latimer pointed the pistol at him, saying, in a feigned voice, "Keep back, or I'll blow your brains out;" and Edmonds paused, with his eyes fixed upon him, longing to spring forward and wrench the weapon from his hands, but feeling but too painfully how vain would be the attempt with his pinioned arms. The shrieks ceased, and all that could be heard was the sound of several voices speaking—some in the tones of supplication, some in those of menace or command. A woman's tongue, however, could be distinguished, and, as if relieved, the park-keeper sat down again, and bent his head thoughtfully. Alfred Latimer was well pleased with this change of attitude, for he did not like to have the eyes of Lucy's father fixed upon him; but still the question recurred to his mind, "I wonder if he suspects me?"

Shortly after, steps were heard above, and then, after a pause, came again a grating crash just over their heads, then another, and then a dull creaking sound, as of a door moving on hinges long disused. Edmonds seemed uneasy, and moved once or twice upon the side of the bed.

"They have broken into the plate room," he said at length, looking at Alfred Latimer again; "that's what they came for; and they've got it; but they'll all be hanged, that's one comfort."

The young man gazed at him fiercely; but remained silent, and after a minute or two had elapsed, during which time the various sounds of moving and breaking into the chests were heard below, the park-keeper spoke again—"They'll all be hanged, that's certain," he repeated, "for they are all known, and will be caught before to-morrow's over."

"Do you mean to say you know them, fool?" demanded Latimer, in a feigned voice, taking at the same time a step towards him.

"To be sure I do," replied Edmonds, rising, and confronting him boldly, and with a flashing eye. "It is you who are the fools, to think that a trumpery piece of crape would hide you."

Alfred Latimer trembled, but it was not with fear. "Who are they, then?" he demanded, grasping the pistol tighter in his hand.

"Why, Williams and the ruffian Brown," replied Edmonds at once, "they are clear enough."

"And I," said Alfred Latimer, in a very low tone, "who am I?"

"I know you well enough," answered the park-keeper, in a voice of deep sadness, "I wish to heaven I didn't."

"Speak! speak!" said the young man; "Who am I?"

"Why, one, bad as I believed him, whom I never thought to see at work like this," replied Edmonds; "the destroyer of my child."

The young man instantly raised the pistol as if to shoot him; but the sturdy park-keeper's eyes did not even wink, and he continued to gaze upon him sternly. Suddenly the youth dropped the muzzle again, saying, with an ill-feigned laugh, "You are mistaken. You have seen me often I know, but I am not the man you think. I am—I could tell you who; but I won't."

"It's no use, Mr. Latimer," answered Edmonds; "it's no use at all. I know you just as well as if your face were uncovered. I wish to heaven, I say, that I did not. You looked just now as if you were going to shoot me. I don't care a straw if you do. You have broken my heart, and made life a load; so finish all by taking it if you will. You have murdered my child's soul; you can but kill my body, as the Bible says."

The young man stared at him for an instant; then strode up to his side, and grasped him with his left hand by the shoulder, saying, in his natural voice, but low and stern, "Will you swear, so help you God, not to betray me?—will you, for Lucy's sake, if not for mine?"

"No!" replied Edmonds, in a resolute tone. "I think you as great a villain as ever lived, and far worse than the other two. Why should I punish them and not you?"

"Will you swear to give no information till this time to-morrow night?" asked Alfred Latimer, with a shaking voice. "Will you swear, man—will you swear? for if not, you must die, and my hand must stop your tongue."

Edmonds paused a single instant; but the next his own stout heart called him a coward even for that brief hesitation. "No," he said, "I will not. I will do my duty at once, and directly. I will neither tell a lie, nor consent to robbery, for any man on earth."

"But till to-morrow night," repeated Alfred Latimer, raising the pistol to the man's head. "Will you swear, till to-morrow night?"

"No, I won't," replied the park-keeper, setting his teeth close. "Make yourself a murderer if you will, as a robber and a deceiver."

The finger was pressed hard upon the trigger—the cock of the pistol fell—there was a flash and a report, and poor Edmonds staggered forward. "Oh, God!—Lucy!" he cried, and then fell forward upon the floor, with his feet beating the ground convulsively for a moment, after which all was still.

Alfred Latimer's arm dropped by his side the moment the deed was done; and there he stood gazing upon the dead man, while a stream of crimson blood flowed from amongst his hair and wandered slowly over the boards. Who that has not committed such a crime can tell the feelings which filled the murderer's bosom as he gazed? It was no rash blow, stricken in the midst of strife and rage—it was a calm deliberate act, perpetrated on one in his power, one who could not resist. There was no extenuating circumstance—nothing to palliate it—nothing to justify it, even to the lying heart of self. It was done from fear of discovery and punishment; it was cowardly as base, and base as cruel. He felt it all—all the magnitude of the offence, all its dark and terrible character—and for an instant his brain seemed to reel, his senses to be troubled, reason to be shaken on her throne. He would have fled anywhere; he would have done anything; he would have sought any refuge—the grave itself—to fly from that horrible consciousness. He thought suddenly of the other pistol, and drew it forth to raise it against his own life, but at that instant rapid steps were heard running down from above; he put the weapon up again, and it was just concealed when his two companions rushed into the room.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

The moment Williams entered the room he stopped short, gazing at the dead man; and Alfred Latimer instantly stepped up to him, saying, in a low tone, "I could not help it. He drove me to do it."

"Speak out, speak out!" cried Williams. "There's no use of whispering now. He can't hear you, man, that's clear enough. I'd have given a great deal, though, that this had not happened. What did he do?"

"He told me that he knew us all, and that he would inform."

"That might be all stuff," replied Williams, with a stern brow. "I don't think he could know us."

"Ay, but he named every one of us," answered Alfred Latimer, eager to palliate the deed even to his ruffian companions. "I could scarcely get him to name me, though he mentioned you and Brown outright at first. But he told me who I was plainly enough in the end."

"It could not be helped, then," said Williams. "It was his own fault; but I think I'd have tried to swear him to secrecy. He'd have kept his oath if he had taken it."

"I did try, I did try!" replied the young man, "but he refused—ay, even when the pistol was at his head he swore he would tell all the moment he was free. So I thought there was no use of waiting for you to do what I could do without you, and I fired."

"Served him devilish well right!" murmured Brown, but Williams was silent for several minutes, and he evidently regretted what had taken place, although he said, in the end, "Well, there was no help for it. If a man will be such a fool, he must take the consequences; and when a man's to be hanged for a robbery, they can't do worse to him for a murder. Yet I like the fellow's pluck, too; but the worst of pistols is, they make such a devil of a noise. It might be heard a good way off, in the stillness of such a night as this. 'Run to the round window, Tom; there's no shutter, and you can see well enough by the moonlight, over towards the keeper's cottage. Look out, and let us know if there's anybody coming."

"Don't go up to the plate-room till I'm back," answered Brown, always fearful of losing part of the money.

"No nonsense!" cried Williams, sternly. "Do as you are bid, and do not give me any of your insolence, or he shan't long lie there singly," and he pointed to the body of Edmonds.

The other ruffian was cowed and walked away, and Williams, turning towards Alfred Latimer, gazed at him for a moment as he stood with his arms folded, his brows knit, and a look of deep bitter gloom upon his face. The impression of his crime was spreading over him more and more darkly every moment. The heart of Cain was in his bosom, the curse of Cain upon his head. Some of the words of his companion, too, even in justifying the deed he had committed, had presented it in its blackest colors to his mind. He had heard it called murder. He had heard the courage and stern resolution, even to death, of the man he had slain applauded, and every thing seemed to force upon him the most horrible view of the act of his hands. He stood there brooding gloomily over his own crime, till at length Williams, who divined in some degree what was passing in his breast, interrupted his reverie by saying, "Come, Mr. Latimer, it can't be helped. It was his own fault. He would have it, and so he got it. It was very easy for him to say he wouldn't tell, and your life is as good to you as his, so you had no choice. Your only way now is to make poor Lucy all the better husband."

Alfred Latimer suddenly put his hand to his head, as if some terrible pang shot through his brain; but the moment after he answered, "So I will, so I will. But will she ever see me again after this?"

"Pooh! nonsense," cried Williams; "she will know nothing about it. Her father's death was necessary to her husband's safety, and if we are not fools ourselves there's no chance of how it happened ever reaching her ears. Come, let us be off, and get what we can. There's a devil of a deal more money than I thought for. So perhaps it will be better to leave the plate behind. I like your resolution, sir, in settling the affair with this poor fellow yourself. Many a man, and a brave man, too, would have waited for us to come down; but there's nothing like being decided in these matters. We won't leave him there, however. Let us put him on the bed."

Thus saying, he took the corpse by the shoulders, and, though unwillingly, Alfred Latimer did not like to refuse to bear a part; so, lifting the body of poor Edmonds between them, they laid him on the bed where he had been sleeping, and then turned towards the door.

"I wonder where that fellow, Brown, can be," said Williams. "Why, you have got your self all over blood, Mr. Latimer. But never

mind, come along, you can have Brown's smock-frock till we change your things."

Thus saying, he led the way out of the room and up the stairs again towards the plate-room, where the lantern had been left burning on the floor. They found Brown at the door, and though some sharp words passed between him and Williams, they did not discover whether he had been in the room or not. They entered, however, and the sight of all the wealth that the late Earl of Mallington had there accumulated soon drove, from the thoughts of Williams at least, all memory of the deed that had been done below. Alfred Latimer, less accustomed to scenes of blood, was longer in recovering himself at all; but when a change did take place it ran into a greater extreme, and became the sort of wild intoxication of despair. He talked, he even laughed, when loading himself with the money and the trinkets they found. His words were wild and whirling, it is true, like those of a man half inebriated; but Williams encouraged him to go on, sometimes by a jest and a light speech, sometimes by representing the sort of fierce decision which he had shown as the brightest of all qualities in the course before them, so that at length the young man did not feel sure that the bloody deed he had committed was not a great act.

It was speedily decided that all the heavier articles of plate should be left, and in about a quarter of an hour after their return to the plate-room they had possessed themselves of even a larger booty than they expected. When this was done they descended to the hall again, and Williams said, "I will go and put out that light."

"A devil of a deal better just pop it to the curtains of the bed," said Brown; "then there would be one grand blaze, and the whole job would be over, and no one know anything about it."

"No," said Williams, sternly, "that's needless. The women don't know us, and there's no use of hurting them. No more of such stuff, Master Brown; you've made me devilish angry more than once to-night, and the next time you shall feel it."

There was a flashing of his eye that was not to be mistaken, and Brown remained silent, while the other entered the room where poor Edmonds lay, and blew out the candle. They then threaded the various passages of the house by the light they carried till they reached the door by which they had entered. There the lantern was also extinguished, and issuing out into the yard, they easily got over the wall into the open ground of the park. Taking for some way the course they had pursued in coming, they kept among the trees as far as possible, till, turning towards the river, they were obliged once or twice to cross the clear spaces in the park.

All was still and silent, however, the clear moon shining calm and peacefully over the glades and dells, not a sound but the whispering of the light breeze among the trees and the fern, no sight of a living thing but when they startled a herd of deer or roused a hare to scamper away in the moonlight. Nothing could form a stronger contrast than the scene without, in its clear, cool, lustrous tranquillity, with the fierce and agitating passions within the bosoms of those unhappy men. They seemed to feel it each in their degree, and they all remained perfectly silent, till at length, when they came among the trees by the river side, Williams stopped and proposed to Brown that he should give his smock-frock to Alfred Latimer. The inferior ruffian, however, did not choose to part with it without compensation, and exacted a guinea as the price of the garment. Williams swore at him, and Alfred Latimer felt inclined to strike him, for there was an insolent familiarity in his tone which showed him painfully how he himself had sunk. There was no help for it, however, and, paying the money, he took the smock-frock and drew it over his other dress, which had before been altered, as we have said, to make him look as much like a countryman as possible. Approaching the little creek where poor Lucy had been carried not long before, they now looked out for the punt, which they found lying quietly at the bank. As they got in, however, what between agitation and the load he carried, Alfred Latimer stumbled and his hat fell into the river. Brown, who was already in the boat, strove to catch it with the pole, but in so doing he pressed it down and it filled and sank.

"That's devilish unlucky!" cried Williams; "what's to be done now?"

"Why, I must go home," said Alfred Latimer, "and change my dress altogether. I can put these things away where nobody will find them, and one of the girls of the house, I dare say, will let me in—at all events, I can get up one of the windows; I know how, I've done it before."

"You must be quick, then," said Williams, as they pushed away into the stream, "for we must be far off before daylight, and it's past twelve now."

"Past twelve!" cried Alfred Latimer. "I thought it was two or three."

"Ay, but these things are sooner done than you think of," answered Williams. "There's Maltby, I fancy, standing on the shore. We'll wait for you at the cottage, by the common, where you took Lucy, if you will run up the back lanes to the house. Only don't be long, and mind you stow away the things where they can't be found."

"No fear, no fear," replied Latimer; and the boat pushed on to the bank, where the form of Bill Maltby became more and more distinct, as they approached. The horse and gig, however, were not to be seen, though at that spot the road which ran along that bank of the river came close to the water's edge; and Williams's first salutation to his accomplice was an inquiry as to the cause of this deficiency.

"Hush!" said Maltby; "don't speak loud. Harry Soames has got a warrant against you, Jack, and learning that you were at the Hog-in-Armour, farther down, he's gone to see if he can nab you. He doesn't want, that's the fact, but he was obliged to go down, and so he told me all about it, when I met him. I took the horse up to the back of the common, and there left him and the gig, because Harry must come back this way. He'll be half an hour first, however, so there's plenty of time; but still we had better be off as quick as possible."

"We're a match for him if he does come," answered Williams, stepping out of the boat; "but there's no use risking anything, or breaking a man's head if one can help it. So let us start. Fasten the boat, Tom—there, hook it on to that stump. That will do. Now, sir, don't be long, for we can't wait above three quarters of an hour."

"You had better not wait at all," said Maltby, "for the place is all in a bustle. They say there's a warrant out against that swell cove, Mr. Morton, too, who the fools fancy had a hand in the last business up at the hall. They say he's nothing but a lawyer's clerk, run away with his master's money."

"Pooh!" cried Williams—"come along—be quick, sir, be quick."

Alfred Latimer turned away without reply, and hurried up the lane towards Mallington House. He paused not for an instant, for dread and anxiety were behind and drove him on; but yet he could not go so fast that thought did not catch him. The scenes of his boyhood and his youth were all around him; and in a few minutes the house where all the brightest memories of early years were stored rose before his eyes. "What had he not cast away?" he asked himself, as he saw it standing out in the calm moonlight, "What had he not lost? Peace, station, friends, esteem, perhaps life, were all gone. Fury, passion, dark remorse, haggard despair were thenceforth to be the fell companions of his way, tearing his heart with their iron fangs as he went." Ere he could stop the reproachful voice from within memory seemed in a moment to present to his eyes all that he had done amiss through life; the waywardness of boyhood, the obstinacy and violence of after years, the vices and follies of early manhood. Oh! how he wished that he had been different—that he had listened to warnings—endured reproof—followed good counsel—seized the opportunity of amendment whenever it was offered—repented ere it was too late. So it is with every one who does wrong. Sooner or later a time comes when the better heart, plunged in dark despair, sums up the goodness of God cast away, and asks, with fruitless longing, "Can these things never come again?"

He was half frenzied at the thought; but still dread of detection, shame, punishment were even stronger than despair; and at a spot where he had often passed before on some wild frolic, he leaped the garden wall and approached the house.

The means that he employed to procure entrance have been already detailed; but, between the time of his seeing Louisa above, and of her coming down to give him admission, a dark and shameful scheme suggested itself to his mind, which he proceeded to put in execution. The fiend called Fear drives man but too frequently to darker crimes than any other passion, and as Alfred Latimer stood there by the door the words which Maltby had used in regard to Mr. Morton recurred to his remembrance. "I will put these clothes in his room," he thought, "if they fancied he had something to do with the other attempt upon the hall, they may suspect him about this, and that will give me time to get off." A consciousness of the terrible baseness of his design came over him, even while such ideas passed through his mind, but the means of glossing over any crime that Satan prompts are never wanting, and he went on to palliate that which he was determined to perform, saying, "He will soon be able to prove himself innocent. It can but be a day or two in prison to him, and it might be death and destruction to me."

At that moment the door was opened, and he went in, hurrying past Louisa, as we have said, and seeking his own room in the first place, when he stripped off the attire in which he had come thither, and clothed himself from head to foot in a fresh and unstained dress. Then, after disposing of the money somewhat better about his person than he had done before, he gathered up the bloody clothes, tied them together, and carrying them into Morton's room, put them cunningly away at the far back part of an open door. Crime never remembers every precaution, however, and in the trepidation and gloom of his mind he forgot more than one. But without pausing to do more than we have said, he hurried away, descended to Louisa's room, and held some conversation with her through the door, as we have before mentioned. Thence, descending to the hall, he issued out once again into the garden, whence, after walking through the shrubberies and leaping over the wall, he pursued his way to the common, where, at the appointed spot, he found his companions waiting with the horse and gig.

Williams had grown impatient, and was upon the very eve of setting off, when Alfred Latimer made his appearance. "Here, jump in," he cried. "There is room enough for us three, and it doesn't much signify if we break the horse's wind, for we must kill him, and break the gig to pieces, to prevent them telling tales of how we went. Maltby's got his money, Mr. Latimer, so you owe me a hundred pounds. I've paid him for all. He's to do the business with Levi, too, and has sworn upon his honor to send us the money when we tell him where, so you had better give him the rings and bracelets and stuff that you've got about you, for they only tell tales."

Alfred Latimer silently did what he was directed, and having placed himself somewhat inconveniently between Williams and Brown, the horse received a lash from the whip, and started off along the road over the hills. He was a strong, high-spirited, bony animal, who had been ill used, and rendered unfit for anything but the sort of work upon which he was now employed. But the goodness of his original breeding was still manifest, and he would have dropped down dead sooner than give up. On they went, then, at a furious pace, up hill and down dale for about seven miles, when at the side of the road they saw a post-chaise broken down, and with one of the wheels off, standing by the side of the road. The horses and the driver were gone, and as the party in the gig were not upon an expedition of pleasure, they paused not to examine what was the nature of the accident, but dashed past as fast as they could go. At length, upon the rise of the highest hill, which was about twelve miles from Mallington, Williams, who was driving, pulled in

the horse a little, and let him take it more leisurely.

"They can't catch us now," he said; "and it would not do to have him break down before we are near the town."

The rest of their journey consequently occupied more time, so that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning when they came within three miles of the place to which their steps tended.

Williams then pulled up altogether, saying, "There should be a chalk-pit here, Mr. Latimer, I think."

"It's further on," answered the young man; "I've seen it once or twice as we have passed coming close to the side of the road."

"What the devil do you want a chalk-pit for?" asked Tom Brown. "I can't make out what you are up to?"

"To put the horse and gig in, to be sure," replied Williams. "What would you have us do with them, you fool. We can't send them back without showing which way we came; and if we were to leave them at the inn while we go on to the sea, it would soon set all the people talking."

"But how are we to get on?" asked Brown.

"Walk, to be sure," answered Williams. "Ay, and we must go all the way round, too, and come in by the other side. That will just fill up the time, for I don't want to come to the inn before daylight. Then we are to be a wedding party, you know. The marriage won't take above ten minutes; and then Mr. Latimer can set off in a chaise with his lady, and we can follow immediately after. It will be the best blind that we could have, so it all turns out lucky. But I'll tell you all about it, and what you are to do, Tom, when we get to the inn."

Alfred Latimer had remained as silent as the grave while his marriage was named; but after a pause, during which Williams whipped the horse on, he asked in a low voice, almost a whisper, "Won't all this marriage delay us too long? It can't take place till nine o'clock."

"Oh dear, no," answered Williams, carelessly. "They'll not find out anything of the job at the hall till seven or eight, then they'll have to carry the news to the magistrates, and then there will be all the fuss and bustle of taking evidence and examining the premises; so that they will not start after us till eleven or twelve, even if their suspicions lead them this way, which is not at all likely. I'd bet a crown they go to Sturton first, and spend half the day there. They know of your being here, sir; but as they have no reason to believe you have anything to do with it, and the only people left living to tell—I mean the old women—saw no one but Brown and me, there's every chance in life that they will take any road but the right one, especially if the horse and gig are not heard of for some time. Ay, there's the pit; I see the railing."

The chalk-pit, close by which Williams stopped the minute after, was a deep excavation which had been carried, as Latimer had said, close to the side of the road—even closer, indeed, than modern road surveyors would permit. When it could be brought no further in that direction, which was the one wherein the chalk was the best, the excavation had ceased, though, as the stratum was deep, not before it had been carried down some fifty or sixty feet perpendicular. The only thing which formed a barrier between this pit and the road was a frail old wooden railing, decayed with time and weather, and towards this slight obstacle Williams, as soon as he and his companions had got out of the gig, turned the back of the vehicle, then suddenly reining the horse back he jammed the two wheels violently against the bar. The rotton wood-work gave way in a moment, and the wheels rolling over the edge dragged the horse back upon his haunches. He made a violent effort to save himself, but a sudden jerk of the bridle in his mouth threw him back, and over he went sheer down to the bottom. A wild sort of scream came up as the poor animal fell, and Williams, saying coolly "there, that's done," walked on with his two companions.

CHAPTER LXIX.

It was in the pretty little church of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the town of ——, at nine o'clock in the morning precisely, that the clergyman of the place waited calmly in his surplice near the door of the vestry. He was a middle-aged man, with some appearance of good living about his well-filled close-shaven cheeks; and, to say the truth, as his usual breakfast hour was nine, and he had put it off for half an hour to perform the ceremony to which he was called, he heartily wished that the pair about to be united in holy matrimony would appear. I do not exactly know, and will not take upon me to say, that had he thought their eagerness would have rendered such a step expedient, he might not have been induced to give the hands of the clock a certain degree of uncanonical rapidity: thinking it a very venial sin, if "felons hang that jurymen may dine," to give a little acceleration to the hour which was to tie two people in a softer band, especially when his own breakfast was waiting.

It was a very pretty church, as I have said, built in the style of other days, with numerous round arches and deep mouldings, such as Normans loved; and the worthy rector was, indeed, somewhat proud of it, taking much pleasure in pointing out to occasional visitors the various grotesque figures which ornamented different parts of the building—tending certainly not much to edification in its usual sense—and descanting learnedly upon the styles which were to be remarked in this place or that, and sometimes moralizing a little over the dust of the many generations which had passed away since the hands that reared the edifice had mouldered in the grave. But, on the present occasion, with an empty stomach, the worthy clergyman was not at all disposed for such exercitations. He had royal authority for thinking that "it is bad talking between a full man and a fasting;" and therefore when, the minute after the clock of the church had struck the hour, he saw two gentlemen—one in clerical attire—enter through the half-open door, he immediately retreated into the vestry, saying to himself "They must

be come to see the church; but they must wait if they want me to explain things to them."

As he stood within the vestry door, he heard a few words pass between the clerk and the strangers, and then the creaking of a pew. The rector was somewhat puzzled; but the minute after the clerk appeared and nodded his head with a solemn inclination, to announce that some, at least, of the wedding party had arrived. The rector then came forth and perceived nearest to the communion table a young man somewhat pale, and with a wild and haggard eye, dressed in fashionable attire, with an older man by his side, stout, dark, and apparently somewhat inferior in station to himself, while through the door of the church were seen coming a fair young girl, leaning on the arm of a respectable looking old man dressed in his best, in whom the rector instantly recognized one of his own parishioners. He was, as we have shown, in no humor for asking many questions; but still, as, upon the whole, he was a conscientious person, before he proceeded to perform his functions he drew the good gardener aside, and addressed some inquiries to him. What the other answered matters not much; but the rector was satisfied, and advanced again, saying, "Oh! very well." The clerk arranged the parties in order, and the ceremony proceeded. To those who looked on, and knew not what was passing in the breast of any there present, it presented few incidents at all remarkable. The rector, indeed, observed that the bridegroom acted as a mere automaton in the hands of those around him—that he sometimes made the responses aloud, sometimes murmured something, which might be assent or not, for no one could hear what it was—that his eye looked wild, and that once or twice he turned, and gazed over his shoulder. But as forced marriages, by parochial or other authority, were very common in those days, the clergyman concluded that in this case the young gentleman had been forced by the friends of the bride to do her justice, when he was otherwise inclined, and that the act was not at all a pleasant one to him. The only objection he could see to this supposition was a momentary indication of affection, which the bridegroom had displayed towards the fair trembling being who was so soon to be united to him by a holy tie, as they came near the communion table, when he suddenly grasped her hand, and murmured, "Dear Lucy," in a tone full of melancholy but of deep feeling. The rector also remarked that when he was reading the warning to confess if there were any impediment to their marriage, the bridegroom, at the words, "As ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed," turned deadly pale, and seemed to stagger where he stood. The concluding words, therefore, were pronounced in a more solemn and urgent tone; but they produced no further effect. The banns had been regularly published, and the ceremony went on to its close.

But had the eye of man been able to penetrate the human heart, and see all the dark things that it contains, what a terrible scene would have been disclosed by the bosom of Alfred Latimer. There he stood before the altar with the only woman he had ever loved, with the only woman towards whom, perhaps, he had ever entertained one purer or higher feeling. He had loved her notwithstanding all the wrong he had done her, notwithstanding all the evil he had inflicted, notwithstanding the misery and wretchedness which he was ready, either from caprice or passion, to inflict upon her afterwards; nay, more, he loved her still, and the very desolation of his heart, the feelings of despair that had seized upon him, made him cling to her affection—made him feel that it was the only thing left to him in existence—made him look upon it as a ray of comfort in the midst of the utter darkness that surrounded him. He stood with her before the altar, but under what circumstances? With her father's murder upon his head—his cold deliberate murder—with the blood of him who gave her being still hot and reeking upon his hand—with the image still present to his eyes of her parent lying before him, struggling in the agonies of death. When her hand clasped his it seemed as if it scorched him with the touch; the fire of hell seemed to spread along every nerve, and flow through every vein, and when the awful adjuration of the priest was pronounced, calling up the vague images of death and judgment, and eternal condemnation, and the opening of the book in which all the dire secrets of humanity stand recorded, it seemed as if the everlasting doom was already ringing in his ears—as if the Almighty fiat had gone forth of unchanging torture and despair.

Yet he went on, yet he struggled up, yet he would not abandon the purpose of making her his. It seemed to him as if for her sake he had done all this, as if for that consummation he had loaded his soul with guilt and brought down judgment on his head. It was but a vague impression that would not bear examination; but like one of those deep and heavy mists that do not exclude all light, but yet cut off the view of everything but themselves, it settled thick and obscure around him. He fancied it was so, and that was enough; that it was all to end in this—that all that had gone before was but as steps leading to this conclusion, and she seemed to grow dearer to him than she had ever been before from the contrast between her love and all that surrounded it.

The ceremony was as briefly got over as possible, not a word more was said than was absolutely necessary; but when it came to an end Alfred Latimer seemed scarcely to know that it had concluded. The monosyllable "Come!" from Williams's lips, however, roused him, and paying the fees, he led his bride to the church door. A chaise was there in waiting, packed with all the little articles which had been accumulated at the gardener's cottage, and the man Brown was standing by its side. Lucy got in, her husband followed, the door was closed, and the post-boy, according to his previous orders, drove off at a rapid rate towards the nearest seaport. Poor Lucy had not seen her lover since the Saturday before. She had received a hurried note from him that morning, dated at the time, telling her to pack up everything, and have all prepared, and he would join her at the church. The words were somewhat wild, and the hand-writing shaken and

irregular, but yet the note had made Lucy very happy. When she saw him in the church, however, his pale and haggard look, his wild and abstracted manner alarmed her much; but still he had kept his promise; he had made her his wife; he had even testified his strong affection for her in so doing; and as they drove out of the town she laid her hand on his, and said, "Thank you, Alfred, thank you!"

Alfred Latimer cast his arms round her, drew her vehemently to his bosom, and pressed his lips on hers.

But we must return to the church.

Williams and Brown and the good gardener walked away together. The latter seemed inclined to stay and gossip with them; but Williams thrust a couple of guineas into the man's hand, saying, "There, my good friend. The gentleman left that for you, in case there should be anything broken, or out of order in your lodging. Good day;" and without further ceremony, he turned in another direction, and hurried off.

The rector hastened home to his breakfast, after speaking a word or two to the clerk; and the clerk, walking up to the door of a pew, opened it, to give exit to Mr. Quatterly and Dr. Western.

"Well, my dear sir, that's all over," said the worthy solicitor; "and so you are now satisfied on that score. She's bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh; so that account being put in order, we have nothing to detain us here for more than an hour, I should think; and, with your good leave, we will order a chaise, and be off for Mallington."

"Most willingly," replied Dr. Western, "for I am most anxious to be back;" and thus saying, he issued out of the church porch, crossed the little burying-ground around it, and entered the street.

"Ha! who have we got here?" cried Mr. Quatterly, "our sagacious Dogberry posting away as if for life. Good morning, Mr. Higginthorp, good morning; what news stirring, Mr. Constable? Anything from our young friend in quod? 'Pon my life you had better let him out, or you'll get into a scrape."

"Let him out!" cried Mr. Higginthorp, tapping the side of his nose sagaciously with his forefinger. "No, no; whatsomever any one says I shall keep him safe. Why, sir, he's confessed quite woluntary to being a cessory before the fack to an inhuman robbery as was to be committed by the notorious Jack Williams this here last night as was at Mallington Hall."

"Jack Williams!" exclaimed Dr. Western; "why that's the very man who was here not a minute ago. He turned the corner with the other fellow just as we came out."

"Thems the men! thems the men!" said Mr. Higginthorp. "Which way did they go, your worship?"

"Towards the High-street, I think," said Dr. Western.

"Then I'll be after them like winkey," rejoined the constable. "You, gentlemen, toddle off to Mr. Muzzlewell's house, as soon as I've got 'em I'll bring 'em down. If I can but get a grab of that feller's collar I'm a made man;" and thus saying, he set off running with a degree of activity which neither his bulk nor his peculiar conformation seemed at all to promise.

CHAPTER LXX.

The morning shone bright over Mallington Park and Mallington village. The river glistened in the early sunshine, the trees waved their leaves, touched with autumnal yellow, in the light air, as if seeking for refreshment; a cloud or two, thin, small, and high up, drifted away overhead on the quick breeze. All was gay and peaceful; but the windows of the hall remained closed, the chimneys gave forth no smoke, and the great door, which usually was flung back soon after daybreak, showing the glass door within, stood firm as it had been fastened the night before. These were unusual things, yet, strange to say, they remained without notice till near eight o'clock. It had been the common custom of poor Edmonds, the park-keeper, since he had made a practice of sleeping at the hall, to go upon his round straight from the house before he returned to his wife and son; the gamekeepers and workmen who had been lately taken into employment went their several ways, sure to meet him or be visited by him in the course of the morning; and old Blackmore, the gardener, with the man who assisted him, proceeded at once to the garden, which lay at a little distance from the mansion.

Mrs. Edmonds, who had charge of the cows, usually milked them at an early hour of the morning, and sent up what was wanted at the hall by her son; but for more than a fortnight she had been later than before, for hers was a heavy heart just then, and it is wonderful how slow a heavy heart will make the limbs. It was eight o'clock, then, when the boy, carrying a small can of milk and a basket of butter, walked leisurely up to the terrace and went round to the back door. He looked up to the windows, and marvelled to see them all shut; but his was not the period of fears and apprehensions, though he was a quick, clever, thoughtful boy, and he only said to himself, "The old folks have overslept themselves;" but when he found the back door fastened, his surprise became mingled with alarm, and, after trying another entrance on that side, he knocked hard with his hand, and rang the bell sharply, his heart beginning to beat with doubt and terror. Immediately there was a noise above, and looking up he saw the face of the housemaid at a window, pale, haggard, and wild. For a moment she did not seem disposed to open it, for fright had nearly deprived her of her senses; but when the boy moved a little way back so that she could see him fully, and shouted to her "What's the matter?—what's the matter?" she threw up the sash, exclaiming "They have broken into the house, and locked us all in."

"Where's my father?" demanded the boy, in terror. "I can't get in; where's my father?"

"I don't know, I don't know," answered the housemaid. "I heard his gun go off; but I don't know any more."

At the same moment the old housekeeper, Mrs. Chalke, appeared at the window, some-

what reassured by the sound of the boy's voice, for up to that moment they had not felt certain that the robbers were not still in the house. "Run and call somebody," she said, "run and call somebody, there's a good boy, and try and get in and let us out."

The boy pondered for an instant, for his first thought was to run home and tell his mother; but he was, as we have said, of a thoughtful and considerate mind; he was terrified himself for his father, and he immediately recollected that his news would alarm his other parent, before he had arrived at any certainty.

"I will go and call old Blackmore and Wilkins from the garden," he said, and setting down the milk and the basket with the butter, he ran off at full speed.

His news carried consternation and alarm to the gardeners. Each dropped the implement with which he was working, and gazed upon the boy as if utterly confounded; but old Blackmore recovered himself in a minute, and crying "Come along, Wilkins. Take a pickaxe, we'll soon get in. Run away, my dear, down to the lodge, and send up any of the people you can meet, especially the gamekeepers," he trudged off as fast as he could go, with a strong hoe in his hand, and was soon under the windows of the house. He found the task of breaking in, however, more difficult than he had anticipated. He first tried the back door, encouraged by the housekeeper and housemaid above, who continued to pour forth on him and his companion from the window the tale of the preceding night's terrible adventures—how their door had been burst open by men with their faces covered with crape; how they had been dragged from their beds, and locked up in the room where they then were; and how they had heard an awful smashing and breaking, and a gun fired below.

"Poor Edmonds!" said old Blackmore, shaking his head and working away with redoubled energy, "I doubt they've done him a mischief."

The door, however, resisted all his efforts; he tore a large splinter off the bottom with his pickaxe; but he was as far from his end as ever, when Mrs. Chalke called from above "Try one of the windows, John Blackmore, try one of the windows. You'll get in easier so."

The gardener was just about to follow her suggestion when two of the gamekeepers came running up, with young Edmonds following as fast as his lesser limbs would let him. Many were the questions asked and answered; but the old gardener worked away, and with their assistance soon effected an entrance by one of the windows. When they got into the room beyond, however, Mrs. Chalke's precautions acted to prevent them proceeding any further, for the door was locked, and they had to get out of the window again in order to commence operations in another quarter. It then struck him that the boy's account of all the doors being fast might not be quite accurate, and, some running one way and some another, all were tried, till at length one of the gamekeepers exclaimed "They must have got in some how. Perhaps the door in the stable yard is open. Here, hold my gun; I'll run and see."

He first tried the great gates, but they were shut, and then following exactly the course which Williams and his companions had pursued, he got into the yard, and almost immediately after his voice was heard exclaiming "Here, here! This is the way," and the whole party scrambled over, and found him at the entrance of the passage, with the door wide open.

All was dark within, and a feeling of awe even mastered curiosity, for none knew what they might meet with next. They paused for an instant; but then the boy passed them all, crying "Oh, my father! I wonder what they have done to father."

"Come along," cried Blackmore; "open some of the windows as we go, Wilkins. One of you fellows run and let the women out."

But, notwithstanding this desire, there were busy feelings among them that kept them altogether. The silence, the darkness of the house, had something terrible in it; but still they went on, opening the windows as they passed, till they reached the hall, where Blackmore paused; but the boy, becoming more and more terrified in regard to his father every moment, exclaimed "This way, this way, Blackmore. He used to sleep in the room up here."

"Stay a minute, my dear," said the gardener, laying his hand upon young Edmonds's head. "Tom, you come on with me; better let the men go on first, my dear," and walking forward with sad misgivings in his heart, he opened the door of poor Edmonds's room. The passage was obscure, the windows were closed, and the interior was quite dark; but there was no sound, and the old gardener, advancing cautiously, opened the shutters. "My God!" cried one of the men who was behind him, and, turning quickly round, the old gardener saw the floor covered with blood, and the dead body of his good friend lying on the bed. The four men gathered round, and it was long before any one ventured to speak; but in the midst of the deep silence a loud and wailing cry burst from behind them, and Blackmore, turning, threw his arms round the poor boy, while the tears dropped heavily from his own eyes.

"Better go away, my dear, better go away," he said. "Here, Wilkins, take him down to my cottage. Don't let him go home just yet. I'll to your mother, and comfort her as well as I can. Go away, there's a good boy; this is no sight for you."

The boy was quite passive in their hands, and, taking him by the arm, Wilkins led him away, while the old gardener whispered "As soon as you have taken him to my wife, run over and fetch Dr. Western. You had better get the constable, too, and send word to the other magistrates."

"Shall I bring the doctor?" asked Wilkins as he was going out of the door. But Blackmore took up poor Edmonds's hand, let it drop again stiff and cold upon the bed, and shook his head mournfully.

"You may as well, however," he said; "the poor widow may want him."

They then proceeded to examine the house and to release the two women who were shut up above. The object and proceedings of the robbers, as far as any traces of them remained, were soon discovered, and the story of Mrs. Chalke and the housemaid told over and over

again. Edmonds's gun was found in the housekeeper's room; and as Mrs. Chalke and the housemaid both declared that the door leading into the yard had been locked when they went to bed the night before, it was clear that the lock had been picked, and entrance effected by that means. The whole party immediately applied themselves to look for footsteps, and, though they were somewhat puzzled by their own, which crossed the yard in a direct line, they found a number of others both going and coming.

"Here are three sizes clear enough," said Blackmore. "Take care, don't tread amongst them. This is a very big one, and here's one a little less, and then a small one, not much bigger than a woman's. Let us leave them till the magistrates come. I dare say we shall be able to trace them out in the park, for they must have crossed the road somewhere, and the gravel is soft."

Following his advice, they returned into the house, and endeavored to ascertain from the two women the appearance of the men they had seen; but, as usually happens in such cases, terror had very much troubled the vision of Mrs. Chalke and her companion; and though the description they gave somewhat resembled Brown, the picture they painted was anything but like Williams, to whom they gave at least three or four inches in height more than he could lay any claim to. They both agreed, however, that one was much taller than the other.

"There must have been three of them, at least, Mrs. Chalke," said Blackmore.

"We only saw two," answered the housekeeper.

"Ay, but I'm sure I saw a man's head at the end of the passage," exclaimed the housemaid.

"And I thought I heard people speaking below as they dragged me along," said Mrs. Chalke.

While this conversation was going on two or three people came hurrying up from Mallington, the news having been spread by Wilkins as he went down. No magistrates appeared, however; but at length the constable came, full of bustle and importance, in a case which he thought worthy of his genius. From him it was first learnt that Dr. Western was absent from Mallington, and that Mr. Middleton had been sent for; and in about half an hour after, that gentleman was seen galloping across the park at full speed. By this time the place was full of people, half the village having turned out as the news had been diffused from house to house, and from mouth to mouth; and it was with great difficulty that Blackmore and the constable could prevent them from running all over Mallington Hall before the magistrates arrived, for everybody was determined to see the body of poor Edmonds and the plate-room which had been broken into, and very much disappointed at even being delayed in gratifying their curiosity. Miss Mathilda Martin, who was amongst the first, had nearly forced her way over all impediments, and got into a serious dispute with Blackmore, when he stopped her, by gently insinuating in the heat of the moment that she dared say he had something to do with it himself, or he wouldn't try to prevent people from seeing with their own eyes. As soon as Mr. Middleton appeared, she was the first to attack him, approaching with an air of great familiarity and consequence, and shaking her head ruefully.

"Ah, sir," she said, "I knew what would happen—I was quite sure of it. I told you so. When such people are suffered to be about a place there is sure to be some mischief. He was not always hanging about here for nothing. He might have murdered us all in our beds, the bloody-minded villain. It's not my fault; I gave all the information I possessed."

"There, get out of the way," cried Harry Soames roughly, "and let his worship come in and examine. You had better go home and measure out your ribands, Miss Martin. This is no place for women or gossiping either."

The fair Mathilda was exceeding wroth; but she knew that it would not do to quarrel with the constable, and therefore governed her anger. In the meanwhile Mr. Middleton, under the guidance of Harry Soames, proceeded, step by step, to examine into the whole affair, and then, without expressing any opinion, asked for pen and ink, saying, "We had better wait for Sir Simon Upplestone; but, in the meantime, I will send a note."

The pen and ink were soon procured, and, sitting down at a table in the library, Mr. Middleton began to write the note he spoke of, while Harry Soames stood scratching his head before him, and looking wondrous wise. At first the magistrate did not remark him; or at least did not observe the peculiar expression of his countenance, for there was an immense gabble in the adjacent rooms; but immediately after, raising his eyes in search of a thought, of which he himself had not many to spare, he suddenly perceived the constable, and the constable's look. Now, Mr. Middleton was a man who, though of a decided tone, was not naturally of a decided character, and though he often led others who were a step weaker, still he was always led himself when he came in contact with any one stronger in mind. With such sort of people there is nothing so embarrassing as a doubtful expression of countenance. I have seen a whole congregation of strong resolutions put to flight in a moment by a shake of the head and an elevation of the eye-brows, and a shrug of the shoulders has discomfited many a grave purpose. Oratory may be combated, arguments refuted; but a look of doubt and admonition slightly tinged with a little pity is so intangible, expresses so many things more than the eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes could ever have found voice to utter, that it is perfectly irrefragable, and Mr. Middleton, laying down the pen, demanded, "What's the matter, Soames?" Now he had a great respect for Soames's opinion.

"Why, please your worship, I was thinking that you might be writing about Mr. Morton," replied the constable.

"Well, so I was, Soames," answered the magistrate, "What of that?"

"Why, sir, it's all nonsense," answered Harry Soames.

"You mean to say what I've written is nonsense?" demanded Mr. Middleton, a good deal nettled at the uncereminious epithet.

"Oh dear, no, your worship; I meant that story of Matty Martin's," said the constable in haste. "Since I saw your worship last I've been putting that and that together, and I'm quite sure it's all stuff. He's a gentleman, every inch of him, from all that I can hear."

"Why you told me quite the contrary t'other day," answered Mr. Middleton. "I don't understand your shifting about in this way, constable."

"Why, you see, sir," answered Soames, "that I am certainly not likely to be right when your worship is wrong; but then I've had an opportunity of getting information when you havn't. Now, I find from good Mrs. Pluckrose that the very gentleman who came down on Saturday night, and was in such a fuss when he found out that Mr. Morton had disappeared, and in such a fright about him too, is no other than that very Mr. Quatterly, the solicitor, from whom the notes were stolen. So it can't be Mr. Morton that stole them."

"I don't know that," said Mr. Middleton, sagely; "a thousand things might have happened; but, however it is, I am determined to give Mrs. Charlton full warning, and to desire her to detain this man till the business is investigated."

Harry Soames was somewhat surprised and a good deal displeased to find that the magistrate did not follow his lead so readily as usual; but, while Mr. Middleton finished his note, by putting that and that together, as he termed it, he arrived very nearly at that gentleman's real motives. "Ay," he thought, "I know he wanted to marry his son to the young heiress, and he thinks this gentleman in the way; so he would do anything to floor him. But it won't answer, it won't answer."

"Don't you think, your worship," he continued, just as the magistrate, having signed, was sealing the note, "don't you think, sir, that while you are pursuing this game the real sort may get off. Now, I happen to know that Jack Williams was over here yesterday, and I saw Bill Maltby hanging about in the lanes down by the river as late as twelve o'clock at night."

"Why did you not execute your warrant against Williams then?" demanded the magistrate.

"Because I couldn't catch him," answered the constable; "I was out after him when I saw Maltby."

"Then Maltby must be taken into custody," said Mr. Middleton, abruptly; and at the same moment Sir Simon Upplestone, booted and spurred, strode into the library.

"There," said Mr. Middleton, handing the note to Soames, "let that be sent to Mrs. Charlton as fast as it can go, and you yourself see if you can get hold of Maltby, and let him be brought here on suspicion."

Harry Soames took the note with the intention of delivering it himself, thinking as he did so, "If I'm right about this here affair it may be as well to be civil to Mr. Morton," and away he went in consequence; but it may be as well to remark that by this time it was past ten o'clock, and the distance between the hall and Mallington House was not far short of two miles.

CHAPTER LXXI.

Without pursuing the course of Mr. Soames, the constable, which, to say the truth, was somewhat circuitous—for he thought fit to secure the person of Mr. William Maltby, in the first instance, before he delivered the note at Mrs. Charlton's—we must proceed to Mallington House, and see what its inmates were about from an earlier hour in the morning than that at which one part of our tale has already arrived. Mrs. Charlton rose somewhat earlier than usual, and this morning she was in a much more placable mood—at least, to all appearance—with everybody and everything. She was as civil as possible to Mrs. Windsor herself, who waited upon her, to speak about household affairs, while she was dressing; and the shrewd housekeeper said to herself, "Now she's going to execute her grand scheme, if Mr. Morton comes back, and that I don't doubt he will do before the day's over, from all I see and hear. I wish I could get speech of him for five minutes before he sees her. If not, I must talk to Miss Louisa, and let her know all about it; otherwise, she'll take them both in, for she's as cunning as the black gentleman."

All this was passing in Mrs. Windsor's mind while she was listening with profound respect to directions about custards and jellies and sundry sorts of preserves; and, having got her orders, she retired with a low courtesy, while Mrs. Charlton thought to herself, in reference to Mrs. Windsor, "She's as smooth as a piece of marble. As soon as this is all settled, I'll pay her her wages, and send her packing."

Shortly after, Mrs. Charlton proceeded to the drawing-room, where she found Louisa already up, but looking somewhat pale and sad. "Come, Louisa, my love," said the excellent lady, "do not be melancholy and anxious; I'm sure Mr. Morton is quite safe. Indeed, I had an intimation last night that such is the case from good Mr. Nethersole, who heard it at Dr. Western's from Mrs. Evelyn—nay, there's no use of coloring, you naughty girl. You did not suppose my eyes were blind all this time, did you?"

Had there been esteem, respect, or affection, Louisa would have cast herself upon Mrs. Charlton's breast, and given way to grateful tears; but as there was neither, she repressed them, and the good lady proceeded: "One thing I may well say,—that I never saw a more charming man, nor one whom I should more like, as far as I see at present, for a son-in-law. I am not one to care for high birth, or great expectations, any more than yourself, my dear—"

"Ma'am, the housemaid wants to speak to you," said a footman at the door; and Mrs. Charlton, wondering what a housemaid could wish to say to her, quitted the room.

After considering for a few minutes, not without both doubt and wonder, at her stepmother's conduct on the present occasion, Louisa took up a book to divert her thoughts from matters of unprofitable speculation, and a minute or two after the great bell of the door rang. A step was then heard upon the stairs which made Louisa's heart palpitate, and her color come and go. The next moment Mrs. Charlton's voice was heard welcoming somebody, and in another that lady and Mr. Morton entered the

room together. Mrs. Charlton's face was all radiant with the brightest and best-arrayed smiles possible; and Morton, advancing towards Louisa at once, with very little restraint of the feelings of his heart, took her hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Come, no explanations now," said Mrs. Charlton, "we'll have breakfast first, for I am very hungry; and then, Louisa, myself, and our young friend will have a conference upon matters of importance. After that we will do anything you like."

With an easy grace, which bespoke the utmost composure, Mrs. Charlton led the way to the breakfast-room, leaving a sufficient space between herself on the one part, and Mr. Morton and Louisa on the other, to afford the lovers a few moments of private conversation as they descended the stairs. The whole evolution was performed very neatly, Mrs. Charlton speaking near the door, and then immediately taking her departure, so that it was impossible for Morton to be civil enough to attend at her side. Not the most discreet chaperon could have done it better. When, however, tea was made and coffee brought in, and all the principals and accessories of an English breakfast at the bar, the conversation of course became general, and naturally turned to the causes of the visitor's unexplained absence.

It was a somewhat difficult subject to deal with; but Morton had considered his position, and he generalized as much as possible, stating indeed the facts of his strange abduction, but withholding the names of the parties concerned in it. Mrs Charlton, however, was not to be so satisfied, and whether it was any particular spirit of inquiry, or only the general devil of curiosity which is supposed to afflict ladies without much to do, I cannot tell; but she inquired at once, first, whether Mr. Morton knew the persons implicated in so gross an outrage; and, next, what were their names.

"My dear madam," replied her guest, "my worthy solicitor, who was the first to come to my rescue, advises a prosecution, and says that some of the parties might be transported; but as I am very much disinclined to such harsh measures, and very much inclined to let the matter pass, I think it will be better perhaps not to mention any names till, after due deliberation, I have made up my mind to my course."

Mrs. Charlton merely replied, "Oh! very well," and breakfast proceeded to its close without any farther interrogatory.

When that important avocation was at an end, a slight and only momentary tremor seemed to come over the lady of the house; but immediately after she rose, saying in a clear sweet voice, "Now, my dear sir, I wish to speak with you for a few minutes; and, if you please, we will go into the library."

Mr. Morton, of course, acceded; Louisa remained where she was, with a somewhat unquiet heart, and Mrs. Charlton and her visitor proceeded through the doors on the left and were soon seated in two arm-chairs on the opposite side of the fireplace. A short pause ensued, but Morton, perversely, would not break silence first, and at length Mrs. Charlton commenced with a gay, short, merry laugh.

"Well, Mr. Morton," she said, "this is, perhaps, almost ridiculous to speak about; but yet I feel myself called upon to say something about our dear Louisa. You must feel that this cannot go on farther without some definite understanding between us upon the subject. Not, indeed, that I at all imagine you to be a man to trifle with any woman's affections; but people will make observations, and it is right that I should have something to answer to inquiries. In a word, then, you love Louisa—is it not so?"

"Most sincerely and devotedly, my dear madam," replied Morton. "I say at once I seek her hand, and am ready immediately to enter into explanations with both her guardians upon the subject."

This was not quite the reply that Mrs. Charlton either expected or desired. She had expected to hear of difficulties, to receive some excuses as to inferior fortune, and apologies for presuming to address a young lady of considerable wealth without equal advantages. She had thought it would be so; several things that she had seen, as well as the report of others, had made her imagine it; but yet her confidence in that result had been somewhat shaken by other circumstances. Nevertheless, she had a reserve, which she fancied quite secure. If Morton was not seeking Louisa for her wealth, he was evidently deeply attached to her—if it were love, it was love of a very intense and powerful kind; and she argued, if it be her money that is his object, she has enough to make a part a bait sufficiently tempting; if it be herself, the loss of a portion will be nothing in his estimation.

After a moment's pause, then, she answered, "Nay, my dear sir, I too must claim some say in the matter. In the first place as a mother—and I am sure I regard Louisa with the affection of one—and, in the next place, as one especially appointed by her dear father, the best and kindest man that ever lived"—and Mrs. Charlton took out a fine cambric handkerchief, embroidered in the corners—"appointed by her father, I say, to watch over her settlement in life. Perhaps you are not aware, Mr. Morton, that, by her father's will, my consent is absolutely necessary to her marriage, and therefore I am her guardian as far as that great step in a woman's life is concerned—nay, pray hear me—I mean not to say that I in the least object in the present case, far from it, I am strongly inclined to give my full approbation. All I mean is that the explanations must be to me, not to those who are merely her guardians and trustees till she is of age."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, "I have been fully made aware of the terms of Mr. Charlton's will—"

"Good!" thought Mrs. Charlton, "he has inquired into the matter. It is her fortune he seeks, and he is prepared to act like a man of sense."

But Mr. Morton proceeded, "I am quite ready to give every explanation to either yourself if you think fit, or to the actual guardians; but first—"

"Oh yes!" said Mrs. Charlton, interrupting him, "it may first be necessary, as you say, to explain all the circumstances of the case; for, of course, they do not exactly appear upon the

face of the will; and, indeed, I have always felt that, in consequence of Mr. Charlton not stating his intentions clearly in that document, I am placed in a very delicate and unpleasant position. I wish to Heaven that he had acted with his usual habits of business; and I have always looked forward to this moment with apprehension and anxiety. It luckily happens now, however, that I have to deal with a man of high feeling and honor, who will understand my situation at once, and thus the task will be less difficult. It had better be undertaken at once, therefore; and thus the case stands:—Mr. Charlton and I had often talked over dear Louisa's prospects; and though he was at one time somewhat inclined—out of regard for me, I believe—that a marriage should take place between her and my son Alfred, I represented to him that the poor boy was in no degree fitted to make her happy, and induced him to put such a bar against it that it could never be thought of. He then, as you know, made his will, leaving all his property to Louisa, with my full consent and approbation; but, at the same time, he said to me, 'My dearest Emily, while Louisa remains with you, united as you are by the strongest ties of affection, there will be quite enough to maintain your household in the style in which you are accustomed to live; but it is my intention to render your consent to her marriage indispensable, both for her own sake and yours, in order that if she chooses to marry, which, perhaps, may not be the case, you may be secured such a share in what I leave as will compensate to you for her seeking another home'—"

Mrs. Charlton paused, and looked at Mr. Morton; but that gentleman sat with his fine eyes bent upon the ground, without any movement of lip, nostril, or eye-brow indicating what was passing in his mind; and she then went on in an easy, natural tone, saying, "I argued against this arrangement; but he still adhered to it, though he was somewhat shaken before he died, but that lamentable event was so sudden that he had not time to make the better arrangements which I believe he proposed, and, therefore, of course, we must abide by those that exist."

"Certainly, my dear madam," replied Morton, "and may I now ask what it is that you think those arrangements imply?"

Now was the tug of war. It was the most important event of all those campaigns which Mrs. Charlton had carried on against the poverty in which she was originally born. She had hitherto been a very successful general, but this was her Waterloo, and she felt all the weight of the occasion. Nevertheless she would not by the pause of one moment suffer Mr. Morton to see that she was calculating. It was her wish to impress him with the idea that all had been settled long before between her and Mr. Charlton, and she replied in an instant, "My dear husband's wish was that if Louisa married, such an arrangement should be made as to secure to me one half of the property, for which reason he placed the whole at my disposal if she married without my consent."

Morton had well nigh laughed. The murder was out, the whole scheme developed; but he *restrained* himself, and demanded, "Pray, my dear madam, is there any memorandum of this intention of Mr. Charlton, any document by which the matter may be defined?"

"No, sir, no!" answered the lady, beginning to grow angry at his coolness, and her cheek becoming somewhat flushed with a vague perception that he saw through her; "there is no memorandum—there is no document. But, surely, Mr. Morton," she added, in a less sharp tone, "you can trust to my word."

"Oh! undoubtedly," replied Morton; "but it would be much more satisfactory to me, my dear lady, to have something tangible to satisfy certain principles which I have within the last three days announced so distinctly that I fear I could not retreat from them without such written proofs of Mr. Charlton's intentions."

The lady was in a state of high consternation and anger. She had expected no such opposition; but what could she do? Her own case was urgent; money she must have; she had always calculated upon having it; and even delay would be ruinous. In these circumstances she lost her usual caution, exposing her game more and more. "Such as I have stated were Mr. Charlton's intentions," she replied; "but I do not say, Mr. Morton, that I am by any means disposed to exact the complete fulfillment of his wishes. A third of the property, fairly estimated, is all that I expect; but that I think I have a right to demand."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, in the same quiet tone, "according to your own showing, you have a right to demand half; and all I require is, that the fact of Mr. Charlton's intentions should be so clearly shown as to justify me in acceding, having, as I said, within these three days distinctly expressed an opinion on the subject, which I cannot retract."

"Within these three days!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, her cheek growing very red; "to whom, sir—who has a right to meddle with these matters but myself?"

"To your own son, my dear madam," answered her companion. "It is now necessary to inform you that Mr. Alfred Latimer, with a gang of not very respectable gentlemen whom he employed, was the person to carry me off from Mallington, and that his object was to drive a bargain with me to pay him certain thousand pounds on my marriage with Miss Charlton. He also hinted that you would have something of this kind to propose; but I told him distinctly, and at once, that I would never make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand, nor be any party to any such transaction; that I would wed her with all that her father left her, or with none, and therefore—"

"Then, then"—cried Mrs. Charlton, with fury flashing from her eyes—but before she could finish the sentence, Wilkinson, the footman, entered the room with a note upon a salver, saying, "Soames, the constable, brought this, ma'am, and he is waiting to see you."

Mrs. Charlton took the note, and was twisting it round her fingers; but the man added, "He says it's very immediate, ma'am, and very important."

His mistress tore it open, and read. At the first words a malicious and triumphant smile crossed her angry countenance, and at the end she rose and hurried out of the room; while

Morton, supposing their conference ended, passed through the side door into the breakfast-room in search of Louisa.

CHAPTER LXXII.

"Can you tell me where I shall find Miss Charlton?" demanded Morton, as he entered the dining-room, and saw Mrs. Windsor's head looking in at the opposite door.

"She is in the little drawing-room, sir," answered the housekeeper; "but I was looking for you, sir—I beg pardon for the liberty. I have something very particular to say to you, if you would be good enough to allow me five minutes' conversation."

"Very willingly, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton, moving towards the door, "and I shall be happy to do anything I can for you, but I fear, if you desire any conversation with me, you must come down to the inn, as, in consequence of something that has just passed, I do not propose to trespass upon Mrs. Charlton's hospitality any longer. At present I must speak with Miss Charlton, immediately."

"I guess what has passed, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, with a grave face, "and wish I could have spoken to you before, as it was just about that I desired to say a word or two, for Mrs. Charlton has in reality no more power over Miss Louisa, or her fortune either, than I have; and I do not like to see my poor young lady made unhappy. But by and by will do, if, as I suppose, you have refused her terms."

While she had been speaking she had accompanied Mr. Morton to the foot of the great stairs, as if to show him the way, though he knew it quite well; but here he turned to gaze at her face, with a good deal of surprise in his own to find her apparently so well acquainted with the nature of Mrs. Charlton's conversation with himself. He had heard a good deal of the various uses of keyholes and crannies, but in the present instance it was evident that Mrs. Windsor had not employed such channels of information, or she would have known his answer, as well as Mrs. Charlton's demand, and consequently he was puzzled. But that was not a moment to find out a puzzle, and therefore merely saying, "I have," he began ascending the stairs.

"Pray hold firm, sir," continued Mrs. Windsor, "for she has no power at all, as I will show you, whenever you have a moment's leisure;" and thus saying, she dropped a low and respectful courtesy and retired.

Morton, on his part, hurried on, and at once entered the little drawing-room, where he found his fair Louisa gazing out of the window, with the vacant look of deep and anxious thought, for she was well aware that what was taking place below while she was left alone, was matter deeply affecting her own peace. She sprang to meet him, however, as soon as she saw him, and we must forgive Morton if he took one embrace, ay, and one kiss.

"Listen, dearest," he said, "for we may be interrupted in a moment—I shall have to leave this house very soon. She wishes to make a matter of merchandise of your hand. I will consent to no such thing. It shall never be said I bought my Louisa. She has, she says, and so says your poor father's will, the power of depriving you of all he left if you marry without her consent, and for that consent she demands half your property. So be it — Louisa is to me a treasure which makes all other wealth valueless. I can settle upon you enough to compensate for what you lose. Will you, dear one, will you make this sacrifice for me; and be mine even at the risk of losing all that is now your own!"

"Oh, Morton!" cried Louisa sadly, "it is you that will lose what you had a right to expect."

"I win all that I desire if I win you, Louisa," answered Morton. "Do you consent? — Will you be mine at any risk!"

"At any, at every risk I will," replied Louisa earnestly, "and try to compensate by my love and gratitude for such noble conduct. But what must I do, Morton, if—"

"Go down as soon as possible to Dr. Western's," answered Morton, before she could finish her question. "Take up your abode with him and Mrs. Evelyn till you can be mine. He is your guardian, and his house is your proper place of refuge, dearest—some one is coming. Will you promise me to do so?"

"I will, Edmond," she said, "I will; nothing shall stop me, for I feel that after all this, the house where I have spent so many happy and so many unhappy hours would almost be unendurable."

Almost as she spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room; but the expression of that lady's countenance was so peculiar that it deserves a word or two for itself. There was still a touch of anger about it, but subdued and quieted, while a slight smile mingled an air of triumph with the bitterness of the expression, as if she had suddenly gained some advantage over an enemy. Her brow was slightly contracted, her lips close and drawn into good order, a very tolerable glow in her cheeks, and an expansion about the nostril, as if she struggled to keep down her emotions, whatever they were. Her tone, too, when she spoke, was cold and decided, though with an affectation of perfect ease, which showed the effort a little too plainly.

"So," she said, somewhat sarcastically, "you are consulting about it. Have you made up your minds yet?"

"You are mistaken, my dear madam," answered Morton; "we are not consulting upon it at all, and as to my mind, it is perfectly made up."

"Well, I have been thinking of other things," said Mrs. Charlton, "and we can talk of that afterwards, should it be necessary. Pray, be seated, Mr. Morton. You have heard, I suppose, of what has happened in our neighborhood?"

"No, indeed," answered her guest, "I have heard of nothing extraordinary, except what has happened to myself within this last two or three days."

The words would bear two interpretations, but Mrs. Charlton was in that irritable frame of mind in which persons always choose the worst and most offensive meaning that can be attached to anything that is said to them, and consequently she immediately contrived to think that Morton referred to her own conduct towards

him. "Oh, yes," she answered, "there has been something both very extraordinary and very horrible happen last night. I thought you must have known it—Mallington Hall was broken into, the door of the plate room forced open, and everything it contained carried off."

Morton was considerably moved. His brow contracted, his cheek got a little heated, and his eye flashed. "This is too bad," he cried, "this is really too bad."

"It is, indeed," answered Mrs. Charlton coolly; "but that is not all. The worst yet remains to be told. However, the villains who did it are not likely to escape. They are pretty well known, I am told, and means have been taken for their immediate apprehension."

"I am very glad to hear it," answered Morton; "for the various outrages that have lately taken place in this neighborhood show that there are some desperate characters down here who ought to have been in prison long ago."

"Quite right, my dear sir—quite right," replied Mrs. Charlton, keeping her eye fixed upon his face. "The principal person suspected is a certain lawyer's clerk, who robbed his employer some time ago and absconded. There have been bills stuck up all about the place regarding him. Have you seen them, Mr. Morton?"

"Oh!—about that unfortunate fellow, Wilkins," replied the gentleman to whom she spoke. "But if he be suspected of a robbery last night, an error has been committed, as I happen to know that he was not in this neighborhood."

"Are you acquainted with him, then, Mr. Morton?" demanded the lady, in the quietest possible tone.

"I have seen him several times at Mr. Quatterly's," answered Morton, carelessly; "but I know that he could not have done this that is attributed to him, as he was not here."

"Oh, then, you know Mr. Quatterly?" rejoined the lady, with a smile.

"Extremely well," was Morton's reply; though he began to be a little surprised at Mrs. Charlton's tone. "Mr. Quatterly is my own solicitor, and the money stolen happened to be my own."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "Then it has not reached you."

"Oh, yes, it has!" answered Morton. "Mr. Quatterly, of course, made it good to me."

"Ahem!" said the lady; but Louisa, who by long and sad experience knew more of her stepdame than even Morton did—though he, considering the length of their acquaintance, had acquired an extraordinary insight into her character—saw very well that there was something kept back, which she expected to produce at last with great effect, according to her own purposes, and she demanded, "What is there more? You said that the worst remained to be told."

"Yes, indeed!" answered Mrs. Charlton; "the worst does remain to be told, and a horrible story it is. It seems that an attempt was made upon the house some time ago; and that ever since poor Edmonds, the park-keeper—as good a creature as ever lived—you know him, Mr. Morton, I think, for you've often been seen talking with him, they tell me?"

"I know him very well, madam," answered Morton; "a highly respectable and honest man. *What of him?*"

Mrs. Charlton paused for a moment, with a somewhat puzzled look; but then she answered, "Ever since that last attempt it seems poor Edmonds has slept in the house to protect it. The villains, whoever they were, must have made themselves thoroughly acquainted with all the particulars, must have known all the rooms and passages—and it is a difficult house, too—so they could have been no common burglars. However, they made their way in by picking the lock of a back door; and what were all their proceedings within we, of course, cannot yet tell; but the result was clear enough, when some of the people forced their way in this morning."

She paused for a moment; and it was evident, both to Morton and to Louisa, that for some purpose of her own she was drawing her story out to as great a length as possible. As Mrs. Charlton's purposes, however, were not always the most transparent, neither the lover nor the young lady could make out what they were; and Morton, who was somewhat anxious to get at the facts, inquired eagerly, "But what was that result, my dear madam? It is that we principally desire to hear."

"Why, that poor Edmonds was murdered," answered Mrs. Charlton. "He was found lying on his bed, shot through the head."

Both Louisa and her lover turned as pale as death. "Good God!" exclaimed Morton, starting up, "I must go down and see about it. This is horrible, indeed!"

"Stay a moment, Mr. Morton," said Mrs. Charlton; "we have, you know, some business to settle, and, as I hate talking frequently upon disagreeable subjects, we had better settle it at once."

"As far as I am concerned," answered Morton, somewhat abruptly, "the whole business is settled already. I think you could not mistake my meaning, my dear lady. We must both take our own course in this matter."

"Yet a moment," said the mistress of the house, beckoning him towards a window. "Louisa, you need not go; this business concerns you, too. Mr. Morton, you are in a dangerous situation, which will become more or less so according to your conduct to me."

"My dear madam, you are pleased to be enigmatical," answered Morton, indignation beginning to master him. "Will you have the goodness to explain yourself clearly, for, standing here comfortably upon the carpet of the drawing-room of Mallington House, I do not see how I can be in a dangerous situation at all."

Mrs. Charlton's fair round cheek flushed, and she answered, "I will explain myself clearly. It is supposed, my dear sir, that the name you have been pleased to assume in this place is not your real one." A slight smile came over Morton's face, and the lady went on. "I see I am right; but it is moreover suspected—mind, I don't say that it is so—that your name is more like Wilkins than Morton. Do you deny it?"

Morton paused for an instant, and then answered coolly, giving a glance of his eye at Louisa as he did so, "Perhaps it is, my dear madam."

Louisa, sad and distressed as she was, could not refrain from a smile; and Mrs. Charlton thought, as she observed the whole, "Then she

has known it all the time. 'Pon my word, this is too bad! What creatures girls are in these days!"

She went on aloud, however, to say, "This is not all, Mr. Morton, or Mr. Wilkins—you are strongly suspected, as I insinuated before, of having some share in this dark deed at Mallington Hall. Mind, I don't say that it is so, but I tell you that I have the power of confirming those suspicions in a very strange manner." She spoke sternly and resolutely, fixing her eye upon him as if she would have searched his soul.

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Morton, with his lip curling. "This is carrying the matter too far."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Charlton, pointing with her finger through the window down the hill, up which was seen coming at considerable speed a gentleman on horseback followed by a servant. "You have two minutes to decide upon what I propose to you, and not more. What do you say?"

"Exactly what I said before," answered Morton, coolly; "and allow me to add, madam, that Mrs. Charlton does not raise herself in my opinion by being ready, for a sum of money, to give the hand of her husband's daughter to a man whom she believes to be a swindler, and suspects of being a murderer."

"I will have revenge at least," muttered Mrs. Charlton; and then, raising her voice, she exclaimed "Soames, Soames! come in."

Louisa had been gazing down upon the carpet as if she had been studying the gay flowers with which it was covered; but suddenly a look of horror and consternation more deep and intense by far than even that with which she had heard the news of poor Edmonds's murder, overspread her countenance, as if some startling and dreadful fact had suddenly presented itself to her mind, and starting forward, she caught Mrs. Charlton's arm, exclaiming, "Stay, stay—for Heaven's sake, stay! You do not know what you are doing. You are destroying yourself."

But as she spoke the constable entered the room, and Mrs. Charlton cried at once, "Take him in charge, Soames."

"What is the matter, dearest Louisa?" asked Morton in a tone of surprise, without taking any notice of the constable. "You cannot suppose for a moment—"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Louisa, wringing her hands, "but I fear she will bring down destruction on her own head."

"I am the best judge of my own acts, Miss Charlton," said the lady. "Take him in charge, Soames. He owns that his name is Wilkins, and not Morton."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing. "Not exactly that, as Miss Charlton can bear witness. I said more like it, my dear madam. This is a very serious business," he continued, "and yet, pushed to this extremity, I cannot but feel that it becomes, in some degree, a jest."

"You will find it no jest, I suspect," replied Mrs. Charlton, not a little puzzled and embarrassed by Mr. Morton's demeanor, and only the more angry from a vague apprehension that she had already suffered rage and disappointment to carry her beyond the bounds of prudence; "however, the matter is not in my hands, but in that of the law, and it must deal with the case as it may be judged expedient—Louisa, you may as well retire, for Mr. Middleton must be already at the door, and the examination of this person will probably be proceeded with here. Such scenes are not fit for young ladies."

"You will excuse me, madam," replied Louisa. "I shall certainly remain here. No place can be more fit for me than by the side of my future husband, when a false, I might call it a ridiculous accusation is brought against him."

"Oh, oh! so bold?" said Mrs. Charlton; "but I have understood you long, young lady. Nevertheless, it is as well, perhaps, that it should be so, and that you should stay to witness what takes place regarding the man of your choice."

"There can be nothing to witness, madam, that I am afraid of," replied Louisa; but even while she was speaking, the door opened and Mr. Middleton was announced. The constable had been talking for some moments to Mr. Morton, towards whom he had advanced when called upon by Mrs. Charlton, and, as soon as the magistrate had entered the room, he spoke a few words to the servant in a low tone, to which the man replied, "I'll send down directly." Harry Soames nodded his head, and then returned quickly to the side of Mr. Morton, towards whom he seemed inclined to testify every sort of respect.

The air of Mr. Middleton was very grand and important indeed. He felt that he was a man of consequence—that his bosom was the temple of justice, and that J. P. was written on his forehead, or ought to be. With a self-satisfied smile and an active air, he crossed the room to shake hands with Mrs. Charlton, and would probably have conferred the same honor upon Louisa, had she not drawn a step back at his approach, and answered his salutation with a courtesy. Not meeting with due reverence in that quarter, he again turned to Mrs. Charlton, and conversed with her for a few minutes in a low voice, and then, observing that Miss Charlton and her lover were speaking together, though all that passed between them consisted of a few words, he exclaimed, in a highly authoritative tone, "No conversing with the prisoner. Constable, see that nothing of this kind takes place."

"Then I am to consider myself as a prisoner, sir?" demanded Morton, addressing the magistrate.

"Most assuredly!" answered Mr. Middleton, with a look of cold scorn.

"On what charge, and on whose authority?" asked the younger gentleman.

"On the charge of fraud, robbery, and murder!" replied Mr. Middleton; "and on my authority."

His tone was intended to be very laconic and decided, but Morton persevered. "May I beg to know who it is brings the charge," he next inquired. "Of course you do not act without information."

"Oh, no!" answered the magistrate; "I act upon very good information. You are in custody on suspicion, my good young man. You will hear more by and by."

"I wish I could venture to call you a good old one," answered Morton; "but, at all events, let me call to your remembrance that a person should always be looked upon as innocent till he is proved guilty, and that it is sometimes inconvenient to forget that you are a gentleman or that another is so, as you may have occasion afterwards to repent it."

"What, sir! do you venture to threaten me, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Middleton, in fury; "to threaten a magistrate in the execution of his duty!"

"Oh dear, no!" replied Morton, calmly; "I do not threaten you at all, Mr. Middleton. I only wish to call you back to a sense of propriety. I beg leave to say, sir, that I am not your good young man; for I am either your very bad young man indeed, or not your young man at all."

"This is foolish nonsense," replied the worthy gentleman; "but we shall soon have Sir Simon Upplestone here, and we can proceed to business on the spot. If you will have the kindness to let us use one of your drawing-rooms, Mrs. Charlton, I do not see why we should adjourn at all. Or we can go to the library, which, perhaps, will be more out of your way."

"Oh dear, no!" answered Mrs. Charlton; "let it be here, by all means. There stands a young lady who declares she will be present the whole time; and I rather imagine that I shall be forced to submit to examination as a witness."

Mr. Middleton raised his eyebrows at the announcement of Louisa's intention, and looked surprised at Mrs. Charlton's hint of her own testimony being important; but after a few moments' private conversation with that lady, he seemed still more surprised, and turning round, exclaimed aloud, "Is it possible! The whole seems so clear that we might, I think, commit him for trial at once—but here is Sir Simon, I suppose. Who has he got with him, I wonder?"

The last observations of worthy Mr. Middleton were produced by the sound of steps and voices coming up the stairs; but he was surprised, when the door opened, to see not only his friend Sir Simon Upplestone, but Dr. Western and another gentleman, with two or three persons of an inferior class, standing at the top of the staircase. The first who entered was the baronet, and without noticing Mrs. Charlton, or any one else in the room, he advanced straight towards his brother magistrate, and then said in a loud whisper, "I am afraid there has been a great mistake here, Middleton. You have been in too great a hurry."

"Not a bit, Sir Simon, not a bit," replied Mr. Middleton, in a determined tone. "You are not acquainted with all the circumstances, my good friend."

"Nor you either, Middleton," answered the other. "The prisoner is in custody, and the case must be investigated immediately."

While he was speaking Dr. Western walked slowly into the room, with a grave brow, and an expression both of pain and indignation on his countenance, and advancing at once to Morton, by whose side Louisa was still standing, he *shook hands* with them both, and then turning towards the other magistrates, demanded aloud, "What is all this folly, Mr. Middleton?"

"Hush, hush," said Morton, in a low tone. "Let the whole thing proceed, my dear friend. I wish particularly to see that worthy lady play her game out."

"She does not know what she is doing," said Louisa sadly. "She does not know what she is doing."

In the meantime Mr. Middleton was answering Dr. Western's question in an authoritative and a somewhat sarcastic tone, saying, "The folly, my reverend friend, happens to be no folly at all. A strong—an exceedingly strong case of suspicion has been made out against that gentleman standing there as accessory, if not principal, in the robbery of Mallington Hall, and the murder of poor Edmonds, the late earl's park-keeper; and since I have come here this morning, additional evidence has been tendered which must, I think, place his guilt beyond all manner of doubt, and require his immediate committal to the county jail. I am glad of the assistance of my two brother justices, but if they had not been present I should have taken the responsibility upon myself."

A clear merry laugh rang through the room, and a good round voice exclaimed, "Ay! if ifs, and ands were pots and pans, there would be no work for the tinkers. How do you do, my dear sir?—how do you do? You seem to have had a pleasant time of it since we parted yesterday evening; but it's a long lane that has never a turning, and when the cat's away the mice will play. As it seems clear we are to have larks for supper, I may as well get rid of my knife and fork;" and Mr. Quatterly, after having shaken hands with Morton, and given a gay sparkling glance from his face to that of Louisa Charlton, murmuring to himself, "Devilish pretty! devilish pretty!" pulled out of his pocket a note book, a pencil, and some papers, folded up and tied together with red tape.

At the same time Dr. Western was advancing to speak with the other magistrates and Mrs. Charlton, who were gathered together in a group on the opposite side of the room; but Morton at this moment took a step forward, and said aloud, "My dear Dr. Western, you must hear me for a moment. This business cannot and must not be stopped: a very serious and horrible charge, perfectly unfounded, as you well know, has been brought against me this morning, together with half-a-dozen other minor insinuations, partly proceeding from malice, and partly from stupidity, originating, I have no doubt, amongst the gossips of this little town, and fostered under the kind care of that lady and that gentleman," and he pointed to Mrs. Charlton and Mr. Middleton. "These charges and insinuations must at once be thoroughly and accurately investigated. Upon this I insist, and I have to beg you, my dear sir, and also my friend here on the left, not to bring forward any one particular to prove to the persons concerned the absurdity of the accusation, till all the charges themselves are fairly stated, and the evidence upon which they are grounded adduced. I would rather, if it were necessary, sleep a night in prison than that the whole of the business should not be made quite clear, and the conduct of those who take part in it be fully exposed."

Morton's coolness, and the determined tone in which he spoke—the whole conduct of Dr. Western towards him—the presence and the merriment of Mr. Quatterly, who, though his name had not yet been announced, was evidently no ordinary man—all struck and somewhat confounded both Mrs. Charlton and Mr. Middleton. The former somewhat regretting, perhaps, that she had gone so far, but with not a particle less venom in her heart than she had felt before, was only anxious to show a fair face to the world, and to prove that she was moved by none but the best of feelings, even whilst she pursued her own objects most virulently; and consequently in the sweetest possible tone she said, "The gentleman does me great injustice in supposing that I have fostered any slanders against him. I am sure Mr. Morton has no occasion to say that I have treated him with anything but unvarying kindness and hospitality ever since he first came into Mallington—too much so, indeed, I fear, from all that now appears, and from the undutiful conduct of that young lady, who seems to entertain the idea that any treatment of a step-mother is justifiable and right."

Mr. Middleton, who had heard Mrs. Charlton even with impatience, did not suffer Morton to reply; but, anxious to get a little farther insight into the business before he went on, he said aloud, although in a somewhat less pompous tone than before, "The case, the young gentleman says, must have full investigation. It is quite right that it should; but what he himself suggested, I think, would be the right course—namely, to remand him till to-morrow morning, at eleven, when the whole evidence can be gone into, and the case fully examined."

"Against that I most decidedly protest," said Dr. Western. "Mr. Morton proposed no such thing. He merely said that he would rather submit to a night's imprisonment than that the matter should not be made clear; but I will not consent to any such course, when it can be made clear in five minutes."

"But, my dear sir, you are not the only magistrate present," said Mr. Middleton; "and if the majority vote for remanding the prisoner, I think it must be done—what do you say, Sir Simon?"

But Sir Simon was already tired of the business, filled with many doubts as to whether they had not all got into a scrape, and rather anxious to see the unraveling of the clue. He, therefore, answered bluffly, "why, you know, Middleton, the fox-hounds meet at Burnley to-morrow, and that's twelve miles off, so I shall vote for going on to-day to a certainty."

"A cogent and irrefutable argument!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, rubbing his small fat white hands with great internal satisfaction at the various considerations of country justice. "Sir, I congratulate you upon such a high and equitable view of the case; but will you allow me to remind you all that the proceedings of the worshipful body here present, have hitherto been somewhat irregular, more resembling those of a corporation committee, or of a meeting of the various partners in a bankrupt bank, than of a body of gentlemen exercising high magisterial functions. Here are accused and witnesses, and magistrates and constables, and gentlemen and ladies—*quot tot et omnes*—all mixed up together in the same drawing-room, in a very indiscriminate manner, while some nine or ten other young ladies, who, I am told, are also witnesses, are assembled at the door, enjoying the benefit of our desultory conversation. Now, if this room is to be converted into a justice-room, and it is not your pleasure to adjourn to a more fitting place—"

"I think that would be much the best plan," said Mr. Middleton.

But Mrs. Charlton, who liked to fight her battle upon her own ground, strongly objected; and both Dr. Western and Sir Simon Upplestone, each for their own several reasons, were also opposed to such a step.

"Well, then," continued Mr. Quatterly, whose peculiarities gained for him considerable attention, though as yet no one but Morton and Dr. Western knew who he was—"Well, then, since it is to be a justice-room, you had better draw that sofa-table across the other side. Each justice can have an arm-chair, and then there will be one left for the clerk, who, by the way, had better be sent for. There are but two footstools, but, I dare say, another can be brought from another room; the witnesses had better be removed till they are needed; and if there is another drawing-room, as I take it, on that side, they can come in by those folding doors. Thus the whole proceeding can be conducted in the most delicate and lady-like manner possible, and whatever it may be in reality, it will have the appearance of justice, at least."

Mr. Middleton was not so obtuse as to be blind to the fact that Mr. Quatterly was quietly laughing at them all; and he asked, in an angry tone, "And pray, sir, who are you, who come here, quite a stranger, to set us all to rights or to wrongs, as the case may be?"

"A very humble individual, your worship," replied Mr. Quatterly, with a low bow, and a quiet smile; "but, I believe, an honest man, though I have had everything in the way of temptation against me, being a magistrate, a lawyer, and, moreover—sad to say—the managing governor of several charities. I was called to the bar, good lack! now more than forty years ago; but finding briefs few, and money likely to be scanty in that branch of the profession, for the pure lucre of gain—like Tommy Tucker, who turned a Turk for twopence—I stripped off my gown, and became an attorney. Thus, sir, I have the honor of presenting myself to your worship as Timothy Quatterly, attorney-at-law, by some persons termed Esquire, and a J. P. for the county of Herts. That, present by your permission, I appear to watch these proceedings on the part of my client here."

Mr. Middleton and Mrs. Charlton were both somewhat distressed in mind. One step had been taken to knock their foundation from below them. Mr. Morton was not Mr. Wilkins—that was evident. He was a man of some consequence, too, apparently, for he kept an attorney; and, as a consequence, he was more likely to be fool than knave. Mrs. Charlton asked for a glass of cold water, and spoke a few words to Mr. Middleton, to which Mr. Middleton replied in as low a tone as her own, "Why, after all, you know, my dear madam, many rich men

commit great crimes, and we have instances of peers themselves being hanged for murder."

"True, true," said Mrs. Charlton, in a whisper; "and the proofs I can bring forward would convict any man."

"I may be permitted to observe," said Mr. Quatterly, in a dry tone, "that it is not usual for magistrates to whisper with witnesses, in which capacity I understand that lady is about to appear."

"Nor for witnesses to whisper with prisoners," said Mr. Middleton, pointing towards Louisa and Morton, who still stood side by side, and were speaking together somewhat eagerly, notwithstanding the injunction to prevent such communication which the magistrate had laid upon the constable.

"Is that lady about to be a witness?" demanded Mr. Quatterly; "I wasn't aware of the fact."

"I am afraid it will be absolutely necessary, sir," replied Louisa, "though I could much wish to avoid it."

"For or against the prisoner, madam?" demanded the solicitor.

"Oh, for him to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "there can be no doubt of that!"

"Then all the witnesses had better retire, or all the witnesses had better be admitted," said Mr. Quatterly. "We can't make meal of one and malt of the other, you know, gentlemen."

"We have sent for our clerk, sir;" said Sir Simon Upplestone; "and we shall act by his opinion."

"A capital thing to get a man who has an opinion," said Mr. Quatterly, rubbing his hands again. "I didn't know there were any in the county—except our friend Mr. Higginthorp," he continued, turning towards Morton, and then looking to Dr. Western. "He, indeed, has an opinion, and a very decided one."

The moment after, Mr. Skinner appeared, and looked round the room with some surprise and amazement. His affections seemed to be rather divided, and his mind bewildered by the variety of persons he saw, and the variety of positions in which they had placed themselves. His eyes fell first, however, upon the group consisting of Louisa, Mr. Morton, and the constable, with Mr. Quatterly a step before them, as an outpost in advance of their camp; and, taking a step forward in that direction, he bowed low to the young lady, and still more low and reverently to the young gentleman. Mr. Quatterly, however, shook hands with him, saying, "Ah, Skinner! how do you do? These gentlemen are in a mess, I think;" and then, as he saw his fellow solicitor raise his eyes to the group on the opposite side of the room, where Sir Simon Upplestone, Mrs. Charlton, and Mr. Middleton stood together, with Dr. Western a little thrown out from the main body, he added, "There, Skinner, go across Tom Tickler's ground, and tell their worships what they're to do, for they don't know."

Mr. Skinner accordingly crossed over; and, after a brief consultation with the magistrates, decided that it was better all the witnesses should be admitted. It was their usual custom in that part of the county, he said, as it was merely a preparatory investigation, and truth might be generally better obtained by giving general publicity in this stage of the proceedings. Mr. Quatterly did not object, though he shook his head as if he had some doubts of the soundness of the doctrine; and the door having been opened, a mixed multitude entered, consisting of gamekeepers, gardeners, housekeepers, housemaids, Mr. Gibbs, and Miss Mathilda Martin. Mrs. Charlton, however, was somewhat surprised to see her friend Mrs. Windsor come in with the rest, and also Mrs. Windsor's still-room maid, a pretty little girl of about seventeen or eighteen, who, under the peculiar protection of the housekeeper, slept in a little bed-closet off her own room.

"What do you want here, Windsor!" said Mrs. Charlton, in a sharp key.

"To give my evidence, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, respectfully.

"Your evidence!" exclaimed her mistress. "You can know nothing about it."

"I think I do, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper, dryly.

In the meantime the chairs and tables were arranged, under the direction of Mr. Skinner, very much in the way that Mr. Quatterly had proposed. The magistrate's clerk, however, contented himself with an ordinary chair, and, greatly to Mrs. Charlton's surprise and disgust, placed the fourth arm-chair for Mr. Morton with his own hands close to the table, and opposite to the one which he himself was about to occupy, while the magistrates were arranged on the other side. Pens, ink, and paper, having been procured, the clerk seated, and Dr. Western, as the senior magistrate, placed in the chair—the witnesses arranged, some seated, some standing, towards the sides of the room—the investigation commenced with some degree of regularity. But as this investigation is a great and momentous affair, much too important to our tale to be treated of at the fag end of a chapter, we shall ask the reader's kind permission to reserve it for another, which shall be devoted entirely to itself.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

Dr. Western looked around the circle; and then, with a glance at Mr. Quatterly, though his heart was very sad—for he was one of those true Christians who mourn over the crimes of their fellow-creatures—he could not forbear a faint smile at what he regarded as one of the most absurd farces he had ever seen played. Mr. Quatterly caught his eye and laughed merrily, rubbing his small fat white hands as if it were the best joke in the world; for he was more accustomed to such scenes, and had so long given up the hope of mending human beings that he thought he had a right to be amused at their follies, whether solemn or gay.

"Let them go on! Let them go on," said the worthy solicitor, with a nod to the clergyman; "even in a farce truths will come out unexpectedly."

Neither of them knew what serious truths were likely to come out; but Mr. Middleton and especially Mrs. Charlton were both nettled at Dr. Western's smile and Mr. Quatterly's laugh—surprised, indeed, and somewhat apprehensive that they were not quite right, but more

te, " the notes I have taken of the state
igton Hall and the adjacent premises
examined them this morning, on receiv-
mation of the crime that was committed
st night."
ll means," answered Dr. Western ; " I
t nearly ignorant of the whole circum-
"

t is clear," said Mr. Middleton, with a
at sarcastic smile ; and he then pro-
o read from a little note-book the mem-
which he had taken on the spot, com-
, as it went, with that sort of routine
on-places, which is a wonderful engine
ing a reputation for sagacity—with the
Dr. Western listened with horror and
vering his eyes with his hands, as if
that all he felt should appear ; and the
urt, if it could be so called, heard the
deep silence, the recital being well cal-
o waken deep and painful feelings even
w and callous.
detailing the appearance of the rooms
d above, and giving an account of the
of the body of poor Edmonds, and the
ances in which it had been found, as
the footmarks apparent in the stable-
Middleton proceeded to read the deposi-
he housekeeper and the housemaid, and
all that he had heard from poor Ed-
son, and from the people who had first
an entrance into the house that morning.
e had done this, and, as he termed it,
the case to that point, he paused and
ound with the consciousness of having
very neat and compact statement,
g of some credit.
uatterly, however, stepped in to prevent
oving his self-satisfaction too long.

" How so, sir," demanded Mr. Middleton, growing furious.

" By and by, by and by," said Mr. Quatterly, nodding his head ; " let us have the whole case first. Pray, read the deposition, Dr. Western, for, as the warrant I see is dated on that day, it may be of consequence."

Dr. Western put on his spectacles, and read, smiling when he came to the assertion that his young friend was known by another name than that of Morton, and saying, as a commentary, " I am well aware of that fact ; and am afraid I must plead guilty to being an accessory."

When he had gone on to the end, Mr. Middleton proceeded, explaining to his brother magistrates what had taken place, but very much in the tone of a public accuser, rather than that of a justice of the peace. " It is proved by numerous witnesses," he continued, " that this gentleman, whoever he may be, was constantly seen hanging about Mallington Park, and Mallington Hall—that he obtained admission more than once into the house, and examined it most curiously—that he made himself acquainted with the habits of the people upon the estate, and learned at what time they were least upon their guard. It was also proved, or can be proved, that he absented himself from Mallington without any apparent cause, or giving any notice of his departure, from the morning of Saturday till the morning of Sunday, in which interval the robbery and murder were committed. We have seen that the criminals who committed the act must have been well acquainted with the house, and must have gained information of all the usual proceedings of the servants ; that one set of footmarks was small and neat—very like those which would be left by the prisoner's feet : and that he has

back of her chair, her two pretty little feet extended, and her head drooping a little forward, with an air of studied but graceful attention. Slight, very slight, indications of what was passing in her mind floated over her countenance from time to time; but now, when Mr. Middleton turned towards her, saying "Mrs. Charlton, I think —," she rose and advanced towards the table with a melancholy and reluctant air, "I have very little evidence to give, sir," she said, "myself; and as you all know what kindness and attention I have shown to Mr. Morton, and what esteem, and I may say regard, I once entertained for him, you will easily conceive how painful that evidence must be, especially as it is confirmatory of the worst suspicions that are entertained. Mr. Morton has been, as Mr. Middleton says, absent from my house, where he was on a visit, from Saturday morning till this morning at about a quarter to ten—at least, that was the first time I saw him, though I am afraid there is clear proof of his having been in the house previously, without my knowledge. Just before I met him coming up the stairs, and apparently freshly arrived, I was called out of the drawing-room by the upper housemaid, who informed me that she had found in Mr. Morton's room, wrapped up in a bundle, and thrust under the drawers, a sort of carman's frock, stained with blood, and a jacket in the same condition, with a good deal of mud and dirt upon it, but having the whole sleeve still wet with gore. Not having heard, at the time, of the barbarous murder of poor Edmonds, and never dreaming that there was any one in my house who could commit such an act, I took no particular notice, but said that it must be some accident, and ordered her to leave the things where she found them. She is here present, and can give her own testimony. These blood-stained clothes are, I suppose, where they were first discovered!"

"Yes, ma'am," said the housemaid, dropping a courtesy.

"The bloody-minded villain!" murmured Miss Mathilda Martin, giving a look of horror at Morton, whose face certainly testified some astonishment.

"A pretty little concatenation," said Mr. Quatterly. "Pray, sir, let us have the things down. You can take the evidence of the housemaid while they are being brought."

Mrs. Charlton immediately ordered one of the men servants to go up and fetch the bundle, describing where it was to be found, and laying particular stress upon the words "In Mr. Morton's room."

The housemaid was then called upon for her testimony, and fully confirmed Mrs. Charlton's account, adding that she had found the marks of some dirty footsteps up the stairs that morning. She was just concluding when the servant returned with the bundle, which was speedily spread out upon the table.

"Look to Miss Charlton," cried Dr. Western, "she is going to faint."

"No!" said Louisa, rising; "but I wish to give my evidence, terrible as it is."

"Stop a little, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly, patting her gently on the hand. "Do not alarm yourself; this will all be made clear."

"Not without dreadful consequences," said Louisa, taking her seat again, and covering her eyes with her hand.

Each of the magistrates examined the frock and jacket carefully; and then Mr. Middleton, rising, said in a solemn and pompous tone, "Sir Simon, I think this is quite sufficient, and that we are not only justified, but called upon by our duty to commit the prisoner for trial; is it not so, Dr. Western?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered the clergyman; "we can do no such thing, for I happen to know that it is utterly impossible that Mr. Morton can have had any share in this transaction."

Mrs. Charlton fixed her beautiful blue eyes upon him, with not the sweetest expression in the world, and Mr. Quatterly, advancing a step, remarked, "You are in a mighty hurry, worshipful sir. I should have thought it was to-day that the fox-hounds were to meet. One story is very good till another is told, and by your good leaves, you must now hear that other. You have made a very good story of it, and I must say that a capital special pleader was spoiled when nature turned you into a country squire; but now we will proceed in order, if you please, for you have made various assumptions, and thrown out various insinuations, of which I must clear the case."

"I beg, sir, that you would treat the court with respect," exclaimed Mr. Middleton, half rising.

"With the most profound," said Mr. Quatterly, "as deep as a draw-well, though not, perhaps, quite so clear. We will admit almost all your premises; but strip them, if you please, of your deductions. In the first place, the prisoner, for reasons of his own, did choose, in coming down here, to assume a name different from that by which he usually goes, though still one that he has a right to, for his name is Edmond Morton, as I can testify. In the next place he was seen—at least I have no doubt that such was the case—in Mallington Park, speaking with that very notorious person, Jack Williams, who is, I am happy to tell you, now in custody. I have no doubt, either, that their conversation was earnest, nay, perhaps, very vehement; but, as to your assumption that neither of them had any right there, that I have before denied, and do still deny."

"Upon what grounds, sir," demanded Mr. Middleton, beginning to find his ideas getting a little confused.

"Upon the best of all possible grounds," answered Mr. Quatterly, "as you shall hear. Jack Williams, perhaps, had no right there—I am not aware that he had. It is not in evidence, and yet it might be so, for if Mr. Morton invited him he had a right, and therefore your assumption in his case is as unwarranted as in the other. But in regard to Mr. Morton, I not only contend that he had a right, but that nobody on earth, let his condition, state, rank, or calling be what they may, had so good a right to be in Mallington Park, at any hour of the day or night which unto him might seem expedient; for, who can have so good a title to walk in a park—Mallington Park or any other—as the owner thereof!"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton, "has

Mr. Morton purchased the park! I did not know it could be sold."

"You have got a capital case of circumstantial evidence," continued Mr. Quatterly, enjoying the evident consternation and surprise of the profound magistrate, and now I will tell you what you were going to commit a man for. For breaking into his own house, robbing his own plate-room, and shooting his own park-keeper. All these circumstances are very probable! Reason and likelihood go with them. But stay a minute—don't be in a hurry, either on one side or the other. We will have the whole matter clear before we have done with it, if you please. You shall have full evidence that the gentleman now before you is the proprietor of Mallington Park, of Mallington Hall, and of everything that it contains, and that the poor man who lost his life there was his servant, and had been receiving wages from him for some time."

"I told you you were going too fast, Middleton," whispered Sir Simon Upplestone across Dr. Western.

"Pish!" cried Mr. Middleton, in a high state of excitement, and Mr. Quatterly went on, saying, "As to Mr. Morton's absence from this place from Saturday morning till Monday morning, that can be easily accounted for. But it may be sufficient for our present purpose to show where that gentleman was at the time the murder was committed. Now, up to the hour of half-past seven o'clock, he was, with myself and Dr. Western, at the distance of two and twenty miles from Mallington; he then set off in a hack post-chaise, and a dark night, intending, I believe, to sleep here; but the chaise unfortunately broke down some seven miles from this place, about ten o'clock. He reached a public house, called the Hand-in-Hand, about four miles off, towards eleven, and remained there till this morning, at about half-past eight, when he left it to walk hither, without ever quitting the house in the interval. It may seem to the sagacity of your worships somewhat extraordinary that I should come here so well prepared to meet this case; and as justice is a very suspicious person, and to peep out from under her bandage, just to see that nobody is playing her a trick, this fact must be explained also. The truth, then, is, that as Dr. Western and myself were driving over hither from the town of ——, we came upon Mr. Morton's post-chaise, with the axle broken and one of the wheels off, and with a man doing his best to pull it further to pieces for the purpose of mending it. The post-boy who drove it was in the act of giving him instructions to that effect, and by him we were informed that the late tenant of his vehicle had the night before gone on to the Hand-in-Hand, two or three miles further, and, stopping there to water the horses, we had a full, true, and particular account from the landlady of the arrival and departure of her guest, for whom we inquired. There sits Dr. Western, who can corroborate my evidence."

Dr. Western bowed his head and said "Entirely."

"And now," continued Mr. Quatterly; but Mr. Middleton interrupted him, beginning to find that he was in what is usually termed the wrong box. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "if all these circumstances can be so clearly explained, the great weight of suspicion is removed; but still it would be satisfactory to all parties if the whole were cleared up, and, perhaps, Mr. Morton will assign the cause of his meeting with Williams, who is certainly not fit society for a gentleman of property."

"That is very easily explained, sir," replied Morton. "It may be in your recollection, and certainly is in Dr. Western's, that I was knocked down upon the common here, and on that occasion I lost a pocket-book, containing the certificate of my grandfather's marriage, and various other papers of considerable importance. I sent for a Bow-street officer from London, and offered a reward for the recovery of the papers. We found that the parties who possessed them comprehended their value, and thought that I might be induced to give a much larger sum for them than I had offered. They opened a communication with me to that effect, and a place of meeting was appointed, first in Wenlock Wood, and subsequently in Mallington Park. I went to the rendezvous, as agreed upon, alone, and not having been able to come to satisfactory terms with the man Williams, the person who met me there, I was walking back again, when I saw somebody scampering off, who, it now seems, was the worthy gentleman with his fragrant Balm of Trinidad. Such is the plain state of the case, as there are several persons here who know; and if there be anything else that requires explanation, it must be given, as the whole of this matter had better be cleared up at once, especially the placing of these bloody clothes in the room which I lately occupied, for I should wish to be quite sure that malice had no part in such a proceeding."

"Oh! hush, hush," said a faint voice behind him.

But Mr. Middleton replied, without attending to those sounds. "That is just what I was going to observe, sir," he said, "it is very necessary that that fact should be explained. It seems clear to me that these clothes on which the blood is not yet dry, as you perceive, must have belonged to the person who committed the crime. Now, how came they in this house? How came they in that room? That is the question. Soames, you had better call all the servants up, and let my man and Sir Simon's aid you, with any persons you can collect near, to ensure that nobody quits the house without permission."

Mrs. Charlton displayed at this moment a considerable degree of agitation. Whether it was that her emotion proceeded from disappointed rage, or that some faint shadow of the truth crossed her mind, or that she felt apprehensive that any of her servants should have been implicated in so horrible a deed, I cannot tell; but, certain it is, that she moved about with a certain sort of nervous uneasiness in her chair, and seemed twice as if she was about to speak. She did not do so, however, and it was Mr. Quatterly who proceeded as soon as the magistrate had done. "There are one or two other questions, in the first place, I should like to establish," he said; "as the charge has been made against Mr. Morton, it is necessary

to trace his whole course, and therefore I wish to question some of the servants, if you have no objection, gentlemen."

"None whatever," said Sir Simon Upplestone.

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Middleton, courteously.

"I would fain know, then," continued Mr. Quatterly, "who it was that let this gentleman in this morning?"

"I did, sir;" answered the man Wilkinson, stepping forward.

"At what hour was that?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"It might be half-past nine, or a quarter to ten;" was the servant's reply.

"What did Mr. Morton then do?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

"He walked straight up stairs towards the drawing-room," answered Wilkinson, "and met my mistress at the drawing-room door."

"You are quite sure that he did not go up to his room?" said Mr. Quatterly.

"Quite sure," replied the servant, "for I heard him speak to my mistress immediately, and saw them go into the drawing-room together."

"I will only remark," proceeded the solicitor, "that, from the lady's evidence, these articles were found before she met Mr. Morton. I will now ask, however, whether any one saw that gentleman in the house, or about the house, before he was admitted by the footman?"

There was a complete silence; and he went on, "Then, now, Mr. What's-your name, which door did Mr. Morton come in by? There are more doors than one to the house, I suppose."

"He came in by the great gates, sir," answered the man. "The bell rang, and I opened the door of the house, and went out to let him in."

"Then he was actually without the garden-wall when you first saw him," said Mr. Quatterly.

Wilkinson assented, and the lawyer went on, "Was the house-door locked or open?"

"It was locked when I got up, sir," said the house-maid; "but I opened it to sweep out the hall."

"Well, then, my pretty girl," continued the solicitor, "since you are upon your legs, I'll ask you a question or two, with their worships' leave. You said just now that you had found dirty footmarks up the stairs. When did you make that discovery?"

"When first I got up, sir," said the girl; "as soon as I had taken down the shutters off the glass-door into the garden I saw them directly, first upon the mat, and then upon the stairs, and upon the oil-cloth, too, for that matter."

"Then they began at the glass-door going into the garden," said Mr. Quatterly, "and went up stairs. How far could you trace them?"

"Why, as far as Mr. Alfred's room," replied the girl.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, and Dr. Western suddenly raised his head with a look of horror and consternation.

"Were the marks plain there?" demanded the solicitor, still addressing the housemaid.

"There was a piece of mud and some gravel stones," replied the girl; "but they were not so plain as below."

"Could you track them any further?" was the solicitor's next question.

"I didn't remark them," she said.

"Did you go into that room?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No, sir," replied the girl; "I had all the lower part of the house to do first; and when I went up after our breakfast I first went to Mr. Morton's room, to open the windows there. It lies at the other end of the passage, you know."

"No, I don't know," answered Mr. Quatterly. "What may be the distance?"

"Oh, not ten steps," answered the girl. "Mr. Alfred's is just over Miss Louisa's room, and the other is down two doors beyond."

"Was the glass door open or shut?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

"It was locked, but not bolted," said the housemaid.

"I bolted it last night with my own hands," observed the butler, who had entered the room, with the cook and several other servants, a minute or two before; but Mr. Quatterly went on, still addressing the housemaid, "Were you up first in the house?" he demanded.

"No, sir," replied the girl, beginning to get a little bewildered. "I think Mrs. Windsor and the still-room maid were down before me."

"We were," said Mrs. Windsor, "and I found the door unlocked, and locked it till the men got up. I have got more to say when it is wanted; but I think my young lady can tell more than any of us."

Mr. Quatterly looked from the housekeeper to Louisa; but Miss Charlton's eyes were fixed upon her step-mother, who sat opposite, fixed and immovable as a statue, with her face pale and her head bent down. There was a pause for a moment, and then Louisa rose and with somewhat trembling steps advancing to the table, spoke across the table to Dr. Western in a low tone, "You had better take her away," she said; "you had better take her away."

The worthy rector instantly rose, and going round to Mrs. Charlton, he said, "I think it would be best for you to retire, my dear lady. You are not well. This is too much for you."

But Mrs. Charlton instantly raised her head, quickly and sharply exclaiming, "No! It's all false; but I'll hear it all, I'll hear it all."

"Be advised," said Dr. Western, in a tender tone.

"No, I will not," she cried; "I understand it all. Go on, go on," and Dr. Western, retiring from her side, resumed his seat. Louisa had by this time retired to the chair where she had been sitting, and stood trembling beside it with a face very pale, and her lips almost bloodless.

"You said you had evidence to give, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly; "will you give it now, or shall I examine this good lady first?"

Louisa hesitated, but Mrs. Charlton exclaimed vehemently, "I demand that one should be sent out of the room, while the other speaks. They will frame their stories one upon the other, I dare say, if they have not done it already."

Louisa said nothing, but moved towards the

door. Mrs. Windsor, however, replied, "I havn't spoken to Miss Charlton to-day, ma'am—not a word—and have only to tell the truth, though I am afraid what I am going to say may offend her."

"Tell the truth, Mrs. Windsor," said Louisa, turning at the door, "whatever it may be—your so doing will give me no offence, be assured."

"A pretty scene!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a look of contempt.

"Now, ma'am, what have you to depose?" said Sir Simon Upplestone, who was getting heartily tired of the affair, and wished it over.

"Why, merely this, sir," said Mrs. Windsor. "Last night, as I was lying awake in bed, I heard somebody walking in the garden. My room is at the far corner, just over Mr. Morton's. I can't tell what o'clock it was, for I had gone to sleep for a short time when I first laid down; but it could not be very late, for the moon was still far up. However, thinking that it might be somebody that wanted to rob the house, I got up and went to the window, and there I saw a man below on the gravel walk, who seemed to throw some stones up towards Miss Charlton's room. He then called out, but not very loud, "Louisa, Louisa," which is her name. He then seemed to make signs to her to open the window, and presently I could plainly hear it thrown up. After that, he asked her to come down and open the door, for he would come in. After that, I could hear Miss Charlton say she would call one of the servants to let him in; but he answered not to do so on any account; but to come down herself, and he spoke sharply and angrily to her; after which she told him to wait a minute and she would. He seemed very careful to tell her not to wake any one, saying that he did not wish it to be known that he was there. After waiting a minute or two, I could plainly hear the door below unchained, unbolted, and unlocked; and the minute after a foot coming quickly up the stairs, stopped at Mr. Latimer's door, and went in. It did not come as far as Mr. Morton's room, then, but after about two minutes I heard it come along the passage, and some one opened the door of Mr. Morton's room, which is just below mine—the bed-room, not the dressing-room, I mean."

"Ay, it was in the bed-room, under the drawers, I found the things," said the housemaid.

"Whoever it was did not stay there a minute," continued Mrs. Windsor, "and then went back and down stairs. He seemed to stop a minute at Miss Louisa's door, and then went down and out into the garden. As soon as I heard the garden door shut I went back to the window again, and I saw the same man go along the gravel walk, and take the first turning to the left towards the wall. I could see him quite plain, for the night was clear."

She paused, and Mr. Quatterly inquired, "Did you ever see him before?"

"Yes, often," replied Mrs. Windsor, in a firm but solemn tone.

"Do you see him now?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No," replied Mrs. Windsor, fixing her eyes full upon Morton.

"Was he the man before you?" asked Mr. Quatterly again.

"Certainly not," answered the housekeeper.

"Then that is all I have to do with the affair," rejoined the solicitor, taking a step back.

"Then who do you really think it was?" demanded Mr. Middleton.

"I think and fully believe," replied Mrs. Windsor, "that it was Mr. Alfred Latimer. His person, perhaps, I could not swear to, for when first he came he seemed strangely disguised; and though, when he went away, he was differently dressed, his back was towards me; but his voice I could swear to anywhere, and he called Miss Charlton, sister, too, which he sometimes did when—"

"Liar and hussy!" cried Mrs. Charlton, starting up and stamping her foot; but Mr. Middleton, whose views were now altogether changed, exclaimed, "We must not have anything of this kind, madam. The case must be investigated fully. Shall we call in Miss Charlton?"

"I think you had better first inquire how the person was dressed," said Mr. Quatterly, "and also call in the gardener, for footsteps must have been remarked."

All the magistrates assented to this course; and in regard to the apparel of the person she had seen, Mrs. Windsor replied, "That when first she saw him, he was dressed in a carman's frock, such as that which lay on the table; but that, when he went away, he had on a dark coat such as Mr. Latimer usually wore."

A pause ensued, not pleasant even to the somewhat obtuse Mr. Middleton, for he was one of those men of action who are uncommonly puzzled when they have nothing to talk about; and the presence of Mrs. Charlton was a burden upon all the other gentlemen present, who showed no inclination to speak themselves, or to indulge him by listening to anything he could say. Feeling strongly convinced that nothing which could transpire would be aught but painful to Mrs. Charlton's ears, Dr. Western resolved, in charity, to make one more effort to induce her to retire; but when he again approached her chair she repulsed him rudely and scornfully, and the good man sat down, grieved, but not offended.

At length the gardener was brought in and questioned, and seeing the frowning countenance of his mistress, and the grave expression upon every face around, he instantly became possessed by that truly English demon, the fear of committing himself, and sturdily resolved to know nothing. Mr. Middleton, however, piqued himself on that art—the meanest of all forensic tricks—the art of cross-examination; and as Mr. Quatterly rested satisfied with having cleared his client, and did not show any disposition to assist or interfere, the worthy magistrate took the task upon himself.

"Pray, gardener," he said, "what did you remark particular in the garden this morning when you first came in."

"Nothing particular, sir," replied the gardener steadily.

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Middleton, with a laugh; "from what I have seen of the garden, I know that you never look to anything but the cabbage-beds; but you can at least say whether you saw anything particular in them."

"I look to every part of the garden," replied the man, nettled—"cabbage-beds too, though

the under-gardener has more to do with them; but I see that they are all right, morning and evening."

"We had better send for the under-gardener," said Mr. Middleton, aloud. "We shall gain no information from this fellow; he is clearly incompetent. You take no notice of the bowling-green or the gravel-walks, I suppose, my good man; it's the under-gardener who mows and rolls them, I suppose."

"Much you know about it!" answered the gardener. "There's no bowling-green here; and as to the gravel walks, though he rolls them, I sees when they want rolling. Why, it is only within the last blessed half-hour that I ordered him to roll the gravel under the windows, and up the great straight walk, and the little serpentine, to take out the foot-marks."

"Your own foot-marks!" said Mr. Middleton, in an indifferent tone. "No one has been out in the garden but yourself and the man, I understand."

"Some one has, since last night," said the gardener, "that I can swear, for there were prints all the way along that were neither mine nor his'n;" and having been led thus far, the poor fellow was soon driven to give an accurate description of the traces of Alfred Latimer's feet from the wall to the house and back again. He was then dismissed, with a warning neither to go near the footsteps himself nor to suffer the under-gardener to roll them out if it were not done already; and then Louisa Charlton was summoned to give her evidence, Mr. Middleton merely observing upon the gardener's testimony, "Exactly the same as those of the smaller prints at Mallington Hall."

Louisa entered more calmly than she had departed. She was still very pale, and her steps still wavered. Her heart, too, sank, and she felt afraid that her voice would fail her when she came to speak; but she had had time for thought, she had had time to ask herself what was her duty, and the voice within at once answered, "To tell the plain truth." It was a terrible thing indeed to bear any part in destroying one whose young years had been spent under the same roof with herself, who had been accustomed to call her sister, whom she had often aided and befriended, for whose willfulness and vices she had often mourned—but still she felt that she must not let such feelings take from her her truth; and, though she resolved not to offer aught in evidence against him that was not drawn from her by questions, yet she was determined to answer each question truly, without a shadow of turning.

If, however, she expected to escape close questioning, she was mistaken; for as soon as she entered, Dr. Western having first requested her to take a seat, Mr. Middleton proceeded to interrogate her in a way that left no opportunity of passing aught over in silence, taking as a text book Mrs. Windsor's account; and having gained the admission that some one had come under the window a little after twelve, had thrown up some pebbles against it, and called her by name, he in plain terms directed her to state all that had occurred between that period and her retiring to rest. Louisa told all truly, but as succinctly as possible, often stopped and questioned as she went, and still giving true and straightforward answers, till at length just as she was replying that Alfred Latimer was dressed when he came in a carman's frock—the very one, she believed, upon the table—Mrs. Charlton, seeing that the proofs against her unhappy son were all too clear, and that, in her own malignity and covetousness, she had been the person to bring them all to light, exclaimed almost with a shriek, "Oh, treacherous girl!" and in a vain effort to reach the door fell fainting almost at Mr. Morton's feet.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

The fainting of Mrs. Charlton caused, as may be supposed, a good deal of confusion in the little court of inquiry held in her back drawing-room; and there were few who did not feel some degree of pity for her situation. Miss Mathilda Martin, indeed, muttered something about pride having a fall, and declared that she had always known how it would be; but sympathy was the prevailing feeling amongst the rest of those assembled, and Morton himself raised her, and bore her to the sofa in the next room. Louisa stood by her, and, aided by the servants, used all the ordinary means to recall her to consciousness; but when she began to revive, and good Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, who had been sent for, appeared, Dr. Western, who had long before this acquired a deep insight into Mrs. Charlton's nature, took Louisa by the hand, saying, "Come away, my love. You will still be wanted to give further evidence, and your presence here will only irritate her."

Louisa was well aware that what he said was true, but yet she would fain have remained to proffer her services at least. Mr. Middleton, however, interfered, saying, "Leave her with Mr. Nethersole, Miss Charlton, and let us return to business. We may want you, Nethersole, after you have done here; so just step in when the lady has recovered."

When once set forms of any kind are disarranged, it is a very difficult thing to get them into order again; and bodies of men thrown by any little circumstance into confusion, are very like certain birds which were once very common in England, and are still occasionally seen in the less cultivated parts of the country. These are called ruffs and rees, and very beautiful and graceful birds they are; but they have the extraordinary habit that as soon as a flight has alighted each bird forms for itself a peculiar circle, and runs round therein upon its long legs with very great rapidity. As long as each keeps to its own district, all goes on as harmoniously as in the planetary system; but the moment that any one of them, either from accident, fright, carelessness, or that perversity which is nearly as common amongst birds as amongst human beings, ventures into the circle of his neighbor, everything becomes confusion, and a general battle commences, during which hundreds of them are taken at a time.

Now, the fainting of Mrs. Charlton, like one of the ruffs getting out of his place, threw magistrates, solicitors, constables, and witnesses all out of their orbits, and for at least a quarter of an hour after they had returned to the room,

where the investigation had been going on, a confused, desultory, gabbling conversation took place, of which it is impossible to give any adequate description. Mr. Middleton talked in a loud voice with Mr. Skinner and Mr. Quatterly, the latter of whom treated him with various nursery rhymes, and sundry puns, till Mr. Middleton was left in a state of doubt as to whether he was mad, or laughing at him. Dr. Western spoke in a low voice with Morton and Louisa; Mr. Soames, in very choice English, of its own particular kind, harangued the butler and footman; and Miss Mathilda Martin expatiated to the female servants upon her own wisdom, wit, and discrimination, informing them that she had foreseen the whole affair, and told Mr. Middleton all about it, before it began—an assertion the truth of which the reader has had the means of discovering. She added sundry dry and pungent insinuations regarding Mrs. Charlton, which were not unpalatable to most of her hearers; for, strange to say, notwithstanding all her grace and sweetness, Mrs. Charlton was not very much loved and respected by any of her household. False money may deceive for a *time*; but keep it for a while in your pocket, and the gilding is sure to wear off.

The only person who kept silence in the room was Mrs. Windsor, and she, as usual, looked quietly about her, and made up her mind as to what was to be done, listening to everybody with decent attention, and catching words and sentences here and there, which were not intended for her ear.

The first thing that had a tendency to give order to this chaos was the entrance of Mr. Nethersole; but even he, important personage as he was, had to move through the crowd unattended to, till he called attention by saying, "Ahem! Mr. Middleton. Ahem! Sir Simon. Did you wish for my presence, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly," said Mr. Middleton; "but really I think we had better take our places again."

"How did you leave Mrs. Charlton?" demanded Dr. Western, as the magistrates moved towards their seats.

"Pretty well, pretty well," replied the surgeon, with a mysterious air. "She seems in great grief, though; a slight disposition to hysteria coming on, so I have administered a few drops of the fetid spirit of ammonia, and shall follow it up by-and-by with some sulphuric æther. Poor dear lady, I have had her removed to her own room, and recommended the recumbent position, as she seems in great grief."

"Is that a good remedy for grief, doctor?" asked Mr. Quatterly. "I know that by the vulgar, the *fruges consumere nati*, lying is considered a remedy for many evils, but I did not know it was for grief."

Mr. Nethersole stared, and Dr. Western, with a melancholy shake of the head, and his eyes bent down, as if speaking to himself more than to any one else, said, "Well may she be grieved! these are the effects of indulgence and neglect."

"Now let us to business," said Mr. Middleton. "There are one or two other questions, Miss Charlton, which I wish to ask you before we proceed with Mr. Nethersole's evidence. Be so kind as to take that seat again, and we shall soon have done. In the first place, are you quite sure and certain, beyond all doubt and dubitation whatever, that the person to whom you gave admittance last night was absolutely and distinctly Mr. Alfred Latimer."

"I am but too certain, sir," replied Louisa, in a low and sad, but clear tone.

"It was quite dark at the time," said Mr. Middleton, anxious to show his acumen; "the person you saw was disguised, that is to say, clothed in unusual apparel, if it was Mr. Latimer; the moon, at that time, must have been, I think, at the southern angle of the house, so as not to shine in at the door. Now, could you see his face so distinctly as to be able to swear that it was he?"

"I took one of the candles from my dressing-table," answered Louisa, "and he took it out of my hand at the door, so that I could not help seeing his face. Indeed, sir, I should be but too willing to doubt, were it possible."

"Don't be frightened, my dear young lady, don't be frightened," said Mr. Middleton; "we only wish to make the whole matter quite clear, that is all. He took the candle from you, you say. Did he bring it back again to you when he went away?"

"He might bring it to my door, perhaps," replied Louisa; "but I would not let him in, for I was frightened at his appearance and manner, and at the time thought he had gone mad."

"Did he speak to you at the door of your room, my dear?" asked Dr. Western.

"He spoke through the door," said Louisa, "and bade me tell no one that he had been here."

"Now let the housemaid and the constable go up to Mr. Alfred Latimer's room, and examine two things—first, whether there is there a candlestick belonging to Miss Charlton's dressing-table. I suppose you will know it, young woman?"

"Oh dear, yes, sir," said the housemaid, "it is quite different from the others in the house."

"And next let them see if they can trace the steps there," continued Mr. Middleton. "Have you swept it out yet, young woman?"

"No, your worship," replied the housemaid, "I have not been in it yet at all, because—"

"Never mind because," said Mr. Middleton; "we don't want any becauses. Go away with the constable. Bring down an accurate report, Soames, of all that you see and find.—Now, Mr. Nethersole, we will take your evidence, if you please."

Mr. Nethersole advanced, and Mr. Middleton proceeded to inquire whether he had visited the Hall and examined the body of poor Edmonds, the park-keeper. Having replied that he had, he was directed to state what remarks he had made, and what he supposed to be the cause of his death, though Mr. Quatterly justly observed that this was evidence rather for the coroner's inquest than the magistrates.

"I found a wound," he said, "in both sides of the head, which, from the appearance it presented was caused by a pistol ball fired from the right side, where it cut the temporal artery and passed through the anterior lobe of the brain, finding exit on the right side, about two inches above the eyebrow."

Sir Simon Upplestone had said nothing for some time, and he owned to himself that Mr. Middleton was the dominant spirit; but still he

thought he ought to have his share of importance, and might as well ask a solemn question too, to throw light or darkness on the matter, as the case might be. "Pray, Mr. Nethersole," he said, "did you use any means of resuscitation?"

There are some questions so utterly confounding that the wit of the most ingenious man on earth cannot find a ready answer to them, and Mr. Nethersole, with the most profound respect for the worthy baronet, and every desire to answer as fast as possible, could only stare in silence for a full minute, at being asked whether he had attempted to restore a man to life who had been shot through and through the head nearly twelve hours before.

"We have an authentic record," said Mr. Quatterly, in a low voice, "of a man having burnt his mouth by eating cold plum porridge, and of another man having bitten his own nose off, so that it is clear nothing is impossible; and therefore, whatever others may think, I hold the question to be a very sensible one."

"My dear sir, I can't jest upon the subject," said Morton, to whom the words were addressed. But, as Sir Simon Upplestone evidently waited for an answer, Mr. Nethersole at last made shift to say, "Why, no, Sir Simon, I did not think it would be of any avail, for I never knew a man to recover with his brains blown out; and, besides, the poor fellow had been dead many hours, the limbs were quite rigid, so it could have answered no purpose."

"I think I would have tried something," said Sir Simon, sagely.

Mr. Middleton contrived to occupy about five minutes more with questions of somewhat greater sagacity, but not much more pertinence; and at the end of that time the constable and the housemaid recappeared.

"Well, Soames, well," cried Mr. Middleton, "what have you discovered?"

"Why, I found this here candlestick, your worship," answered the constable, putting one down on the table. "It's burnt out in the socket, you see, sir, and scattered all the wax about. It was a-top of the drawers in Mr. Latimer's room. It might have set the house a-fire. Then, as to the footsteps, we traced two or three of them in straight from the door up to the drawers, and one of the drawers had been pulled open, for we saw the mark of a hand upon it, somewhat dirty, and not quite dry, and the same is on the candlestick, if you'll look; and then on the floor, tumbled down, with the top off, was a hat-box, which the girl says had a new hat in it yesterday; but the hat is gone now, howsoever; and there were two finger-marks on the top."

"Did you find any steps towards Mr. Morton's room?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"Why, no, sir," said the constable; "but the girl says she swept the passage and the room. We found nothing particklar there, though I went over it, just to see underneath the drawers, where the bundle had been stowed away; the carpet was somewhat bloody—not much, just a scratch of blood, like; but that shows that the job couldn't have been long done, or the things would have been dry."

"Very true, very true," said Mr. Middleton; and, turning to Morton, he said, "I think, sir, the evidence given clears you of all suspicion."

"Then you'll have the goodness to dismiss the warrant," said Mr. Quatterly.

"I think we ought to have evidence," said Sir Simon Upplestone, "that the gentleman is really the proprietor of Mallington Hall, for on that rests a great deal of the matter."

"Not a whit," replied Mr. Quatterly. "If he had no other property than a mortgage on the moon there is not one suspicious circumstance against him. But the evidence you shall have—the evidence you shall have. There is your own clerk, a very respectable solicitor, whom you all know. He can testify to the fact."

"I beg leave to depose," said Mr. Skinner, rising and speaking with due deliberation, "that this gentleman, commonly called and known by, in these parts, the name of Mr. Morton, is the undoubted proprietor of Mallington Hall, and the Mallington Park estate, together with all the goods, chattels, household furniture, books, pictures, plate, and appurtenances therein contained, or belonging thereto;" and down he sat, having said exactly what he thought sufficient, and not one word more.

Sir Simon Upplestone was frustrated; for, if truth must be told, a certain very ticklish propensity, easily excited in human beings, and called curiosity, was the true motive of the question he had put. He wanted to know, in short, who Mr. Morton was, and what, and all about him; and Mr. Quatterly saw through and through him as if he had been a piece of rock crystal. Not seeing, however, any new channel open for further inquiries, at least publicly, he determined, as the only probable chance of getting information, to cross-examine Mr. Skinner in private upon the very first opportunity, and consented that the warrant against Mr. Morton should be discharged forthwith.

"And now, Dr. Western," said Mr. Quatterly, "I think, my very reverend friend, that it will be expedient for you to inform your worshipful brethren of the facts which came to our knowledge this morning regarding two worthy gentlemen named Thomas Brown and John Williams, and also in regard to another personage called Mr. Alfred Latimer, against whom a slight case of suspicion has been made out this morning. Your worships will remark that I say slight; because it is very slight indeed, and though from the temper of the court it is evident that the young gentleman does not appear in a very favorable light, yet it must be recollected that nothing has been proved against him whatsoever as yet; but that he entered his own mother's house clandestinely and in disguise on the same night that this unhappy event occurred. The disguise, however, might have been assumed from a thousand different causes; the clandestine mode of his coming might be accounted for in various ways; and the blood which was found upon the clothes supposed to be cast off by him may be that of a hare, of a rabbit, or a barn-door fowl, for aught we know to the contrary.

"There, my dear," he continued, turning to Louisa, "go and tell that to your step-mother, it may be some comfort to her; and as for yourself, your white face and trembling hand shows that you have had quite enough of this business already."

Louisa felt that it was indeed as he said,

and rose to depart, and Morton very naturally accompanied her for a short time from the room —not, indeed, that he had the slightest intention of visiting Mrs. Charlton, as he was well aware that in the existing state of that lady's mind his presence was not likely to be peculiarly agreeable to her. It might be, though I will not pretend to say that it was, that Morton wished to have a few minutes' conversation with a person who was very dear to him; but at all events I shall beg leave to take advantage of their absence to detail the events to which Mr. Quatterly referred—not exactly in Dr. Western's own words, which were somewhat prolix, from the necessity of explaining to his brother magistrates many particulars with which the reader is already acquainted.

CHAPTER LXXV.

When last we left Dr. Western and worthy Mr. Quatterly, previous to bringing them suddenly and unexpectedly to Mallington, where they have been acting and speaking throughout the last three chapters, they were standing before the small gate of the church of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the town of—*quod versu dicitur non est.* They were left there, too, to their own speculations; for, as may be remembered, the excellent constable, Mr. Higginthorp, had set off with almost superhuman velocity, to take hold of the collar of Jack Williams. Now, Mr. Higginthorp was a strong man—a very strong man indeed, considering his peculiar conformation, but that conformation gave him a tendency to topple over when any strong force was applied to the superior extremity of his person, which he was conscious of; and though it was as difficult to make Mr. Higginthorp let go his hold when once he had taken it, as a bull-dog or a shark, yet a sudden wrench, such as might be caused by a knock-down blow, sometimes had slipped a fustian jacket out of his fingers; and, therefore, when he saw his lean confederate coming slowly down the next street as he crossed it like a steam engine, he made him a sharp sign to follow, resolved "to make assurance doubly sure, and take a bond of fate," though he would take no bail but leg bail of Jack Williams.

Neddy—for we know the sub-constable by no other name—was quick at taking a hint, and he followed not so rapidly, indeed, as Mr. Higginthorp ran, but with considerable speed, so that he had entered the main street of the town, and could see clear into the market-place when his superior had reached the latter. He there saw his superior slacken his pace, advance quietly behind two personages who were just turning into the door of the chief inn, and suddenly seize the shorter of the two by the collar of his coat. The person whom he thus grasped, without more ado, turned round and instantly struck the constable a blow between the eyes, which overset his bulk, and down Mr. Higginthorp went; but so firm was his grasp of the stout cloth, that down went Jack Williams upon him; and fixed like a vice tightly screwed, the constable held on with his right hand, while with his left, rolling over and tumbling in the kennel, he contrived with quiet and pertinacious resolution to extract from the wide open pocket of his coat a pair of iron handcuffs, which, with marvelous dexterity, he essayed to slip over the wrists of his destined prey even in the midst of the fierce struggle that was going on between them. At the same time he shouted loud and strong, "Help, in the king's name. I calls upon all good men to aid and abet me in getting seizure of this here felon!"

The landlord of the inn had retired into his domicile some five minutes before, after taking a draught of the morning air at the door, to get his breakfast; and one of the waiters and a helper in the stable, who had been standing under the arch, and saw the commencement of the affray, having no vocation for aiding constables, retreated immediately. But a stout shopkeeper of the town, and a hump-backed man who was walking with him, ran up and stopped Brown just as he was beating a retreat from what he conceived to be a lost battle; and Neddy coming up, well disciplined by Mr. Higginthorp, cast himself on the back of Jack Williams, and, directing his efforts to the one sole object of getting the handcuffs on his wrists, soon saw him powerless in his upper limbs.

"What the devil do you mean by attacking me in this way?" cried Jack Williams, whose policy now was to assume a different tone from that of resistance; "if you are a constable why did you not tell me so?"

"Oh, we always secures our man first, and then we tells him," answered Mr. Higginthorp. "There's more lost nor gained at any time by talking, Mr. Williams. I say, Jack, that was a wiper you gave me between the eyes. Winegar-like, it makes 'em tingle. But, that's all over; so now be quiet and easy, and come along, like two respectable gentlemen. Their wushipe want a bit of a talk with you about that there job last night at Mallington Hall."

But Jack Williams was not so easily led as young Blackmore, and he turned round his head to Brown, closing his teeth fast, and slightly raising his under lip, which the other received as a warning to be silent; and not being of an extremely loquacious disposition, signified his approval of the course recommended by a nod.

"Well, sir," said Williams, with an air of as much dignity as could have been assumed by a captive prince, "I do not know what you are talking of, but if you have any charge against me, and are really a constable, you must take me in tow, and bring me to what port you like."

"'Any port's good in a storm,' they says, Jack," answered Mr. Higginthorp; "and so, as this here is blusterous weather for you, why I'll just steer you to the nearest harbor, which is Mr. Muzzlewell's justice-room. You'll find friends there, I'm thinking, and that's always mighty pleasant for the misfortunate."

"Certainly," replied Jack Williams, dryly, "only I'm not so *misfortunate* as you think, Master Constable, and you may be more so than you know of for the assault you have committed on me—so look to yourself."

"I always does," answered Mr. Higginthorp, "and a little to other folks too. But what signifies talking? Come along. I'll trouble you, Mr. Gillaghan, jeest to look arter that ere fellow along with Neddy—many thanks for lending a

hand to grab him. I'll take care o' this 'un; and we won't trouble you far.'

Thus saying, he walked on by the side of Williams, who went on calmly and quietly enough, revolving in his own mind the course to be pursued in the present emergency, and considering every means of escape that could suggest itself to a fertile imagination, long practised in extracting hope, and even success, from the most adverse circumstances. Had he been alone, he would have entertained no apprehension—fear, indeed, he entertained none, for, both by habit of danger and by corporeal temperament, he was incapable of terror. But in the present instance, he well knew that the folly or the indiscretion of any of those who were more or less his accomplices might produce a result fatal to himself and them; and his chief trust was that Alfred Latimer might be beyond pursuit, that Maltby might not be suspected, and that the habitual taciturnity of Brown might be only increased by the peril in which he stood. How suspicion had fallen upon himself, and how the crime he had committed had been so soon discovered, and the pursuit instituted so rapidly, puzzled him a little, and made him doubt that his person had been sufficiently disguised; but he resolved to wait and watch, to assume the air of perfect innocence and unconsciousness against any proofs, and studiously to seek for some means of escape from thraldom, even to the last. In some respects he had provided against all contingencies; he had, as we have seen, come into the town from the side opposite to Mallington; he had taken care that the ill-gotten wealth which he and Brown possessed should be concealed where little probability existed of its being discovered by other eyes than their own; and he had laid out with Brown and Alfred Latimer a story which they were all to tell in case of difficulty. Fortunately for his purpose, that story had at least some fact in it, and all he doubted was that Brown might be able to stand a cross-examination in regard to all the details.

Such were the thoughts that occupied him as he walked on in the handcuffs towards the house of the worthy and worshipful Mr. Muzzlewell; and as the streets of the town were not very crowded at that hour, even by urchins, he passed without the unpleasant accessory of a mob at his heels. Several persons were collected round the door, amongst whom was the clerk, waiting for admission, and some little bustle, as not unfrequently happens, took place when the two prisoners were led on through the midst. Williams had hitherto been kept at a distance from Brown, but here they were for an instant brought close together, and the former immediately took advantage of it to whisper, "The story we agreed upon in every particular!"

The next moment Williams was taken forward, and found himself suddenly in the presence of two of the magistrates of the town, while on the right of Mr. Muzzlewell appeared Dr. Western, and on the left of the other magistrate, Mr. Quatterly. With Dr. Western Jack Williams was unfortunately too well acquainted, having been compelled to visit him in his magisterial capacity more than once; but of the features of Mr. Quatterly he knew nothing, and consequently set him down as one of the other magistrates of the town. Mr. Muzzlewell began the examination in the true justice of peace style of that day by exclaiming, "Well, prisoner, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, sir," answered Jack Williams sharply; "but that I think it devilish hard a man can't walk along the streets peaceably and honestly without being collared by a constable, just, I suppose, because at one time of my life, when I was a mere boy, I was fond of a little poaching; but if there is law in the land I'll know whether you've all a right to do this."

Frustrated in this quarter, Mr. Muzzlewell had recourse to the constable. "Well, Higginthorp," he said, "what have you got to say to this? Why did you take this man in charge?"

"Why, your worship," said the constable, "I took him in charge and the fellow as was with him, on account of a deposition made this morning by a 'cessory before the fack in regard to a notorious robbery as was to have been committed last night at a place called Mallington Hall, in this county."

"As was to have been committed!" said Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly in the same breath.

"Pray, Mr. Muzzlewell," continued the reverend gentleman, "does your constable mean to say that the robbery was not committed, then?"

"'Pon my life, I don't know what he means to say," replied Mr. Muzzlewell, with a look of bewilderment; "there he is, ask him."

"I mean to say, your worship," said Mr. Higginthorp, taking the explanatory part of the matter upon himself, "that it was to have been committed, and mought have been committed too, for that matter, for aught that I can say; but of that I knows nothing. But the charge I brings against the prisoners is, that whether they were guilty of robbery or not, that it is clear by the deposition of a 'cessory before the fack, that they were compounding a felony."

Mr. Quatterly gave a merry glance along the bench, and chuckled heartily, and seeing that Dr. Western was really and truly, in the simplicity of his heart, at a complete loss to know what the constable meant, and only more darkened by his explanation than he had been by his statement, he observed aloud, "I suppose by compounding of felony, he means laying a scheme to rob a house."

"That's it! You've hit it, my buck!" cried Mr. Higginthorp. "But what does it signify talking, there's the deposition taken down by myself, and witnessed by Neddy. There you can read it for yourselves. 'The deposition of John Blackmore, gardener'—I've got the boy in the lock-up, and we can examine him presently; and mind, I used no inducements; I told him all the time he was as likely to be hanged as not."

The paper was handed to the magistrates, and by the magistrates to their clerk, who proceeded to read it in a dosy, nasal, and rather solemn tone, which brought out all the rich absurdities of Mr. Higginthorp's peculiar style and orthography in the most prominent manner. Mr. Quatterly was enchanted. He had heard many curious specimens of composition before; but he had never met with anything equal to the present. But the whole business seemed

so absurd, that it produced on his mind an opinion rather favorable to the prisoners than otherwise, especially as he knew from what he had seen of Mr. Higginthorp's practice, on the preceding night, that he was a person very likely to use somewhat extraordinary measures to extract from young John Blackmore the confession before them.

As soon as Williams had heard it read, and perceived the whole and sole grounds upon which his apprehension had taken place, he saw the necessity of making a bold and vigorous effort to slip out from amongst the claws of justice before fresh and corroborative facts were brought against him. Assuming, therefore, a frank and innocent tone, he exclaimed, "It's all a lie—that is to say, not altogether a lie either, for there is some truth in it. There was some talk of there being a great lot of money in Mallington Hall, and what people might get by breaking in. But I remember quite well that I said that most likely they'd get their necks twisted if they did. Why the devil didn't the boy put that down? Well, then, it's true enough that I did send the young blackguard over on horseback to tell Mr. Latimer that all the business was found out about his having carried off Mr. Morton from Mallington, and that the story of his being a madman wouldn't do, so that his whole scheme was blown to pieces like a burst bomb-shell. And I did come over myself, with Tom Brown here, to help him out of the scrape, for I knew that that cowardly scoundrel called Tankerville would only get him in farther and farther. But we didn't come all the way in a gig, though, for the horse got rusty, and backed by a chalk pit on the road, and Tom and I had just time to get out before the devil went over, gig and all, and there they lie now, if the knackers havn't got hold of them."

"And pray what did you do after you came to Mr. Latimer?" asked Dr. Western. "This was on Saturday night, I think."

"Yes, sir," answered Williams; "Saturday night, hard upon twelve. Why, when I got to Mr. Latimer's, I found him in a great fright from the message I had sent him over, and expecting to have the magistrates upon him every minute, and yet as he had promised to marry poor Lucy Edmonds on this morning—which he did, by the way, and I was present at the wedding, which wasn't like as if I had committed a robbery last night."

"Certainly not," said Dr. Western

"Well, your reverence," continued Williams, "I told him the best plan was for him to come away with me and Brown at once, and to have Mr. Morton let out the next morning, and, then, perhaps, there would be no more said about it; and I told him I would show him where he could stay over Sunday, and he could come back early on Monday morning and marry Lucy, and be off again. But I didn't take him down Mallington way, you may be sure, when I wanted to get him out of your way, sir. We went t'other side, quite away towards London, and stayed all night at the Wheatsheaf, not far this side of St. Albans. Then this morning we came back again. We set off about four o'clock, and walked along till just about day break, or thereabouts; we stopped at the Chequers, a mile or so upon the road, and had a glass of ale each. You can send and ask the landlord — I don't know what his name is. Well, then, there's another thing I remember, which will show that I am telling truth. Just coming into the town from the London side, there's a hosier's shop, and the man of the shop was opening it with his boy as we came by, and we stopped for a minute to ask him what was the best inn for us to go to, because Mr. Latimer didn't choose to go home, for fear of being caught about Mr. Morton's business, and I am sure the hosier will remember seeing us, for he looked at us devilish hard."

"We will send for these two men—the landlord of the Chequers, and Mr. Gimp, the hosier," answered Mr. Muzzlewell; and then he added, with a warning shake of the head, "Higginthorp, Higginthorp! you have been too sharp again, I fancy."

But at the same time Mr. Quatterly took out his watch, and observing to Dr. Western that it was quite time they should be gone, turned round to hold a short conversation with the magistrates in regard to what was to be done.

"If I may be permitted to suggest, gentlemen, as I term it," said Mr. Quatterly, "the best plan for you to follow is to take all the evidence you can get here, and then to remand the prisoners till to-morrow for further information. The man tells his story well; but there's something—something—something that I don't like;" and he shook his head sagaciously at each something very suspiciously. "However, as Dr. Western and I are going direct to Mallington, we can, within six hours at the farthest, send you information whether Mallington Hall has really been robbed or not; and it will be no great harm to remand the two worthy gentlemen till to-morrow morning."

Thus speaking, Mr. Quatterly, accompanied by Dr. Western, withdrew, the magistrates promising to follow all his suggestions.

Oh, promises, promises! piecrust is adamant to you, and puff-paste is not more fragile. Soon after Mr. Quatterly and Dr. Western had rolled out of the town, the landlord of the Chequers, Mr. Gimp, the hosier, and young John Blackmore himself were brought down to the magistrates' room. The first two fully corroborated Williams's statement, and the third, on being confronted with the prisoners, was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and on Williams demanding in a stern tone, "What the devil he meant by telling such lies of him," John Blackmore burst into tears like a great baby, declared that he had thought it was the intention of Mr. Higginthorp to starve him to death, and that he had made the deposition for the sake of a roll and a basin of cocoa.

In vain Mr. Higginthorp vowed and protested that he had used no inducements. He was too well known as a sharp practitioner for his word to be fully believed, and the magistrates, forgetting their promise to Mr. Quatterly, and thinking the case quite clear, ordered Williams and Brown immediately to be set at liberty, and young John Blackmore to be set in the stocks, an implement which was still in use at that time

CHAPTER LXXVI.

"KNOWLEDGE is power," said Lord Bacon; and many have said so since; but never was there propounded by human tongue an axiom more calculated to mislead. Adam and Eve found it so when first the tempter tried the same argument with them, and they believed him; every one of their children have found it so since; and Bacon himself, before he had done, discovered the fallacy when he saw weaker and less instructed minds triumph over one of the greatest that ever was possessed by man. Even could the mortal creature rob the Almighty Creator of one of his attributes, would that imply that he could rob him of all, and that power to use it would be commensurate with the knowledge obtained? Even in its ordinary application to the matters of this earth the dictum breaks down under us, whichever way we turn it. History, reason, experience, all show us its inapplicability; and that, let man's knowledge be what it may, there is ever an overruling principle, in action, which limits its operation within a prescribed range, and, as if to reprove the pride of science, snatches from it the rod of power at the moment least expected. History—sad history, the saddest of all things—shows us, alas! that none have possessed less real power over the minds of their contemporaries than those who were most in advance, in point of knowledge, of the age in which they lived; and the rack, and the scourge, and the dungeon walls, bear evidence how little power there is in knowledge against the force of circumstances.

The knowledge that we possess, too, is always so small in amount, so deficient in one part or another, that but too often it leads us to act in the worst possible direction. If our minds possess the faculty of separating the important from the unimportant in any question that is before us, of sifting the corn from the chaff, the gold from the sand, and taking out the true from amidst the false, how seldom is it that we obtain the whole that is true! In other words, how seldom is it that everything which affects the question is before us. It is still a broken chain, dear reader, and imagination supplies the missing links with packthread.

Dr. Western told his story truly and fully; but he could tell no more than he knew, and the magistrates naturally concluded that, as he himself believed, Jack Williams and Thomas Brown were safely lodged in custody in the little town of ——. Where were they by the time that Dr. Western had finished his statement? That you shall hear by and by. The personage, however, against whom the strongest motives for suspicion existed was evidently at liberty, and probably afar, and it was proposed that he should be immediately pursued. Neither Mr. Quatterly, however, nor the worthy rector had heard the directions given to the post-boy who drove Alfred Latimer and his poor bride; it was necessary, therefore, to despatch information to the magistrates of —— of all that had been discovered at Mallington; and it was proposed to mount Harry Soames on horseback and send him off at once. But the constable was growing hungry, and, stepping forward, he observed that Bill Maltby was already in custody; that he certainly knew something of the affair, and as he did not think that he was a principal, it was very probable he would give valuable information if rightly questioned. A nice piece of toasted cheese in a mousetrap never proved more tempting to one of the sleek long-tailed denizens of the skirting-board than did this suggestion to Mr. Middleton. He declared that they ought not to send over incomplete information when they had the means of rendering it perfect, and though Mr. Quatterly urged that delays were dangerous, and hinted that there was never any knowing what country magistrates might do, having a shrewd suspicion that worthy Mr. Muzzlewell would mismanage the affair, yet Mr. Middleton persisted in his desire to examine Bill Maltby, and Sir Simon Upplestone, ever bearing in mind that the foxhounds would meet the next morning, determined to seize the precious moment to insure that the following day was not wasted on magisterial business when so much more important avocations were before him in the field. Mr. Quatterly rubbed his hands, chuckled, and looked at his friend Morton with a sly glance, whispering

"Bye, baby bunting,
Daddy's gone a hunting."

But, notwithstanding jest or remonstrance, Harry Soames was sent to bring Bill Maltby before the magistrates, who amused themselves during the twenty minutes he was gone by discussing the whole particulars of the affair to very little purpose; while Dr. Western, sometimes meditative over the fearful events that had occurred, tracing in the wild demeanor which he had remarked in Alfred Latimer the consciousness of his crime, and sometimes conversing with Morton in a low voice, occasionally smiling faintly and sadly as any of the absurdities which had mingled with the horrors awakened in him that sense of the ridiculous which had originally been strong within him.

At the end of the time I have mentioned, Maltby was brought into the room, handcuffed, pale in the face, and bearing craven in every line and feature. Harry Soames had taken care to frighten him well as he came, eager, for his own credit's sake, to drive him to confession. In the tenderest and most friendly manner he had insinuated everything that was likely to create fear. He had talked of hanging, had expatiated upon gallowses; he had spoken a whole essay upon ropes. Judges, juries, counsel, the black cap, the condemned sermon, the pinioning for execution, were all passed in review; and, as they walked along, he ended by giving a full, true, and particular account of the last trial and execution he had seen, adding, that one of the three fellows whom he had seen kicking in a noose for nearly an hour, might have saved himself that unpleasant sort of dance if he had been wise enough to turn king's evidence at once. He wanted to do afterwards, the constable said, but it was too late, and they did without him. The dence was not very complete, indeed, but luc they had got a hanging judge and a hang jury, who went lightly over any little flaws, condemned the fellows notwithstanding.

Thus prepared, Maltby appeared before magistrates with his heart in the soles of

feet, and Mr. Middleton immediately commenced the examination in the usual style, "Pray, Mr. Maltby," he said, "give an account of yourself from half-past eleven o'clock last night till one o'clock this morning!"

Bill Maltby was silent, not from anything like obstinacy, but from the very opposite condition of mind—doubt and hesitation.

"Do you choose to answer, or do you not, sir?" demanded Mr. Middleton; and Dr. Western added, "The law does not require you, prisoner, to say anything that may criminate yourself. With this information, it is for you to judge whether you will speak or not."

"I'd speak willingly enough," answered Maltby, "if I were promised to be king's evidence."

"That cannot be promised by us," said Dr. Western, speaking before Mr. Middleton could put in his word. "It must depend upon the crown, and I can hold out no hope to you of such being the case, especially if, as your words seem to imply, you have been a principal in the horrible crime which last night disgraced the country. Doubtless, there will be sufficient evidence of all the facts without yours."

"No, no!" cried the young man eagerly; "I'm no principal—I had nothing to do with the robbery—I was never in the house, nor near the house; and sooner than be thought a principal, I'll tell the whole just as it happened."

"Remember," continued Mr. Middleton, something in the style of Mr. Higginthorp, "we hold out no inducement, we make no promises."

"Well, it don't signify," answered Maltby; "I'll tell the whole truth, and perhaps it may be taken into consideration."

He did not keep his word, however, in respect to telling the whole truth, for cowardice is ever apt to take its basest course—that of lying—when opportunity offers; and Maltby, though he related every circumstance that could criminate Williams, Brown, and Alfred Latimer, suppressed or distorted all that could aggravate his own offence. To have heard him one would have believed that he was nearly as innocent and as simple as a sucking lamb, and that he had been made a complete tool of by Williams and the rest. But, unfortunately for him, nobody believed that part of his story. Mr. Quatterly took no part in the examination, but smiled once or twice at the coloring which the young man gave to his own share in the transaction, and observed to Morton, "If he don't mend his story it won't stand cross-examination. He'll trip, for a hundred guineas, at the first five questions. Cross-examination has this advantage; that, though I have seen many a very honest man tell a dozen lies in a minute without knowing it, simply from puzzle and confusion, yet I never saw a liar who was such a complete master of his trade as to stand against it for ten minutes"

As soon as the investigation was over, Mr. Middleton proposed to commit the prisoner, on his own showing as an accessory before the fact; but, at the suggestion of Mr. Skinner, he was remanded till after the coroner's jury could be assembled.

The magistrates then adjourned, and Mr. Middleton, well contented with himself and with the important part he had played, was quite placable and courteous to every one else, but more especially to Mr. Morton, who was rising vigorously in his good graces, upon the strength of being the proprietor of the Mallington Park estate.

Although Morton's mind was not of a character to bear rancor, and although he held Mr. Middleton too lightly to retain any lengthened indignation for his conduct, yet the contempt that he felt for that worthy person was an effectual bar to anything like cordiality on his part. A stiff bow, a word or two of commonplace, was all that Mr. Middleton's civilities could extract from him; and it is a truth which even narrow and vulgar-minded men feel more or less, that when a gentleman and a man of sense answers you with commonplaces, he has a very low opinion of your mind or your character. Indeed, you may almost always judge of the estimation in which you are held by another from the conversation which he addresses to you.

Thus rebuffed, Mr. Middleton took his departure, mentally calling Morton a proud puppy, whereas before he had called him a low scamp. The witnesses were suffered to depart. Mr. Skinner bundled up his papers and withdrew, and Sir Simon Upplestone, advancing to Mr. Morton, frankly apologised for having entertained the suspicions that had been instilled into him, saying, with a laugh and a glance at Mr. Quatterly, "We poor country squires, sir, know no better, and are strongly inclined to suppose every Londoner a rogue."

Morton shook him by the hand, for he liked his folly better than the other's. "Don't think of it any more, Sir Simon," he said; "we shall be neighbors, and I trust good neighbors, too; so, according to the old saying, we will let bygones be bygones, and look upon each other differently for the future."

"Sue out a *venire de novo*, and try the cause again," said Mr. Quatterly; and Sir Simon, not quite understanding what he meant, took his leave and his departure.

Left in possession of the back drawing-room, Mr. Morton, Mr. Quatterly, and Dr. Western gave a few minutes' consideration to all that had occurred, and then proceeded into the next room in search of Louisa, whom they found weeping alone, and near the window. The worthy rector, well understanding a part at least of her feelings, comforted her to the best of his ability, and Louisa, though she could not forget the occasion of her sorrow, or recover altogether from the shock and horror which the events of that morning had produced, wiped away the tears from her eyes, and besought her venerable friend to go and endeavor to give consolation and support to Mrs. Charlton, saying, "She needs it much more than I do, my dear sir, and me she, of course, will not see. I went to her dressing-room just now, because I thought it right, but, as I expected, she refused to admit me."

"She's very wrong in many respects," replied Dr. Western; "but, perhaps, is only the more in need of comfort and advice from the fact of being torn by angry passions, as well as assailed by misfortune. I will go to her for a short time, my dear; but I must not forget

there is another who requires consolation as much, and deserves it more—I mean the poor widow."

Thus saying he retired, but returned in a few minutes, saying, "She will not see me, and, indeed, I think her mind seems almost deranged by these terrible events, for she sent out word by her maid, that we were all in a conspiracy against her, and that the sooner we were out of the house the better. You, my dear young friend," he continued, turning to Morton, "cannot, of course, remain here, and you had better come down to my homely dwelling and remain there till your affairs are settled."

But Morton shook his head. "I think, my dear sir," he replied, "that had better not be. I have watched Mrs. Charlton narrowly for some time, and do not think I do her injustice when I express a belief that she will speedily render a residence in the same house with herself impossible to this dear girl. Though this house is Louisa's own, yet I know her too well to say that she will say one word to cause her step-mother to quit it. Under these circumstances it will be as well that she should have a place of refuge always at hand, and I see none to which she could possibly fly with propriety but to your roof, till such time as our marriage can take place, and therefore it will be better for me to take up my 'lodging as before at the inn."

"Always just and thoughtful," answered the clergyman; "and if Louisa thinks it right to come with me at once, I will go home with her before I proceed to the park."

"No," answered Louisa Charlton, with her bright eyes filling. "I will endure as much as I can first. It shall not be my fault if I do not remain to comfort and to soothe her."

"Good, dear girl," said Dr. Western, pressing her hand in his, "do your duty always, my love. It will have its reward. I shall come up, however, in the evening to see; and I suppose, my dear sir, you and I will meet in the course of the afternoon."

"Undoubtedly," answered Morton.

Mr. Quatterly taking his departure with the worthy rector, the lovers were left alone for a few minutes. Had anything been needed to draw the hearts of Louisa Charlton and of Morton closer together, it would have been found in the conversation which followed, sorrowful and painful as it was; for though passion may rise up in the midst of gay and happy scenes, love that is watered by tears is generally the strongest and the finest plant. But they were not permitted to enjoy for any length of time even the happiness of being alone together.

Scarcely had the clergyman and the solicitor been gone ten minutes when Mrs. Charlton's maid entered, and, with a short courtesy to Morton, said, "I have a message from my mistress, sir, which I must deliver, though it isn't a very pleasant one. She says, that considering all things, and the state of the house, she thinks it very improper you should be here, and begs you would not trouble yourself to stay any longer."

A slight cloud came over Morton's brow; but he repressed every angry feeling, and replied, "Give my compliments to Mrs. Charlton, and tell her that, imagining that my society would not be pleasant to her at the present moment, I was prepared to depart when her message came, which I wish she had spared herself the pain of sending, and me of receiving."

"Very well, sir," replied the woman, in almost a saucy tone; but she still lingered in the room, till Louisa, turning round, with a look of surprise, said, "You may go."

"My mistress said, ma'am," replied the woman—but Miss Charlton stopped her, saying, "Understand, Margaret, that in some things, at least, I am mistress of this house, and I tell you to go."

Her tone was perfectly calm, but firm; and the maid did not venture to disobey, but carried back to Mrs. Charlton the information that Miss Louisa had turned her out of the room, saying she was mistress of the house, and would not have her stay.

Mrs. Charlton started up from off the couch on which she was lying, with rage in every feature, exclaiming, "Mistress of the house, is she? Well, that may be, but she shall find that I am mistress of her and her fate;" and she took two or three steps towards the door. Thought came in the midst of passion, however, and she paused. She recollected what might be the consequences if, as she at first intended, she instantly came to a rupture with Louisa, and quitted Mallington House. Visions of importunate creditors came before her—of privation, discomfort, and annoyance, and, turning back to the sofa again, she put her handkerchief to her eyes, saying, "It is not worth while to grieve myself more than I am grieved already."

"I dare say he will not be long before he goes, ma'am," observed the maid.

"See, and let me know when he does," replied Mrs. Charlton; and in two or three minutes more the woman returned with the welcome tidings that Mr. Morton was gone. The worthy lady immediately rose again, and proceeded to the drawing-room, with the full determination of tormenting her step-daughter to the utmost of her ability, and it was great. She resolved, indeed, to put a certain degree of restraint upon herself, in order not to raise the spirit of resistance; but to say everything that was cutting and unkind, to point every insinuation and inuendo in the calmest and meekest manner, to assume the airs of the injured and the patient, but to lose no opportunity of stinging where she dared not bite, and to utter words and imply suspicions which she fancied would poison Louisa's rest for many a day to come. She was met, however, in a different way from that which she expected. Judging from herself, she had supposed she would be able to irritate the poor girl into saying something that would put her in the wrong. But with Louisa pity triumphed over every other feeling, and she met everything with gentleness and calmness, which for long placed Mrs. Charlton at fault; it was done without effect, too, for it sprang from the real feelings of her heart. She could not be angry with one whom she supposed to be suffering so deeply, and at every unkind word that her step-mother addressed to her, she did not think, as some might have done, "Well, I will bear it; it cannot last long," but rather said, "No wonder she is irritable, with

burst of passion, in which she poured
usations, and even insults, in a tone
med her fair hearer for her intellect.
e first time since Morton's departure
ept, and in the midst of her tears, and
s. Charlton was still giving vent to the
f her rage, the door was thrown open,
Western announced. He was close
ie servant, and had the excellent lady
ght before she was aware of it. He
e fierce and bitter words she uttered,
he angry hatred and defiance of her
d gestures, and he soon made up his
to what was to be done.
r part, Mrs. Charlton speedily saw that
been caught in the fact, and that it
t do suddenly to change her voice and
he moment that Dr. Western entered.
ierefore, went on in the same strain, but
re violently than before, saying, "Base
y girl! Is it not enough that by a foul
y you have attempted to take away
life, and now you treat me with con-
nd contempt, almost giving me orders
our house, which, if your father's di-
had been followed by those who drew
ill, would have been mine, not your's."
d nothing of the kind," replied Louisa,
ring to wipe away her tears, "and can
ou that no such thought ever entered
mind. I only insisted upon a servant
the room who thought fit to intrude
after I told her to go, and that was
o."
I dare say you will make your story
exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, seeing her
eyes to Dr. Western. "The heiress
ty of partisans, no doubt; but I must
I wonder that I am subjected to intru-

said, "I can be depriving you of nothing that you can wish to retain, when I take one whom you have pronounced the only bane of your peace, and the serpent in your path;" but the next instant his heart smote him for what he had said, and, though he was resolved to execute his purpose, and firmly repeated his request to Louisa to get ready to accompany him, he added to Mrs. Charlton, as soon as she was gone, "I think, my dear madam, that Miss Charlton's absence for a few days, till you have recovered your usual command of yourself, is absolutely necessary to the preservation of those feelings between you which I hope may soon be restored, and never again interrupted."

"Oh, very well, sir—very well!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, rising. "I see it all—I understand it all! The scheme is plain enough, but it shall not succeed; for, thank God! I have power to stop it—and power which I will use, too. So don't let her triumph too soon, pray;" and thus saying, she turned and left the room without waiting for a reply.

When Louisa, on her return, found Dr. Western alone, she looked anxiously round the room, inquiring, "Will she not see me before I go?"

"My dear, it is better not," replied the rector; "an ill-regulated mind, in a high state of irritation, is apt to say things that are not easily forgotten. She will think better of all this by and by!" and, taking her hand, he led her to the carriage.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

We must give a very brief space—a very

articles, which somewhat alarmed the respectable traveler; for therein grave and serious remonstrances were addressed to him in regard to the small results which for the last two months had accrued from his exertions, and the little return derived from the expenses of his tour. A hint was also conveyed to him that his services would be dispensed with unless a different position of affairs was presented by the accounts of the next month; and as his heart was wrapped up in the Fragrant Balm, and he felt that his honor and reputation were concerned in its success, Mr. Gibbs had just determined to walk over to Sturton, where he had some time before commenced a negotiation with a perfumer, and endeavor to do, what is, I believe, technically called, "make a deal," when he was called as a witness before the magistrates. The length of time that he was kept at Mallington House threw him into despair; and as soon as he was free to act as he pleased, he set off down the hill like a shot, entered the inn, provided himself with a certain number of bottles and his note-book, and informed worthy Mrs. Pluckrose that he was going over to the neighboring town, and might stay all night.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Pluckrose, "that is unlucky, I do declare, Mr. Gibbs; for since you went out old Stapleton, the rich old wig-maker at Barbourne, has been here, and I talked to him of your stuff ('Stuff!' said Mr. Gibbs), and showed him what it had done for my hair; and he said he had a great mind to take a score, if he could get a good per-centage, and he's to be back about it to-night."

Mr. Gibbs instantly promised in the most solemn manner to be back to meet old Stapleton, and off he set for Sturton at a swinging pace.

It was a good long distance, as the reader well knows; and although Mr. Gibbs walked as fast as he could go, and he was a light and active man, who usually went at the rate of a postman, it took him a few minutes more than two hours to reach the market-place at Sturton. When he did reach it, however, which was about five o'clock in the afternoon, he found every reason to be satisfied with his expedition. The bottle of the Fragrant Balm which he had left was approved of; it had adorned the head of the mayor's wife; it had beautified the locks of the aldermen's children! After a little haggling about price, fifty bottles were disposed of to the chief perfumer in the place, and Mr. Gibbs, saying to himself "This will bring me up with a wipe," retired to a snug little public-house to get himself some bread and cheese and ale, before he set out on his return to Mallington. The traffic, the bread and cheese, and ale, took him altogether about one hour and five-and-twenty minutes, so that it was about half-past six o'clock when the worthy traveler set out upon his return towards Mallington.

I trust that I have combined precision with brevity in this account of Mr. Gibbs's proceedings, for it is necessary that the reader should know the particulars, but not necessary that he should pause upon them. Now, to any one who considers how far the year was advanced it will be apparent that Mr. Gibbs could not get half way back to Mallington before night began to fall, and the same fact was apparent to Mr. Gibbs also before he set out; but what c... Mr. Gibbs! He had made a successful sp... lation; he had wiped away a reproach upon h... commercial abilities; his heart was light, t... evening was fair, and he had bread and ch... and ale on board! If he thought at all of h... ing been knocked down in Wenlock Wood, ... remembered at the same time that, by ... Western's showing, the knocker-down was ... away from the knockee, in custody one-a... twenty miles off, and, therefore, away he w... with a gay step—

"Harmless himself, expecting harm from none."

During the first two miles he met with ... good number of people, all cheerful, bustli... busy, like himself. It seemed as if the radia... of Mr. Gibbs's countenance spread sunshi... around him. But during the next two miles th... population became thinner, a laborer or two w... met trudging slowly homeward, one farm... passed on horseback, and that was all; t... next mile of the road proved almost a solitud... The country became wilder, the sky grew som... what gray, and Wenlock Wood was near at ... hand. Whether it was that the ale began to lose its effect, or that the spirits of Mr. Gibbs had exhausted themselves by their own activity, or whether it was that Mr. Gibbs was tired, or that the solemn aspect of the sky and the wo... scene before his eyes oppressed his breast, cer... tain it is that Mr. Gibbs's heart began to fail h... little, a very little, at the sight of Wenlock Wood.

We have before said that Mr. Gibbs was a brave man; he by no means wanted courage, though subject, like many other men's courage, to a few little irregularities; but as soon as he found a sort of sinking about the præcordial region, he called all his resolution to his aid, and began to mount the hill before him with a wide step and a somewhat more rapid pace than was necessary. By the time that he reached the top, where the hill formed a sort of angle, commanding a view on two sides over the country below, Mr. Gibbs found himself what in jockey language is called "blown," anglicé, out of breath, and pausing on the top to recover, he looked out over the low ground on either hand and the two slopes at the hill. He could see the road by which he himself had ascended, another small path on the left, at about a third of a mile's distance, and another road to the right, somewhat farther, all mounting with a winding course, like three great serpents, into Wenlock Wood; and the gray cool light of the evening, without any of the dazzling mistiness of the day, showed him, perhaps, their several courses more distinctly than if the sun had been above the horizon. He knew, from his former perquisitions in the wood, in company with Mr. Harry Soames, constable of Mallington, that the path to the left wound up to the very spot where he had been knocked down; and in the state of his feelings at that moment, it was by no means satisfactory to him to perceive two persons issue forth from amongst the bushes about half way down, and beginning to climb the hill. Mr. Gibbs, at one glance, saw that the foremost of these men was a short stout personage, whom either fancy or the clearness of his visual organs made him think very like the celebrated Jack Williams; whil...

the one that followed was a taller and heavier personage, who might very well be Mr. Thomas Brown.

All this was seen in a moment, as I have said, for as soon as he had seen it, Mr. Gibbs ducked down to prevent his own person from attracting observation, and hurried along with the utmost rapidity, calculating that he should get past the place where the two paths met before the others could reach it.

There is an old proverb to the effect that the more haste is the worst speed, and so Mr. Gibbs found it on the present occasion. He made some way, indeed, without any sinister accident; but when he had gone about half a mile, and was in the midst of the thickest part of the wood, grim night had begun to be unpleasantly troublesome. Certain importunate brambles which we have spoken of before, began to tug at his shins as he passed, and solicit him urgently rather to remain where he was; the stump of a tree objected strongly to his passing; and at the same time Mr. Gibbs was very well aware that the path on which he had seen the other two men, came along at an acute angle with the one he was himself pursuing, so that if they had gone on at anything like a moderate rate of progression, they would not be further from him than a hundred yards or so. He fancied he heard voices too, and that put him in a portentous fright. The epithet may seem not well chosen, but still it is selected with care. The evil which his fright portended, was a tremendous fall over the gnarled root of an old oak, just about five yards from the spot where he had before fallen from an application of a crab stick to the other extreme of his person.

Mr. Gibbs broke his shin. The consequence was that immediately upon rising, he hopped for a minute and a half on one foot in the temporary insanity of acute pain. He was brought to his senses the moment after, however, by distinctly hearing a voice, and an excessively unpleasant voice it was to his ears, for he had heard it more than once before.

What could he do? What was to become of him? He was lame, lonely, benighted, and within thirty yards upon the best possible computation of a couple of murderers flying from justice.

Mr. Gibbs had been famous for bird's nesting in his youth. He had practised some of the inferior means and appliances of the same art in Mallington Park, amongst the beech trees. A beech tree is more difficult to climb than an oak, the one which had overthrown him was close at hand, and Mr. Gibbs resolved to make a friend of an enemy, and get into the tree. There was neither sin nor shame in it; King Charles had done the same before him; he was less likely to be followed, and more able to defend himself there than on the open path; and consequently up he went, finding the various knobs and protuberances of the old oak's rugged rind almost as good as a flight of stairs, and a great deal better than a ladder. And now having placed him in a very interesting situation, we shall leave the reader to contemplate him as he sits about twelve feet from the ground, where the principal stem of the oak divided into great branches. A man may have a more uncomfortable seat than on an oak tree, if there be not a pack of wolves at the foot.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

We left Mr. Gibbs in an oak tree, and in no very pleasant state of mind. We have much compassion for him; we have a yearning to return to him, one of our early love—to get him out of his oak tree if possible—to lend him a friendly hand, and aid him to descend lightly to the ground. The reader, too, would fain watch him as he sits, and learn what became of him—would contemplate him in the crisis of his fate, and prepare to shed tears over his tragic end, in the hand of those wolves in sheeps'-clothing (an exquisite figure of speech, which may well be applied to any bad man who wears a woolen jacket), or to smile with a rejoicing heart if he contrives to escape them. The critic, too—the lenient, mild, benignant critic—lies in wait beside us, ready, in the true style of our witty friend Poole's "slashing article," to condemn any course that we may pursue, and declare that there is a great deal too much, or a great deal too little of Mr. Gibbs in the book—just as we speak of him or let him alone. But after due deliberation, and a considerable waste of thought, we have determined, not without some hesitation, and a good deal of alarm, from manifold motives, and for various reasons thereunto us moving, which we will not detain the reader any longer to explain—to leave Mr. Gibbs in the oak tree!

There he is, reader! Let him make the best of it. It is his own fault: he had no business to get into the oak tree if he was in such a hurry to get out of it. What business have men to complain of a union workhouse? If it is so terrible a place, why do they go in? It is true they may starve if they stay out, and many prefer it; but, nevertheless, merciful legislators give them a choice—starvation or imprisonment! What unreasonable men to grumble! Thus, Mr. Gibbs fancied that he would have his throat cut if he stayed down below, and therefore got up into the tree. Yet it was his own fault if he felt uncomfortable there, for he might have remained where he was at first, and all the miseries of life would soon have been over. So he had nobody to thank for it but himself. The two cases are exactly parallel.

Neither will we follow Louisa Charlton to the rectory at present, nor pursue Alfred Latimer on his ill-omened bridal journey; nor sit with the Misses Martin to their dish of scandal; nor follow Mr. Henry Soames upon his pursuit of the criminals; but, by the reader's leave, that everything may be in order, we will walk along with Mr. Quatterly and Mr. Morton to the respectable inn called the Bagpipes, where they were received with every sort of joy and satisfaction by the blooming Mrs. Pluckrose.

It may be well supposed that the little town of Mallington had been in a state of excitement and consternation during the whole morning, and where they have neither a billiard-room, a reading-room, a club, or a coffee-house in a place, where can people go to compare notes, receive information, and manufacture rumors, so well as to the principal inn or public-house in the neighborhood? The bar, the commercial room, and the passage were filled with the inhabitants of Mallington and its vicinity, and round the door were collected a considerable

number of persons who had an objection to spending their money upon ale, wine, or brandy-and-water.

Through the midst of all these Mr. Morton passed with his friend, Mr. Quatterly, and they all turned round at him to stare at him as they went, for they were all aware by this time that he had been accused of robbery and murder, and whatever it was that they expected to see, they were certainly considerably surprised by his calm, placid, and self-possessed demeanor, as he walked on, unconscious of the attention he was attracting.

"Well, madam," said Mr. Quatterly, tapping the landlady familiarly on the shoulder; "Well, Mrs. Pluckrose"—and immediately alleviating, as was sometimes customary with him, into an abominable pun, he added, "though, indeed, my dear lady, I think your name ought to be put into the plural, for you must have plucked two roses to blush so brightly on either cheek. But to return. Has anybody been here this morning inquiring for me. If so, I hope you have kept him."

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Mrs. Pluckrose, dropping a courtesy, "there are two gentlemen waiting for you. I took the liberty of putting them into Mr. Morton's sitting-room, because the house is so full."

"Not so full as to prevent my having a bed in it, Mrs. Pluckrose?" said the worthy solicitor; but the landlady reassured him on that point, and Mr. Morton and his friend walked up stairs, where they found waiting a middle-aged gentleman, who looked very much like a solicitor, and a younger man, bearing a strong resemblance to a clerk. There was a great blue bag upon the table before them, and the solicitor looked out of the window, while the clerk sat with his hands on his knees.

"Ah, Mr. Writham," said Mr. Quatterly, rolling into the room as fast as his small legs would carry him. "I hope I have not kept you waiting, for we had a little magisterial business to go through here. Indeed, I did not expect to see you yourself. A clerk would have done."

"Oh, nothing like one's own presence, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, who had a peculiarly clear, sharp, ferret-like expression of countenance, with a long sharp nose, the very look of which would have made a flaw in a piece of parchment. "I came down to say that the whole matter may be considered as definitely settled and agreed upon the basis laid down between us at our last conference—always provided, nevertheless—"

"Anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary notwithstanding," said Mr. Quatterly, laughing. "I thought there was an exceptionable clause, friend Writham. Well, what is it—what is it? Out with it, man. We'll soon deal with it."

"It is simply this, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, "and you will own that it's quite reasonable, namely, that your client—I presume that I have the honor of being in his presence—do produce lawful and sufficient proof of the marriage of Henry Morton Wilmot and Maria dei Pazzi, and also of the death without issue of Charles Francis Wilmot."

"Oh, the latter is easily proved," replied Mr. Quatterly, "and, besides with that you have nothing to do, for if he did leave legitimate issue, it would bar your client as well as mine, and besides, I never heard of a boy seven years old having a son and heir. The law does not contemplate such a case, Mr. Writham, and we can prove his birth and his death, with an interval of seven years between them. As to the other matter, it is quite right that you should have the proof you require, and you shall have it. There may be a little delay, from an awkward event which has removed the certificate to some distance."

Mr. Writham pricked up his ears, for there seemed to him a chance of pleading still, and he observed in a solemn tone, "Of course, Mr. Quatterly, proof is necessary. Full, legal indubitable proof."

"And proof you shall have, my dear Writham," answered Mr. Quatterly — "full, legal, indubitable proof, as you say, for where we got the one certificate we can easily get another, even if the first should be lost. But by your good leave, my friend, we will draw up a little memorandum of the grounds on which we stand, stating the proofs and particulars that you require, and guarding against any future demands." Mr. Writham seemed to pause and hesitate; but Mr. Quatterly went on in a decided tone, saying, "It is absolutely necessary, Writham. It must be done, my friend. Either sign and get your costs, or don't sign and go without them. I'm a solicitor, too, you know, Writham, and one time I had a window broken in my house—a glazier was sent for, who put in the pane. Just when he had done I unfortunately walked into the room, and saw him neatly starring the next pane with his diamond, then placing his finger dexterously against it till it gave a crack. I thought to myself, 'What an image of a solicitor!' We are all fond of making little holes, that we may mend them afterwards. It's the very nature and essence of our profession, Writham," and he took his fellow practitioner by the arm and gave him a friendly shake.

Mr. Writham did not attempt to resist his eloquence. The paper was drawn up by Mr. Quatterly's own hands; Mr. Writham suggested some alterations; they were canvassed, discussed, investigated in their tendencies, and some were rejected, whilst others were admitted; after which the paper was signed. Mr. Morton took no part in the affair; but amused himself quietly by writing a letter, which occupied the greater portion of the time. When the whole business was concluded, Mr. Quatterly began to feel the inconvenience of his brother solicitor having been shown into that room. He was naturally of a hospitable and jovial disposition, and he would have liked very well to have asked Mr. Writham to dine with him at Mallington; but then he wanted a little private conversation with Morton, and was well aware that Morton might desire a little private conversation with somebody else. Mr. Writham, however, relieved him from his difficulty by declaring that he must be off to London as fast as possible, as he had at least a hundred and fifty pieces of business to transact on the following day. As no coach passed towards town after that hour, his only resource lay in post-chaises; and accordingly, as soon

as one could be procured, away he went, taking his clerk and his blue bag along with him.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Quatterly entered upon business with his friend. "This certificate must be procured somehow, my dear sir," he said. "It may be difficult and unpleasant to wait for journeys to and from Italy; and yet how are we to get it without sending, I do not perceive. You look mighty cool and indifferent; but I can tell you it is a serious matter; for the want of this document, if the exhibition thereof be long delayed, may encourage these people to plead; and then Lord have mercy on your purse!—for it will be a fight with them for life or death—or for costs or no costs, which comes to the same thing."

"I am not at all indifferent, my good friend, I assure you," answered Morton; "but nevertheless, I feel very sure that we shall obtain the paper speedily. I know it to be in the hands of the fellow Williams, with all the other papers that were in my pocket-book. Most likely he has not had time to destroy them before he was apprehended, as you have stated, for the only thing he could gain, would be by keeping them; and, therefore, doubtless, they will be found amongst the rest of the things which he may have thought fit to leave behind. I suppose we shall soon have over some intelligence from Mr. Soames, the constable, and you can send over directions to stop all that belongs to me."

"That shall be done—that shall be done!" answered Mr. Quatterly: "but still I can't help regretting that the paper is not forthcoming at once. I see risk and inconvenience, and a great deal of law; and no one who knows as much of the fresh eggs of Mrs. Themis can doubt that the sooner they are hatched the better; for if they are left alone for a single night, a thousand to one they are found addled the next morning."

"That is not a very consolatory view of the case," answered Morton; "but still I do not see, my excellent friend, how I can help myself. There is an old saying, which you of all men must be well acquainted with, that 'what is done cannot be undone.'"

"Oh yes, I love old sayings," answered the worthy solicitor, "some for being wonderfully good and true, and some for being wonderfully bad and false; though, probably, they were all true when they were first said, otherwise Solomon must have been a fool, and many a wiser man than he was much in the same case. Now, for instance, men say that honesty is the best policy; and it would be true of all times, if they had added the words 'here or hereafter;' but as the proverb stands, upon my life, I believe there is nothing more false. An honest man always makes much less noise in the world than a rogue; and as the only way to get on in life is to make a noise in the world, the rogue has the better chance. Look at poets, philosophers, statesmen, soldiers—you will always find that those who have done the most good have been the least rewarded. Write lascivious verses and immoral odes, and your contemporaries crown you with immortality—the public purchase, and the minister honors. Inculcate virtue, try to amend and correct, and starve in a garret, or die in a madhouse. Set up for infidel, and you're raised above Locke and Newton. Be a true Christian philosopher, and you are passed by as a twaddling canter. So with statesmen, so with soldiers, so even with lawyers. A rogue has a thousand paths he may follow to distinction, an honest man but one. Rogues for ever, friend Morton! But I'm getting misanthropical and you fidgety; so tell me what you are going to do, noble sir, and I'll be no clog upon you."

"First, my dear sir," replied Morton, with a smile, given in passing to his friend's somewhat bitter, but not very unjust view of human life. "First, I am going over to Mallington Hall, in order to see something of the scene of such sad events, and to visit the poor widow of the murdered man; then I am going to return here, by your leave, to dine with you upon such fare as Mrs. Pluckrose can furnish; and then I shall go and drink tea with good Dr. Western and his sister."

"Where you expect to meet somebody else," said Mr. Quatterly. "Well, then, my young friend, my afternoon is laid out also. First, I will walk over with you to Mallington Hall, if you have no objection; then I will return here with you and dine; then I will amuse myself by writing a few letters, and making a few notes, till it is time to go to what the young people call Bedfordshire. Thus will you and I both consult our convenience: I shall not be in your way, and you will not be in mine. But pray order the dinner before you go, or else we shall have to wait for a full hour after we come back. Now, there is nothing so unpleasant on earth as waiting for an inn dinner."

Morton praised the punctuality of Mrs. Pluckrose, the greatest virtue of an innkeeper, but took his friend's advice, and after the dinner was ordered, they both set out upon their expedition, although the day had become cloudy as the sun crossed the sky. Mr. Quatterly admired the whole scene very much. With the park he was peculiarly pleased, and noticed all those little beauties which well directed art had added to nature, in a manner that would have delighted poor Edmonds, could he have heard his words.

"All that you so much praise, my dear sir," said Morton, "is owing to the exertions of one man, poor Edmonds, who lies murdered up at the house there. He was a fine specimen of that very fine creature the English peasant of the best class. Not without his peculiarities; he was, perhaps, rather elevated by them than otherwise, for they were all of a fine and generous kind. He was blunt and straightforward, but never rude or insolent, and resolute to do his duty to his master, whether his master liked it or not; he was sometimes a little pertinacious, especially where the object required labor and exertion on his own part. There was a certain degree of sternness about him, but yet he was not without kindly and gentle feelings; and, indeed, from all I have heard, I fear that his taking part with, and making excuses for, that wretched young man, Mrs. Charlton's son, when every one else avoided and condemned him, has been the means of bringing wretchedness to his home, and even death upon himself."

"A fine character, but a rare one in his class," said Mr. Quatterly.

"Nay, I do not think so," answered Morton;

"I believe that there are more of such characters in England than we imagine, and that there would be more still if various circumstances in our state of society did not tend in different ways to brutalise them. It is with the classes above themselves that a great part of the fault lies wherever we find a rude and animal class of peasantry. I speak not of one class alone, but of all the classes above them in their degree, for the great proprietor has his share in producing the evil, by the neglect of the means which God has put in his power for the purpose of removing it. But take two classes as examples—the farmer and the manufacturer. There are many individual exceptions, but in general they only seem to look upon those who labor for them as machines, by means of which they are to produce as much as possible at the least possible expense. They have no object in making them aught but machines, and a human machine is nothing but a teachable beast. In the manufactory he may become a well-drilled monkey; in the fields he may be a bear; but no effort of any value is made to raise him, but, on the contrary, many to depress him in the scale of being. In some places we teach the people reading and writing, and so far we do well; but we rarely, if ever, address ourselves to teach them to think rightly, to reason justly, or to weigh moral against physical advantages; and all the time we show them by our own conduct that we use their exertions but for our own purposes, and, by paying not one penny more than we are obliged, keep them in that state of poverty and dependence which is the most brutalising of all things; or, what is worse, perhaps, and more dangerous to themselves and society, prove to them that in their communication with the classes above them, they receive nought but injury and wrong. Here, in this very case before us, a man in the rank and station of a gentleman is treated both respectfully and kindly by a person greatly inferior to himself in station, though greatly superior to him in mind; and what does he inflict in return, first upon the daughter, and then upon the father?"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, with surprise, "you do not mean to say that the poor girl I saw married this day to that young vagabond, Alfred Latimer, is the daughter of the murdered man."

"Yes, indeed," answered Morton; "and I know not to be sorry or to rejoice that the marriage has really taken place."

"Oh, rejoice, rejoice at all events," answered Mr. Quatterly; "but, to say truth, this offers me the first reasonable cause for doubting the young man's guilt. Notwithstanding all my knowledge of human crime—and it is tolerably extensive, as I need not tell you—I can hardly believe it possible that a man, however depraved, should go and wed at the altar a woman with whose father's blood his hand was still wet. Truth, that most extraordinary thing, is the most difficult of all ores to extract from the immense mass of dross with which it is mingled, and in this case we may have got upon a wrong scent. Certainly the circumstances are very suspicious; but yet nothing is clearly proved. The young man may have been out upon some other wild expedition, the blood may have come upon his clothes in some other way; God grant it, and grant that it may be proved, for although we get at as much truth as perhaps can possibly be obtained by the means and appliances of our criminal law, yet, depend upon it, many a man is hanged for crimes he has never committed."

Morton was silent, for he knew more of Alfred Latimer's character than good Mr. Quatterly did, and he did not entertain the same hopes as his friend. In a few minutes after they approached the great door of the house by the gravel walk in front, and the old gentleman, not feeling the same interest in all the actors of the sad scenes which had lately passed that Morton did, paused to comment upon the heavy and antique masses of the building, which had their picturesque beauty, notwithstanding some want of taste in the details. Morton walked silently on and rang the bell. The door was speedily opened, and Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, appeared behind the good woman who drew it back. "Ah, sir," said the housekeeper, as soon as she saw Mr. Morton; "this has been a terrible affair, and I'm very glad you are come, if you have anything to do with the place, for, indeed, I cannot stay in it to-night after what has happened. I should die of fright, I am sure, before morning broke; and, indeed, if we had not got in Betsy Smith and Mrs. Blackmore, I don't think I could stay in it by day."

Morton promised that he would send two or three men to remain upon the premises all night, and then proceeded with Mr. Quatterly to visit the immediate scenes of the plunderers' operations. He first turned his steps to the plate room, the door of which was still open, for the keys had always been kept in London, and then, after having given orders that it should be immediately fastened by a padlock, he proceeded to the chamber where the body of poor Edmonds still lay, awaiting the coroner's inquest. The presence of death is always sad and solemn. There are vague and dark prophecies in the look of the dead that appeal with a warning voice to the living, even when the last final act of man's life has come in the regular course of the great tragedy. But when an active and intelligent being has been brought to a close, in the midst of health and vigor, by some unnatural cause, and more especially by crime, that voice becomes more deep and strong, reasoning to the ear that will hear it, of all the duties and relations of life, and all the punishments which attend their neglect or violation. The punishments inevitable, innumerable, not alone those which the hand of man visibly inflicts, but those which the judgment of the Almighty prescribes even in this world—the withdrawal of his countenance and his grace, the extinction of good feelings and of higher hopes, the blotting out of all the traces of a better and a purer nature, which were left to his descendants by the first sinner at the fall. Mr. Morton and his friend gazed upon the body of the poor park-keeper, as he remained stretched upon the bed in the same position in which he had been placed on the preceding night. Neither of them said a word for some time, but both felt deeply, and Morton, when he turned away, repeated once or twice, "Poor fellow, poor fellow!"

"Now, my dear sir," he said, when they were once more in the hall; "I will go over to the widow's, and if she will receive me, I will see her, however painful a duty it may be. The man has been killed in my service, and I doubt not, from what I know of him, in doing it well. She and her children, therefore, must be provided for, and though, perhaps, she may not have turned her thoughts to the aggravation which poverty and wordly difficulties must always, sooner or later, bring to other sorrows, yet they would sooner or later present themselves to her mind, and it is as well that she should be spared that uneasiness altogether."

"You are right, my dear sir, you are right," replied Mr. Quatterly, following him; "one of the best charities is the sparing of our fellow-creatures any source of unhappiness from which we can shield them."

The door of the park-keeper's house was opened by the little boy, with his face pale and his eyes red. The room in which the family had usually sat was vacant, and the boy said that his mother was lying down on her bed, and that Dr. Western had just left her.

"Tell her, my good boy," said Morton, "that I am here, and that I should like to speak to her for a few minutes, if she can admit me; but that if she is not well enough I will come and see her to-morrow."

The boy returned from the little room, beyond, however, asking Mr. Morton to go in; and, leaving Mr. Quatterly in the other chamber, he passed through the door, and found poor Mrs. Edmonds seated upon the side of the bed, with the windows half closed. Her grief was very silent; there was no display, no effort, no noisy sorrow. She made more than one ineffectual attempt to restrain her tears, but she felt that she could not speak, lest the bitterness of her heart should burst forth in lamentations. Morton took her hand kindly; and, seating himself on a chair beside her, he said, in a quiet low tone, "I am sorry to intrude upon you now, Mrs. Edmonds, especially as I know that such grief as yours is not to be comforted; but I thought I might as well spare you any unnecessary cares or anxieties by assuring you that your own fate, and that of your children, shall be well cared for. I will take the boy's education upon myself, and will provide for him hereafter. You, also, I will take care shall never know want of any kind, and in whatever occupation may suit you best—for I know that you will not like to be without occupation—you shall have every assistance that I can give you."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," answered Mrs. Edmonds; "you are very kind—but, oh, my poor girl!" and she burst into tears again.

"Well, perhaps, what I have to tell you of her may comfort you, on her score, at least," answered Morton. "I have ascertained, Mrs. Edmonds, that she is really lawfully married to him." He did not venture to mention the name; and he did hope and trust that, for some time, at least, the share which Alfred Latimer was suspected of having taken in the death of her husband would be kept from Mrs. Edmonds's ear.

"Oh! thank you, sir," replied the widow; "that is comfort, indeed. I did not dare to mention her name to Dr. Western, for I knew he thought her very wicked, though he never said so. Oh, that her poor father could have heard such news!" and the tears burst forth afresh.

After a few more words of kindness, which is always consolation in its degree, Morton left the widow, and returned with Mr. Quatterly to the inn.

We will not pause to discuss the dinner which Mrs. Pluckrose set before her revered guests, nor descant upon the excellence of the roast chickens, nor the insufferable hardness of the bacon by which they were accompanied. After the moderate meal was over, Morton left his companion for the evening, and once more took his way along the bank of the river from the inn to the rectory.

There are days in the life of every one when events seem to crowd so thickly together that they jostle one another for attention, and a thousand subjects of deep interest were pressing upon our young friend's mind at that moment; but yet a faint hope of seeing fair Louisa Charlton at the rector's passed through the crowd, and made him hurry his steps. Nor was he deceived, for the first person he saw on entering was herself.

"I thought, dear Louisa," he said, "that you would be driven to this kind place of refuge. I hope you had not much to endure before you sought it."

"A great deal more than ought to have been inflicted upon her," replied Dr. Western, speaking for his fair ward. "But now, my dear sir, my sister and I will do our best to make her happy whilst she remains with us; but I fear there are still a good many difficulties and discomforts to be encountered before her fate is more happily fixed."

"Discomforts, perhaps many," replied Morton; "but difficulties, I trust, none, my dear doctor. Mrs. Charlton's opposition, I know, we must expect; but if Louisa feels as I hope she does, that opposition need cause no delay whatever in our arrangements. The law must afterwards take its course, and pronounce how far we may be affected by the lady's decision. But after a scene which I have to relate to you, and which took place this morning before you arrived, I think you will see that it is unnecessary for us to pay any attention to Mrs. Charlton's proceedings, as her opinion of me or any other person depends entirely upon our pliability in regard to certain views, which seem to me not of the most honest character. However, of that hereafter."

The conversation now turned to other subjects; but still the events of the day formed, of course, the principal topic, and as all those events were sad—as they all showed, in different points of view, the depravity or folly of human nature, the general tenor of that evening's conference was sad and somewhat gloomy. Yet Morton did not love Louisa less, and Louisa loved Morton, if possible, more, as that conversation came towards a close. The lighter things of life have their effect perhaps in first attracting, but it is when the deeper and the sterner draw forth the more profound and precious qualities that the heart becomes knit to heart by ties that can never be broken. It is then that the casket is thrown open, and the real jewels displayed, for the small traits and indications which are visible in ordinary society much more frequently

afford a view into the faults and failings than into the virtues and excellencies of our companions.

As the hour of ten was approaching, Morton related to Dr. Western his visit to the widow, and the short conversation which had taken place between them. "I must ask you, my dear sir," he said, "who know so much more of her habits and feelings than I do, to turn in your mind what sort of position will be best suited for her. I will secure to her a little independence; but I know that it will please her best, and I am sure that, under existing circumstances, it will be best for her, to have some employment for her leisure time. There are some occasions, as we all know, when labor is a blessing; and such, I believe, it will be in her case. The boy we will easily provide for; and as to poor Lucy, I fear we must wait to see the course of events before we can devise anything for her benefit."

"I dread to think," said Dr. Western, feelingly, "what must be the effect on Lucy's mind when she knows the whole of this sad history."

"Oh, keep it from her—keep it from her!" cried Louisa. "If it be possible, never let her know the worst of all that has occurred."

Dr. Western shook his head. "It is the saddest part of sin and crime, my love," he said, "that they bring misery to others who have no participation in them. One man's folly or wickedness often spreads round wretchedness to thousands, and almost each house in the land has, sooner or later, its heartaches from the errors of some one whom its roof has at some time sheltered. You, yourself, my dear child, will have to bear your share of suffering from Alfred Latimer's errors, and this poor girl who is now his wife must endure her part of the same hard consequences. I see no possibility of preventing it. She must know of his apprehension, which will doubtless be speedily effected, and all the circumstances will, sooner or later, be heard, whatever be the result.

"I think it might be prevented," said Morton, after a moment's thought. "His apprehension, indeed, she must learn; but it seems to me possible that by some one stepping forward to protect her in her unprotected state, the darkest fact of all—if it be a fact—that her husband was an actual participator in her father's murder, may be concealed from her. At all events, in the case of the poor widow, we had better keep our suspicions from reaching her ears as long as possible, for it would bitterly aggravate her grief at present were she to know all the circumstances as they now appear."

"You say if it be a fact, my dear sir," replied Dr. Western, "and you speak in a tone of doubt. Has anything occurred to make you hope that the opinions we formed this morning are groundless?"

"But little," answered Morton. "Mr. Quatterly, indeed, has doubts; but it seems to me—"

While he was speaking there was a good deal of bustle in the rector's hall; much more, indeed, than that usually quiet and well-regulated place was at all accustomed to. Voices sounded speaking low and eagerly, and the tones of Dr. Western's old butler, usually so grave and calm, were at length heard rising powerfully.

"But I must and will see him this instant," cried one voice, which Morton thought he recognised.

"But I tell you you cannot see him till I let him know, and ask whether he chooses it or not."

"But I know he will choose, and see him I will this moment," rejoined the first speaker. "I tell you it's matter of life and death; and there's not a moment to be lost!"

There seemed to come then a little scuffle in the hall, in which the rector's butler, being the weakest, as usual, went to the wall, and the moment after, the door of the dining-room, which was adjacent, was thrown open, and then suddenly closed again. Another moment brought a step to the drawing-room door, and it too was opened with eager haste. All eyes were turned towards it, on the part of Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn with some degree of fear, and instantly in rushed Mr. Gibbs in his own proper person, his usually neat and somewhat extravagant attire being a good deal deranged, his black and silken ringlets all confused and tumbled over each other like a mob of corkscrews; but importance and vigor in his countenance.

"Oh, sir," he said, addressing Morton, as soon as he perceived him; "I have such news for you, though it has well nigh cost me my life—come along—there is not a moment to be lost—we've got them safe if you like to have them."

Mr. Gibbs' mind was evidently over-excited, and Morton, fearing that he might come harshly on some subject that would be painful to Louisa, beckoned him to come out of the room, saying, "I will speak to you in the library, Mr. Gibbs, by Dr. Western's permission."

"Let him come, too—let him come, too," cried Mr. Gibbs. "We shall want all the assistance we can get, I can tell you, sir; but there's not a moment to be lost if you intend to do anything effectual"—thus saying he followed Mr. Morton out of the room. Dr. Western accompanied him, and after they had been about ten minutes away together, the bell of the library was heard ringing, and several of the men servants were called into the room.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

The reader cannot tell—nay, it is impossible to describe to him so as to give him even a faint idea of it—no, "*si j'avais une langue de fer toujours parlante*," as Voltaire has it, I could not explain the terrible temptation which an author has to struggle with when he has got his reader and some of his characters into what is vulgarly termed a predicament, and feels an inclination to leave them all there and go to some other part of the story. No man should be trusted with power. It is more than human nature can bear; and the despot's spirit is sure to seize upon every one who has his fellow creatures at his mercy. I feel at this present moment, dear reader, the tyrant strong within me, urging me to torture you even at the risk of losing my throne—to fly away from Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Morton and Dr. Western, and follow

out the course of Alfred Latimer. But I will resist it manfully; and if ever I should come into Parliament—which heaven forfend!—I will introduce a bill to render it penal for an author to tell his story in any other than a straightforward manner.

I will go on with Mr. Gibbs, *coute qui coute*; for do not suppose that to do so is without its inconveniences. On the contrary, I foresee many to the after telling of my tale; but still "for a great good I must do a little wrong;" though, be it remarked that principle—a very vicious one, by the way—should never be acted upon but once in his life by an author, and never in his whole life by a prime minister. It is contrary to morals, to logic, and to common sense to do wrong at all; and no motive can justify it, as shall be proved at large in some chapter especially devoted to that purpose; but enough of the question for the present, and now for Mr. Gibbs.

We left Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and the traveling perfumer all in the library together, ringing the bell; but before we proceed to examine into the results of that phenomenon we must inquire into the causes—"*Mon ami bellier toujours commencez par le commencement.*" Upon my life, that is the third piece of French I have put into this chapter. I beg a thousand pardons, and trust to be forgiven; for I do not think there is as much of any foreign language, ancient or modern, in all my works put together.

However, we left, as I have said, Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and Mr. Gibbs in the library together—I'll go on, now, upon my word—and the first sentence spoken was by Morton. "Well, Mr. Gibbs," he said, "What is all this? What have you discovered?"

"Why, I've got them, sir—I've got them!" cried Gibbs; "but there's no time to be lost if you want to have them."

"Who do you mean, my good friend?" exclaimed Dr. Western. "Do you mean Mr. Latimer?"

"No, no, no!" cried the traveler eagerly. "I mean the villains, the scoundrels, the chiefs of the whole gang, and I'm afraid every moment that they should get away."

"But give us some connected account of who they are, and what you mean?" said Mr. Morton, judging from the visitor's excited manner, soiled and deranged dress, and whirling words, that he had either drank too much, or that he was slightly insane. "We have already seen to-day, Mr. Gibbs, how unjustly suspicions may be entertained, and, of course, can do nothing without proper information."

"Well, then, if I must waste time," exclaimed the other, "all I have to say is that it is entirely owing to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad. If it hadn't been for that I should never have known anything at all. I went over to Sturton, sir, where I made a very convenient deal, and as I was coming back through the wood, just at the top of the hill on this side of Sturton, where I could look down over all the country, I saw two men creeping up by one of the narrow paths, and, not liking their looks at all—for I thought I knew the villains—I went on as fast as I could. They came nearly as fast, and, as the mischief would have it, it grew quite dark in the wood, and down I fell, breaking my shin most desperately. Running was out of the question; if I lay there I was sure to be murdered; so I took to my old trick, and got up the tree. I had not been there two minutes when the blood-thirsty villains passed underneath, and I held my breath, and listened with all my ears. Well, I heard one say to the other 'I could have sworn I heard something running and the bushes shake;' and then the other answered 'It's very likely a deer got out of the park; the paling is very bad in some places.' You may fancy how I trembled; but then t'other one said 'It was more like a man's foot than a deer's,' so that made me tremble more, till I thought they would hear me shaking. But then one said to the other 'It's all quiet enough now, however;' and the other answered 'Ay; if it was any one, he's off by this time, and he couldn't be looking for us, at all events.' That was Jack Williams that spoke."

"Jack Williams," exclaimed Dr. Western; "why, I left him in the hands of the magistrates at——."

"Ay! he's out, however it happened," answered Mr. Gibbs, "and Brown with him, too, doctor. "I'll take my oath of it, by the fragrant Balm of Trinidad, and all I hold sacred. I knew who they were pretty well when first I saw them, and then when I heard their tongues I was quite sure; besides, they called each other by their names, that is to say Brown called him 'Williams,' and he called Brown 'Tom.'

"But where are they, then?" demanded Morton. "It would take a whole regiment to search that wood properly, even if they are there still."

"They are there still," answered Gibbs; "but they won't be there very long. But as to searching the wood, that's needless; for I can tell you exactly where they are, and where they intend to remain till two o'clock, for I heard all their arrangements just as plain as a sermon. They stopped a minute close under the tree after they had said what I have told you, as if they were listening, and then Brown said to Williams 'I don't hear anything, Williams, do you?' upon which Williams answered 'No, Tom, I don't; and, at all events, we had better get into the cave, for we must have some rest before we go on, and we are in less danger there than anywhere else.' 'So I think,' answered Brown; 'but if I once fall asleep, I'm not likely to wake in a hurry, for it's a tolerable long walk, I can tell you, Williams, with all the round we have made, and this bundle is devilish heavy. One of us had better keep awake whilst the other sleeps, and so take it in turns.' But Williams replied 'Never you fear, I shall wake at two o'clock; I always do, for that's the time I used to go up and watch. I must have some sleep, too, recollect, for I've had none these three nights, and we mustn't be much after two in starting again, that we may get on ten or twelve miles on the other side before daylight.' 'Well, come along, then,' answered Brown, 'and let us have something to eat and drink first. It's devilish little use having got the money if we are forced to starve ourselves notwithstanding.' After that they walked on a little, and I began to think how I should like to follow them and see where the

cave is they talked about; but I very soon found that it was nearer than I thought, for I could hear that they did not go along the path, but pushed through the trees and bushes near towards the high bank, and then they seemed to come to a dead stop, for I could hear their voices talking again without seeming to move. They were far enough off to prevent me from knowing what they said, except when they spoke very loud; but near enough to make me quite sure of whereabouts they were. Presently, too, there came a sort of crackling sound, and I could see a red light shining through the branches, which showed me that they had lighted a fire. The dogs did not know there was anybody so near, or I dare say they would not have made themselves so comfortable."

"This opportunity must not be lost," said Dr. Western, rising, and ringing the bell. "We must secure these men if possible."

"It would do me a great deal of good, your reverence," said Mr. Gibbs, "if you would just let me have a glass of wine, for, to tell the truth, I am somewhat tired, and a good deal exhausted, not having touched a bit of anything for a good many hours; but still I am ready to go the minute the others are."

"You deserve high praise for your courage and activity, Mr. Gibbs," replied the worthy clergyman, "and you shall have anything that you desire which the house can afford. 'Bring in some wine and some cold meat," he continued, as the servant appeared; "but first tell the coachman to come here directly. Now pray, Mr. Gibbs, let us hear how you escaped from your very unpleasant situation in the tree."

"It was all owing to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad," replied his visitor; "for having a specimen bottle in my pocket, as soon as I found that the murderers were safely lodged at such a distance as not to hear a little rustle, I took it out, and, pushing down my stocking, rubbed my shin till the pain quite went off, otherwise I couldn't have walked a step, I'm sure. I kept a sharp ear upon my friends in the cave, however, and rubbed and listened, and listened and rubbed, for full half an hour. But still they kept talking and eating I fancy, and I could hear a cork drawn, and then they laughed."

"Laughed!" exclaimed Dr. Western. "I am sometimes inclined to wonder how human beings ever laugh."

"It was Tom Brown, I think," returned Mr. Gibbs; "for I never saw Williams laugh in my life, and I don't think he ever does. But some time after that they began to be more silent, speaking for a minute or two, and then breaking off again; and then there came a word or two and an answer; and then they were still so long I thought they were both asleep; but then they began again; and so it went on till it must have been half-past nine, I dare say. After that all was quiet; but I dare not move for a full half hour, during which time I considered what I had best do, and gradually I began to take courage, and I determined to come down, and get across as fast as possible, for it was the nearest magistrate's house; and as I grew bolder and bolder, I thought I might just as well take a look at their cave before I went; and when I was quite sure they must be asleep, I got slowly down the tree from knot to knot, making no noise at all, and then crept quietly through the grass towards the chesnut-trees and bushes under the bank, making as near as I could for the spot where I had seen the light glimmering when I was up-stairs in the tree, for I could not see it now for the brushwood, but I smelt it strong enough, notwithstanding. I picked my steps like a cat over the wet ground, and presently as I moved about, I spied a gap amongst the leaves and branches, not bigger than my hand, through which I saw something red shining, and getting as near as I could I peeped through."

"And what did you see?" asked Morton, as the coachman entered, followed by the footman with a tray of cold meat and wine in his hands, and Mr. Gibbs paused in his narrative.

"Why, I saw the fire of sticks beginning to die out," replied Mr. Gibbs, "and that great big hulking fellow, Brown, lying upon his back with a bundle under his head, and Williams sitting with his back against the bank, and his head leaning forward, sound asleep. As I stood there Brown began to snore. You thought it very horrible, sir, that such men should laugh, but I can tell you it's very horrible indeed to hear a murderer snore; so creeping away again without making the least noise, I marked one or two of the large trees near with my knife, and then came down back again as fast as I could to old Blackmore, the gardener's cottage. I had to knock the old man up out of his bed, for his boat was chained and padlocked; but when he saw me, and heard what I wanted it for—though I didn't tell him all—he let me have it willingly enough, and I punted myself across here without more ado. The boat is just down by the bank there, and I'm ready to go as soon as I have had something to refresh me a little."

While Mr. Gibbs proceeded with great self-possession and satisfaction to comfort himself with the good things set before him, a consultation took place between Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and the coachman, as to what would be the best plan to pursue for the purpose of capturing the two malefactors, whose place of concealment had been discovered by the worthy traveler. Considerable difficulties, however, presented themselves. The lateness of the hour—the want of all preparation—the absence of the only constable that Mallington boasted—the distance of Dr. Western's house from the village—and the early period at which Williams and his companion were to start upon their onward journey—were all impediments which were difficult to be overcome. Dr. Western was a man of peace; but, nevertheless, his sense of duty as a magistrate led him at first to resolve upon going in person, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Morton dissuaded him.

"I shall go, certainly, my dear sir," said the young gentleman himself, "for you know that I have a personal stake in this matter; when, besides forwarding the ends of justice, I would fain secure the papers which one or the other of these men undoubtedly possess. But both your age and your profession, my dear sir, should prevent you from going; and, doubtless, we shall be able to get enough men by the way to render our proceedings secure."

"I don't know, sir," said the coachman,

scratching his head; "but, if you cross over in the boat, you'll find nobody but old Blackmore, and he's too lame to be of any good. You and I, and the gentleman there might be enough, it's true; but, depend upon it, the fellows will fight like mad, for I suppose they've got a rope round their necks any how."

"Doesn't Miles, one of the keepers, live up at the corner of the park by Mrs. Hazlewood's cottage?" asked Morton; "and we can easily take that in our way."

"Yes sir, so we can," answered the coachman; "and a strapping chap he is too. I didn't think of him."

"Then we shall be enough, my dear sir," rejoined Mr. Morton, turning to the rector with a cheerful smile. "Four stout men will certainly be sufficient against two. Though any odds are justifiable in such a case, I should be almost ashamed of taking more. We had better have some arms, however, if you have any in the house. If not, I must send for my pistols to the inn."

"Oh, the footman has a couple of brace in his pantry, and I have a long-unused gun upstairs," replied Dr. Western.

"I've got a pistol, too," said the coachman, and Mr. Gibbs chimed in, announcing that he had his two little barkers in his pocket, never having gone unprovided since his head had suffered in the very wood to which he was now destined. He started up at the same time, declaring himself quite ready; and, indeed, he showed a degree of alacrity and resolution which raised him high in the opinion of Mr. Morton. The gun and pistols were procured, and then a sufficient quantity of cord was sought for and cut at convenient lengths, with a portion of which each of the expeditionary party furnished themselves.

"Now, go out with the coachman and down to the boat, Mr. Gibbs," said Mr. Morton, as soon as all was ready; "I will join you in a minute;" and then turning to Dr. Western, he added, "I will just go and bid Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn good evening. It will be much better, however, that they should know nothing of this affair till it is over, as it would render them uneasy during the night, and poor Louisa has enough to grieve her without any further anxiety."

Dr. Western agreed cordially in this view, but at the same time he added, "You must return and let me know, my dear sir, for I shall certainly sit up till it is all over."

Morton promised to do as he requested, and then returning to the drawing-room, laughed with Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn for a moment over Mr. Gibbs's strange interruption, and merely adding that he thought it would end in the capture of two notorious malefactors, took his leave with as light an air as if he was going to a party of pleasure.

CHAPTER LXXX.

The moon had somewhat declined, the high slopes of the ground behind Mallington Park, the deep rounds of the wood in the foreground, even the lower part of the park itself, though turned to the south, were all in shadow; but yet the river in some of its bends caught the rays of the declining planet, and glistened like silver as it flowed along. The boat had been drawn up as near to the rectory as possible, where the stream, expanding, flowed on more gently, leaving a fringe of reeds, mingled with the large round leaves of the water lily, on that side of the river; and in the punt itself appeared, when Morton approached, the coachman and Mr. Gibbs. He concluded, of course, that they were waiting there for him; but, nevertheless, he could not, as he hurried on, divine with what amusement they were filling up their time; for the coachman, with his body slightly bent, and the pole in his hand, seemed very much in the attitude of one who was lifting out a large fish with a landing net, while Mr. Gibbs, on his knees, in the bottom of the punt, was stooping over still further, and reaching out with his hands, apparently to secure something that his companion was endeavoring to guide to the side of their little bark.

Just when Morton came up the worthy traveler made a sharp grasp at something, exclaiming the moment after, "I have got it—it's a hat."

He then emptied the water out, and turning to the young gentleman as he stepped into the punt, he showed him his prize, saying "Here's a hat in the water. Isn't that funny, sir?—a very good hat, too, and can't have been long in, or it would have fallen to pieces."

"Keep it safely, Mr. Gibbs," answered Morton, who saw more in the fact than the other seemed to do. "There, push off, coachman, as fast as you can. You had better, perhaps, mark the hat, Mr. Gibbs, for we must leave it in the boat, and it may be important to identify it."

"Here's something written in the inside already," answered the traveler, "if I could but make out what it is," and he turned it to the moonlight, but in vain. "I'll mark it at all events," he continued, taking out his pencil and marking a broad cross on the leather. "There, that will prevent mistakes. I shouldn't wonder if it were that young Mr. Latimer's hat. He came back without one, they say, and took a new one with him."

Mr. Morton did not reply, and the punt soon glided into the darker part of the stream, and approached the opposite bank, where the whole party stepped out, and the boat was made fast. Morton then led the way at once towards the cottage of the man Miles; but by this time it was past twelve o'clock, and the good countryman and all his family were sound asleep in their beds, whence it was very difficult to rouse them. At length, after long knocking at the door, and tapping at the window, Miles himself was called out of his bed; and, as apprehension was the order of the day, and as he did not choose to give such nocturnal visitors an opportunity of forcing their way in, he brought his face as near as possible to the casement, and opened it, inquiring "Who the devil are you?"

"Get on some clothes and come out, Miles," replied Mr. Morton. "Bring your gun with you, too, with a ball or two, fit for it, if you've got any. We've some business to do."

"Lord bless me sir! I didn't know you," answered the man in a respectful tone; but, rubbing his eyes heartily at the same time, "What

is it all about? The season is too far gone for shooting a buck."

"I'll tell you presently," answered Morton; "but make haste, my good friend, for we have no time to lose."

The man retired, promptly threw on some clothes, and calling one of his little girls to shut the door after him, speedily appeared with gun and powder flask in one hand and some bullets in the other.

"You had better charge," said Morton, and the man obeyed without hesitation, but still not without some surprise. Mr. Gibbs he stared at heartily, but recognized Dr. Western's coachman, and asked him how he did in a semi-somnambulous manner, while he went on cramming his gun as hard as he could drive.

"The French havn't landed, have they?" he asked at length, as he followed Morton up the sandy lane under the park wall.

"Oh, no," answered Morton. "We have not such serious enemies to deal with as that, my good fellow. We have discovered where two of the men are lying hid who are suspected of having broken into Mallington Hall, and murdered poor Edmonds."

"Oh, d—n them!" cried the gamekeeper; "if I catch them I'll knock their brains out."

"No, no," answered Morton. "You must be so good as to follow your orders exactly. I'll tell you what to do when we get near the spot, and you must do neither more nor less."

"Where be they?" asked Miles, in an eager tone, which showed that sleep was now quite thrown off. "In the chesnut wood, I'll bet any money."

"No," answered Morton; "in a cave or hollow piece of ground in Wenlock Wood, I understand."

"What! Gammer Hurry's Hole!" exclaimed Miles, stopping suddenly. "Well, that's the very place for them to hide, to be sure. I havn't been there this many a year, and I didn't think of it. But stop a bit, stop a bit. If they are in there you'll want some light, for at the back part it's as black as the coal-hole, even in the day time, and we may all get our throats cut before we know it."

This was a point that had neither struck Morton, Mr. Gibbs, nor the coachman, and for a moment or two it puzzled them all very much.

Miles soon came to their relief. "I've got a dark lantern at home," he said. "You three go up to the common, at the back of the park, and I'll run and fetch it, and be up with you in a minute."

They reached the top of the hill, however, some minutes before they were overtaken by the gamekeeper; and Morton took advantage of the opportunity to cross-examine Mr. Gibbs in regard to the locality and circumstances of the cave, and also to arrange his plan of operations.

"Two of us had better go in first," he said, "and two stay at the entrance, in case the others should miss them, and they should run out. As soon, however, as we have got hold of them, the others can rush in to help."

"They were both close at the mouth," said Mr. Gibbs. "But who's to go in first?"

Morton mistook him, and thought that one of the qualms of apprehension which he acknowledged having felt in the tree had now got possession of him again, and he accordingly replied, "You and the coachman had better stay at the entrance, Mr. Gibbs; you can hold the lantern, so as to give us as much light as possible, and knock any of them down who attempt to pass."

But the safety that is in numbers had inspired Mr. Gibbs with the spirit of a hero. He was not at all unwilling to take his part in a fight, though he objected strongly to having the fight all to himself. "No, no, sir!" he exclaimed, "on my life, that's not fair. I found the fellows out, and I ought to be allowed my part in taking them."

"So you shall, my good friend," replied Morton; "but only, as I think that Miles is a stronger man—"

"Oh! I'm stronger than I look," answered Mr. Gibbs, interrupting him, "and devilish active. Let me once get my fingers on one of their throats, and the fellow shan't throw me off more easily than a pinned bull does a bulldog."

"Well, so be it," answered Morton, who recollecting that Miles was a married man, with a large family dependent upon him, thought it as well that the more dangerous part of the undertaking should fall upon the dapper traveler.

When the gamekeeper joined them, however, though he did not venture to express his dissent so boldly as Mr. Gibbs had done, yet he grumbled a little at the prospect of not being allowed, as he termed it, "to have a lick at the fellows who murdered poor Edmonds."

Morton replied, "You must remember that they are only suspected, my good friend, and, therefore, there must be no more violence than is necessary to secure them. Probably, however, we shall all have as much of it as we well deserve. So now that we understand the whole, let us go on in perfect silence; and remember, Miles, not to unshade the lantern till we are close to the entrance of the cave. Step as quietly as possible also; and you, Miles, lead the way, as I suppose you know the place best."

"Know Gammer Hurry's Hole! Ay, that I do," answered the gamekeeper; "but what am I to do if I am not to go in when I get there!"

"You keep close to the right of the mouth. The coachman, who must come last, will keep close to the left, and Mr. Gibbs and I will go in between you as soon as you unshade the lantern."

"Very well, sir," answered Miles, "just as you like, though I think you had better leave it to us, in case harm should come of it."

"No, no, that will not do," answered Morton. "I never put other men upon tasks that I am afraid to undertake myself. Now go on, Miles."

The man led the way across the common till he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood; but then, instead of taking the path which Mr. Gibbs had followed once before, he struck away to the left, skirting the wood, till he came nearly to the spot where the high bank in which the cave was dug fell away into the broken ground of the common. This proceeding agitated Mr. Gibbs a good deal, for he thought that the man

must have mistaken the place; and, plucking Mr. Morton by the coat, he whispered his apprehensions.

"Hush!" answered Morton, "he is right, depend upon it;" and at the same moment the gamekeeper turned into the wood, where a somewhat broader and less entangled path was found under the shelter of the sandy banks.

Slowly and cautiously they walked along, keeping close to each other, and preserving a profound silence; and it is vain to say that the sensation was not somewhat awful, as, in the depth of the night, and with no other light but that afforded by the sky above, bright though it might be with the moon's rays, they walked on through the deep wood, and remembered that a struggle was about to take place with men whose hands were already imbrued in human blood, and who would, in all probability, struggle with the courage of despair. Every now and then, where the banks were a little lower, the moonlight poured from the south-west upon their path, streaming between the boles of the trees that crested the high ground above; but those occasional glimpses of brightness tended rather to render the gloom more deep when the darkness succeeded again.

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile a bird of the raven species—whether their steps had caught his watchful ear or whether he was already on the wing, I cannot tell—flew over their heads, with a hoarse croak, and they could hear the strong feathers of his wings flap amongst the branches. These were the only sounds they heard, all the rest was still, and solemn, and silent; not a breath of air was felt; the thin branches of the birch waved not, and the light leaves of the aspen remained at rest. Their own step was all that moved, and each took especial care to tread as lightly as possible, and to hold the cautious breath. At length a faint odor of burnt wood was perceptible, hanging about amongst the trees; and Miles, turning partly round, touched Mr. Morton on the shoulder, as an intimation that they were approaching the place.

Morton instantly drew one of the pistols from his pocket and held it in his left hand, giving the same sign to those behind him; and, after taking about twenty steps further, the gamekeeper stood still. Though completely dark, and though the fire which Mr. Gibbs had seen had now gone out, Morton could perceive distinctly enough the dark outline of the mouth of the cave, and when Miles paused and faced round on the right-hand side, the young gentleman did the same within about a yard of him. Mr. Gibbs also approached, and then Morton touched the gamekeeper as a signal to unshade the lantern. Just at the same moment there was a slight noise in the cave, as if some one moved; but the covering over the lantern was instantly drawn back, and the figures of the two sleeping men were straight before them. The feeble rays penetrated faintly into the cave, showing near the entrance the rough smoke-begrimed sides, but suffering the further parts to rest in obscurity. They flashed full upon the faces of Williams and his companion, however, and while Brown rolled over uneasily on his side, but without waking, the former started at once upon his feet, exclaiming, "Ay, ay, sir," as if suddenly called by some one in command over him.

Without giving him a moment's pause Morton rushed in upon him and grasped him by the collar; but even in the short interval, roused completely by the sound of feet, the miscreant was upon his guard, and grappling tight with his antagonist, a fearful struggle commenced between them. At the same moment Mr. Gibbs sprang upon Brown and held him down, meeting at first but little resistance, for the man's senses were completely buried in sleep; but as the grasp of his assailant began to oppress his throat, he too roused himself and struck the traveler a tremendous blow on the head as he started up, but without inducing Gibbs to let go his hold. Then seizing him by the waist he endeavored with his great strength to dash his head against the side of the cavern; but with active dexterity Gibbs contrived to avoid the blow, keeping fast to his throat, to use his own simile, like a bull-dog, while Brown raged and swore with every blasphemy that the vocabulary of crime could supply.

The contest, in the meantime, between Morton and Williams was more silent and apparently less violent, but more deadly. They were better matched in all respects; the gentleman was taller, as active, as much inured to exercise and danger; but not so muscular as his opponent. He had his pistol cocked in his hand, too, but that only embarrassed him, for he was determined not to use it but in case of the last necessity, and as he was presenting it at his head with a low threat to fire, a well-aimed blow knocked it out of his hand, and it went off as it struck the ground. They grappled with each other instantly, and wrestling with all their power, each strove to throw the other, till Williams, finding that he had to contend with one as powerful and as skillful as himself, relaxed his hold for a moment, and thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket. It was for life or death; for he knew that the withdrawal of his hand from Morton's shoulder would give his antagonist one fearful advantage; but he saw the two men at the mouth of the cave; he heard Miles exclaim "Hang it, this will never do!" and beheld him set down the lantern to start forward. His only chance was in dispatching his adversary at once; and the next instant a pistol was in his hand. Morton saw it, turned towards him, and put forth all his strength. Williams staggered, wavered, lost his balance; but still, with the pertinacity of the wolf, that bites even in dying, he strove to aim the weapon aright as he fell, still clinging to his enemy with his left hand. Miles beheld the whole, as he rushed on, and grasped at the felon's wrist, turning it somewhat from its course; but at the same moment that Williams fell headlong, the pistol went off; and Morton cast himself upon him, holding his chest down with his knee.

"Are you hurt, sir! are you hurt!" cried the gamekeeper.

"Never mind! never mind!" answered Morton, "Tie him! tie him!" and at the same time he pressed heavily upon his antagonist's chest.

With rapidity and skill Miles slipped a noose over Williams's arms, while Morton held him down, drew it tight, and tied it fast. "Now,

help them there! help them!" said the young gentleman, rising; and as Miles sprang away to aid Gibbs and the coachman, who were both struggling with Brown, Morton drew a second pistol from his pocket, turned to the mouth of the cave, and sat down, keeping a wary eye upon Williams. The man stood for an instant with his eyes bent upon the ground, without turning even a glance to the strife which went on for a moment near, ere his comrade was finally overcome and tied; but at length, with a slow step, he advanced towards Morton.

"Stand back!" said the young gentleman, as he saw him approach, raising his pistol at the same time; "I have not strength to struggle with you now, so I must fire, however unwillingly, if you attempt to escape."

"I was only coming to say I am afraid you are hurt, sir," answered Williams, in a mild tone; "I am sorry for it; but my blood was up, and I could not help it."

At the same moment Miles seized him by the collar, and dragged him back; but Morton exclaimed, "Do not ill-use him—do not ill-use him, on any account!" and the other three gathering round the young gentleman, whose face had turned somewhat pale, saw the blood streaming rapidly over the breast of his shirt from the right side as he leaned upon the left arm.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

In the prison of the town of ——, and in the best room of the prison, for in those days every man was considered innocent till he was proved guilty, and no man was treated to the utmost rigors of imprisonment till he was condemned by a jury of his country—we have changed all these things now, and it is quite as bad to be suspected of any serious crime as to commit a minor one—sat Captain Tankerville at his ease. He had a bottle of wine before him, and a veal pie—both excellent things, when they are good of their kind—and he reasoned with himself, as he sat, upon fate and human circumstances, and was quite as good a philosopher in his way, as far as ethics were concerned at least, as many a man who has written a large folio, and begotten for himself a great name. True, it is probable that his lucubrations would not greatly have tended to improve the moral or religious tone of society; but the same may be said, unfortunately, of almost every philosopher that ever lived. I say almost, because there are one or two great exceptions. But search through a large library, dear reader, and point out those exceptions one by one, and your feet will sooner have been tired of moving from shelf to shelf, than your tongue of pronouncing the names of the few clever men who have been good men too.

Captain Tankerville began by thinking of the strange turn circumstances had taken in bringing him to the jail of a small country town, when he felt himself well qualified to figure in a more extended sphere in the capital itself. "It's not an uncomfortable jail either," he said to himself, looking round—for Captain Tankerville was a connoisseur in jails, and had had some experience—"It's not an uncomfortable jail either, and devilish civil fellows in it; but it is strange to find one's self here. What an atrocious thing law is! Here am I shut up, for three or four days perhaps, for nothing in life but for playing at cards in an inn on a Sunday. It is true old Quatterly says he can prove a forgery against me—he's a clever fellow if he does. That cock's been tried before, I can tell him, and won't fight; but if he did he might run a chance of twisting my neck, after all. What an infamous shame to hang a man as one would a dog, merely for writing ten or twelve black strokes at the bottom of a piece of paper. It's contrary to every principle of justice and equity—it's pure murder. If I had to make laws I'd hang all those who have made them. Man was intended to be free. I don't suppose, when he was first turned out, that even a spadeful of earth was given to him as his own. Then whence does he derive his right to anything he has? It's all stuff. The whole world is properly in common, and each man has a right to take what he can get, and keep what he can. Why should not I write down upon a piece of paper the simple words, George Jacobson, just as well as any other man. I entered into no pledge with my godfathers and godmothers that I would stick to the name of Tom Tankerville all my life. Why doesn't a name wear out as well as anything else by too much use? and it's devilish hard that one may not get a new one, just as a man gets a new coat—that's cursed bad wine: brandy, sugar, and sloe juice. I wonder if one can't get anything better in this stupid town;" and he rang the bell which hung beside the mantel-piece.

One of the turnkeys came in immediately, for Captain Tankerville bled freely, as they said in the prison, and, thinking he had done his dinner, was about to remove the things; but the captain stopped him, exclaiming "Stay, stay; I havn't half done. I want some more wine, Mr. What's-your-name; and something better than that, too. I never tasted such stuff as that. You may take it away and drink it yourself if you like; but get me a bottle of good real old port, that will make the evening pass comfortably—and, I say, if you have anything new and entertaining come in, bring it in here just for an hour or so, for the sake of society. I'm beginning to get devilish dull."

"You don't seem so, I'm sure, sir," replied the turnkey; "but I'll tell Mr. Wilson what you say," and, withdrawing with the bottle in his hand, he went and spoke with his principal.

"Go and get him a bottle of old port from the Hart," said Mr. Wilson; "there's four shillings to pay for it—charge him eight, you know—but let it be good, for conscience sake. What's come in?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the turnkey, "but a petty larceny and an assault locked up in default."

"They might as well have sent that to the cage, I think," said Mr. Wilson; "I don't like to have such dirty jobs here—but I'll go and talk to him myself and amuse him. He seems a rollicking sort of blade, and takes it mighty easy."

"Ay, that he do," answered the turnkey. "I dare say he thinks the old gentleman won't persecute."

"Oh, but they'll make him," answered the principal jailer. "They have bound him over, I think."

"No, sir, the captain is only remanded," answered his subordinate. "But, hark! they are bringing some one in now. Why, it's that smart-dressed boy as was set in the stocks!"

As he spoke he held the door of the room, which was near the entrance of the prison, ajar in his hand, and Mr. Wilson sauntered out with his coat tails turned back as he had been standing by the fire. When he saw young Blackmore, however, and heard that he too was remanded on the charge of being an accessory in the robbery of Mallington Hall, he thought he would be just the person to suit Captain Tankerville, and accordingly ordered him to be put into that worthy's room till a cell could be got ready for him. There were plenty quite ready in the jail, but there are conventionalities in prisons as well as other places.

When young John Blackmore found into whose society he was introduced he was greatly relieved and delighted, and the appetite with which Captain Tankerville was eating his veal pie, though a great vacuity in one side showed that it was not the first attack he had made upon it, gave him quite a new view of prison life, and taught him the great advantage of "a light heart," whatever may be the benefit of the other article which is sometimes supposed, in conjunction with it, to facilitate a man in going "through the world." He had a great respect for Captain Tankerville. He was a man of the first class in the profession which he had shown himself anxious to follow, and the gay and cordial manner with which the worthy captain treated him inspired confidence and won regard.

"Ah, Blackee, my boy!" cried the captain, "what, have they grabbed you? Delighted to see you. You are welcome to the stone pitcher. Sit down and have a bit of pie and a glass of wine when it comes. I'll treat you."

Young Blackmore took a seat, and, with his usual effeminate manner, received the captain's civilities; but when the wine came, and he had taken a glass or two, he felt his spirits greatly revived, and the stocks were forgotten.

"Now, tell us what you're in for, Blackee," said the captain, after they had conversed and drank for some little time, "Something capital, I hope."

"Capital! la, captain, don't talk of capital!" replied young Blackmore. "You make me quite nervous again."

"I'm talking of capital fun, not capital punishment," replied his fellow prisoner, laughing; "but whatever it is, you had better have a little good advice. A young fellow like you, when he first begins, is sure to get himself into some scrape, if he hasn't some friend at his elbow to tell him to keep out of it."

"I've got into a terrible scrape already," said John Blackmore.

"The more reason you should take advice from my long experience," answered his sage companion. "This is the fourteenth time I have been in jail, Blackee—eight times for debt, and six for peccadilloes—and I never yet failed to get my head out almost as fast as it was in; so tell me what's the matter, and you shall have a good legal opinion without a fee."

"Why, they've put me in here," replied the lad, "for overhearing something that Jack Williams said to Bill Maltby, about robbing Mallington House, and not telling."

"Oh, Jack Williams!" said Captain Tankerville. "Then Latimer's in for it too, and I may be excused for not giving him his revenge, as I promised."

Young Blackmore nodded his head in token of assent, and Captain Tankerville went on in a grave, deliberate, thoughtful manner. "So, you overheard them, did you? and you didn't tell. Well, that certainly makes you *particeps criminis*. An awkward position, Mr. Blackmore, especially if you had any finger in the pie—I don't mean your whole hand. I mean only if you fingered it—carrying messages, running for horses, giving a nod or a wink, and such things. Now, if murder had been committed, the question would have been settled. You'd have had to taste hemp, Blackee. It's rather bitter, but not so much so as people imagine, I have a notion, and one thing is, it's soon over."

"They say murder was committed," replied the young man, in a low tone, fixing his eyes upon Captain Tankerville's countenance, as if his life depended upon the next word.

"Ah! that's awkward," answered his fellow prisoner. "Take a glass of wine, Blackee. We'll have another bottle when that's done. Now, as far as I can see, you've got but one chance. You must stag—I dare say you don't care a straw about Williams—nor I either, for that matter—nor about Alfred Latimer—nor I either. They are both sure to be hanged, any way; so, if you can get your neck out of the noose between them, you are a fool if you don't do it."

"But I did confess," replied the youth, setting down his half emptied glass of wine; and he proceeded to tell his companion all that had happened to him during the preceding night and that eventful morning, and added by saying that the constable, as he had brought him along, had told him that the whole story was out, and the people hunting for Williams, Latimer, and Brown, all over the country; "and so they took me out of the stocks and put me in here," he added.

"See what it is not to have an experienced hand to consult with," rejoined Captain Tankerville. "If I had been near you, I'd have put you right in a minute. You should have stuck to your story to Williams's face, whether it was true or false. Then you would have got clear off, and, perhaps, been rewarded; now you've only one chance, my lad. You must come back to your old story, and say that the sight of the fellow frightened you out of your wits; then if you can just tell where Williams is gone, so as to get him nabbed, you'll save your bacon."

"I don't know," answered the youth, mournfully.

"Do you know where young Latimer is gone?" cried Captain Tankerville.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed young Blackmore, joyfully; "I know where he intended to go, and how they arranged all their plans, though at that time I wasn't aware that he was to have any hand in this job. He was first to go to Portsmouth, and then over to France, to a

place called Havre, where Williams was to join him, and then they were to go pirating in the Levant together."

"A very pretty scheme!" cried Captain Tankerville, laughing heartily. "Quite romantic, upon my life. Two gentlemen starting in the characters of Blue Beard and Black Beard." As he spoke he approached the bell and gave it a smart pull.

"What are you going to do? what are you going to do?" cried young Blackmore.

"To save your life, my lad," replied Captain Tankerville. "It's very seldom indeed that one can tell the truth with any advantage to one's self. I never knew above two or three instances of it. But this is one, and it shows a man's skill if he finds out when it is just as good for him to tell the truth as to tell a lie. So now you have nothing to do but to go and swear where Alfred Latimer may be found, and, if he's caught, you may be safe enough. I say, my good friend," he continued, as the turnkey opened the door, "just tell the governor to step here. This young man has got something to tell which may further the ends of justice immensely; and, as I am always fond of seeing justice done, I think it quite as well that the magistrates should know it. But you had better be quick, or the fellows may have got beyond reach."

Mr. Wilson appeared in a minute, and heard all that young Blackmore had to say with a dry attentive countenance. At first his former tergiversation, which had reached the worthy officer's ears, seemed to have produced an unfavorable impression in regard to the young man's veracity; but as soon as he heard what he had to say of Alfred Latimer's escape, he replied "You must come before the magistrates. Send up Bill here to keep him safe," he continued, addressing the turnkey who stood behind, "and let some one keep a look-out for Mr. Soames; he was down at the bench just now."

"He was over at the Hart asking when the shay went," rejoined the turnkey.

"Well, see for him—see for him! and let him know that we've got information," said Mr. Wilson; and these precautions had their desired effect, for John Blackmore's new deposition was made before Soames had quitted the town, and furnished with the best information he could get, and all legal powers, as well as an assistant, he jumped into a post-chaise, and drove off towards Portsmouth.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

The post-chaise which contained Alfred Latimer and his poor bride rolled along as fast as two horses could draw it; but yet not fast enough for his impatience, for remorse and fear were upon him. He fancied that he had taken all his measures so well, indeed, that suspicion was not likely to fall upon him speedily, if at all. He fancied that it would be some time before the bloody clothes which he had left at Mallington House would be discovered; and as no one knew that they belonged to him, that it would be still longer before any circumstance would show that they had ever been in his possession. Even his marriage with Lucy he thought would tend more than all the rest to the concealment of his part in the crime that had been committed, and he argued and reargued with himself to prove, to his own satisfaction, that he was quite safe. Yet fear was in his heart, for, with a very few exceptions, terror is always the follower of crime. He could not banish it; he could not drive it away. More than once he pulled up the covering over the little window at the back of the chaise and looked out behind; more than once he called to the postboy to "get on," though he was going as fast as he could.

Remorse also was doing its part bitterly and terribly, and the struggling feelings within his bosom strangely affected his demeanor. Sometimes he would fall into deep and gloomy fits of thought—sometimes he would answer Lucy sharply and angrily—sometimes be prodigal of tenderness and caresses. He loved her certainly better than he had ever loved any human being. He had always done so, and now he clung to her as the only solace left, and the only fragment that he had saved out of the wreck of better things left for him; and yet the impatience and irritation of his mind would not suffer him to be wholly kind. But she bore all with gentleness and affection, as she had been lately taught to bear; and she now saw that something, she knew not what, weighed heavily upon his mind. For a moment at one time she thought, with deep grief, that it might be his marriage with her that irritated him—that he might regret it—that he might feel that it had degraded him; but then came one of those fits of tenderness which showed her that such could not be the case.

She little thought, poor girl, that she was sitting side by side with the murderer of her father; and that the hand, the burning hand which clasped hers was stained with her father's blood.

Onward, however, they went, and had gone near fifty miles on their way before Harry Soames, the constable, set out from Mallington in pursuit of them. But though poor Lucy was tired, and Alfred Latimer himself became drowsy with the exertions and the watchfulness of the preceding night, still he went on, till towards eleven they reached the town of Southampton. As soon as the chaise drove up at the door of the inn, Alfred Latimer inquired when the packet would sail for Havre, and, to his great relief, heard that it got under weigh at four o'clock on the following morning. He immediately sent to secure berths for himself and his wife, and after a light meal, bade Lucy retire to rest for an hour or two. But he himself did not lie down, fearful lest the people of the inn, notwithstanding all his injunctions, should not call him in time; and he remained dozing by the fire of the sitting-room in a half-delirious sleep. The horrors that he underwent during those three hours that he thus remained are indescribable. Scarcely had he closed his eyes for five minutes when the figure of poor Edmonds, as he lay bleeding on the floor the moment after he had shot him, presented itself to his sight, and he woke with a start of agony. Then, when he slept again, he seemed to hear loud voices shouting, and peo-

ple screaming out his name, and calling "Stop the murderer!" and again sleep was banished. Thus it went on all the time, till at the hour appointed the punctual porter of the inn came with a candle in his hand to call the gentleman and lady that were going by the packet.

Lucy was soon roused, and ready to depart. The trunks and boxes they had brought were put upon a wheelbarrow; the bills paid, the servants fee'd, and with the daughter of his victim hanging on his arm, Alfred Latimer took his way down through the dark streets to the port.

It was a fine clear night, the wind was light and favorable, and no obstacle or impediment presented itself. The careless examination to which goods going abroad at that time were subjected at the Custom House was soon got over; one trunk was opened, and then all were marked with chalk, and carried to the vessel. Alfred Latimer and Lucy went on board at the same time, and both went down below to wait for the ship sailing.

In about twenty minutes after, there was a good deal of noise and swearing upon deck, and Alfred Latimer looked anxiously towards the cabin door. But presently a sort of swaying motion was felt, the ship began to bend considerably to one side, and the noise of rushing water showed him that they had got under weigh. It was a blessed relief, but still he could not rest; and as he and Lucy were the only cabin passengers, he laid down for a short time on the sofa by the side of her berth, and then started up again, saying he would go upon deck to see how they got on.

He found everything now calm and quiet; the ship going easily through the water, and the different lights that marked the shoals and headlands in that part of the channel distinctly visible. He wished that they were all passed; but still it was some satisfaction to be at sea, and he gazed over for a few minutes into the water as the ship sent it in foam from her sides. Presently, however, the captain gave some orders, the speed of the packet was slackened, and then apparently she stopped, without however letting down the anchor, and in reality driving on slowly with the tide.

"What is the matter?" asked Alfred Latimer of one of the sailors who came up the gangway with a coil of rope on his arm.

"Nothing but a boat from Portsmouth, sir," answered the man, unfastening the bolt where what is called the accommodation ladder is placed.

Alfred Latimer asked no more questions, but instantly went below, and there remained listening, with the cabin-door ajar in his hand. Presently the sound of oars, a grating noise against the ship's side, and voices speaking were heard; a good deal of hallooing followed, and then some conversation upon deck; but the unhappy young man could not distinguish anything that was said. In another instant, however, steps were heard coming down, and he closed the door hastily, and laid down upon the sofa again.

The persons who had descended went into what was called the gentlemen's cabin first; but then almost immediately returned, and the door of that in which Alfred Latimer and his poor wife were was thrown unceremoniously open. The first who came in was the captain of the ship; but two other faces appeared behind him, and in one of them the wretched young man instantly recognized a countenance which he knew too well—that of Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington.

His fate was no longer doubtful; a chill like that of death spread on his whole frame, and though he shook not, nor uttered a word, it seemed as if all his limbs were changed into stone,

"Ah, Master Alfred!" cried the constable, in a familiar tone, "I've caught you at last, have I? 'Twas devilish clever of you that doubling upon me at Andover, and taking to Southampton instead of Portsmouth. But you must come along now, and I am sorry to say I must put the darbies upon you, for you see the offence is a big 'un."

Alfred Latimer stood before him without word or motion, with his eyes gazing upon him, his lips quivering, and his face as pale as death.

"What is the matter?" cried Lucy, rising in terror. "What is all this, in heaven's name?"

"Why, it's a bad job, Miss Lucy," replied Harry Soames. "I must take your lover here—that's to say your husband, for I hear you are married outright—away with me. I've got nothing to do with you. The warrant's against him, and you can go where you like—to France, if it suits you."

"I will go wherever he goes," answered Lucy, clinging to the arm of her husband.

"Can't allow that," said Mr. Soames, in a decided tone; "and besides, you see it is impossible. I and the other constable have got to take him back, and the shay will but hold three anyhow. Howsoever, you can come after us if you like, though I'd advise you not."

"Where are you going to take him?" cried Lucy. "What are you putting those things on him for?" and she gazed with terror upon the handcuffs that they were fastening upon his unresisting arms.

"Why, we are going back to Mallington," answered Harry Soames, "and that as fast as we can go; and as for why we are putting these on him, you see it's for murder"—he had very nearly added "of your own father," but he had once had a child, and he paused, thinking, "I will not say that."

"For murder!" exclaimed Lucy, "for murder! Well, he is my husband, and I will go with him, whatever he has done."

"But I tell you you can't, ma'rm," answered Harry Soames. "It's no use argufying, it can't be done."

"Then I'll follow," said Lucy mournfully—"I'll follow, wherever he goes."

"Come," said the captain of the vessel, "you had better get him out of the ship as fast as you can. I can't lay to here all night. I thought there was something wrong about him when first I saw him. Come, take him away to the boat."

"Oh, take me with him—take me with him in the boat!" cried Lucy; "at least take me on shore with him!"

But Mr. Soames thought fit to assume a harshness which, notwithstanding his various faults, was not natural to him. "It's a great

deal better she should be out of the way," he thought; she'll only break her heart if she comes in the midst of it, and finds how it all is. Better the young dog should be safe lodged in the stone pitcher, and her father's burial over, before she gets home, anyhow;" and, therefore, upon these considerations he replied, "No, that can't be permitted, ma'rm. You may jest speak a word to him, if you like, before he goes. There can be no harm in that. Stay a minute, captain, there's a good soul. They are new-married people, and this is a hard parting," and he walked towards the door.

"And what am I to do with the girl?" asked the captain in a low voice, following the constable.

"Oh, you must take her over to Havre, and bring her back again if she wants to come," answered Harry Soames. "I'm not going to take her ashore, I can tell you, for many reasons; but be kind to her, there's a good man, for she comes of very good people, and he's a gentleman of high family, although he has played this here trick."

"Are they really married?" asked the captain.

"Ay, that they were, yesterday morning," answered Harry Soames; "I see the gentleman that married them."

In the mean time Lucy had cast her arms round her husband's neck, and given way to the tears she had long repressed. But Alfred Latimer recovered himself sufficiently to whisper, in a quick tone, "Put your hand in my waistcoat pocket, and take out the key of the large trunk—all the money is in it. Go on to Havre, and then come back again if you like, Lucy. But on no account bring that trunk back with you, or anything that it contains, but what money you want. Quick—quick!—don't let them see you."

Lucy did as he bade her; and the moment after Harry Soames said, "Come, I can't give any more time, Mr. Latimer; you must come along."

"Well, I am ready," answered the young man. "Farewell, Lucy!—farewell!" and he kissed her tenderly.

They were obliged to take poor Lucy's arms from his neck before they could lead him to the deck. Alfred Latimer went calmly, though slowly; but as he approached the ship's side the overwhelming impression of the dreadful situation in which he was placed rushed upon his mind more forcibly than it had done before. The horror of being branded and tried as a murderer—the sight of all those whom he had known from his youth gazing upon him with horror, and the agony of a public execution—all seemed to flash upon his mind at once, and he thought anything would be preferable. He was near the ship's side—one of the men had him by the arm to help him down into the boat, and his hands were manacled; but he contrived to dart away, and at one spring cleared the bulwark. A dull splash was heard in the water, and a loud shriek from Lucy, who had followed close behind; but the instant after one of the boatmen exclaimed "I have got him, I have got him. Here he is!" and as they held the lantern over the ship's side they saw two of the men below pulling the wretched culprit into the boat.

"Oh, let me go with him—in pity, in mercy, let me go with him!" cried poor Lucy; but Harry Soames and his companion scrambled down the ship's side without heeding her, and the next moment the boat pushed off, leaving her upon the deck.

"There, go down, go down, my poor young lady," said the captain, in a kindly tone, "go down and sleep. Perhaps they won't be able to prove anything against him after all."

Those were the first words of comfort that Lucy had heard, and, after gazing for a minute in the direction that the boat took, she did go down into the cabin, but not to sleep. Still the captain's words returned to her mind.

"They may not be able to prove anything against him," she repeated to herself, "Oh, no, no, no, I am sure they cannot. Murder! Alfred would never commit murder! Perhaps he has killed somebody in a duel; they call that murder sometimes, but then they are always pardoned, and I am sure he will be."

She gave up her mind, however, to bitterer thoughts when she remembered many of the circumstances that had taken place—the companionship of Williams, the long absence of her husband for a day and two nights, the terrible agitation he had displayed, his haste and eagerness to reach a foreign country, and the sort of dull despair that had fallen upon him when Soames and his companion came on board. "I will return directly," she thought. "I will get back as fast as I can. But where shall I go when I reach Mallington? My father would be angry and not see me, and my mother will not venture to have me there. I will go to Dr. Western; he will be kind, though he may be angry, and he will pity me and help me, I am sure. But I must get back directly. I wonder if they could not land me somewhere as they go."

As soon as this thought struck her she looked forth from the cabin and called the steward, inquiring whether the captain could not put her ashore on the Isle of Wight? The reply, however, was in the negative; and a few minutes after the captain himself came down, saying "I shan't touch anywhere till I get to Havre, ma'am, but I can bring you back the day after to-morrow, if that will do. But I think you had a great deal better lie down, for we shall soon get into rough water."

"The day after to-morrow!" said Lucy. "That is a long time;" but the poor girl had no other resource. Steam-packets in those days did not span the seas as with a flying bridge, and Lucy, after brief deliberation, agreed to the captain's proposal to carry her back again. Then lying down in her berth once more, she turned her face so that no one entering could see her, and gave way to her grief without restraint. Innumerable horrors could be added, if any one so pleased, to the tale, of the sorrows which poor Lucy suffered, and the romance writers of an olden time would have produced a long history of disasters arising—as, indeed, was not improbable—from her having with her a number of things belonging to Alfred Latimer, and, more especially, a large quantity of the gold which had been plundered from Mallington House. She knew nothing of the fact, indeed, but still it was more than likely to have led her

into difficulties and even dangers. But there is nothing so sickening to good taste as the exaggeration of that which is horrible enough in the plain reality. Far from meeting with all the misfortunes that she could meet with, various circumstances combined to prevent many of them from falling upon her. In the first place, Harry Soames, who had never before had the honor of capturing so respectable a prisoner for so capital an offence, what between the hurry and the eagerness of the pursuit, and the confusion and the novelty of boarding the packet at night, forgot those precautions which a more experienced officer of the street called Bow would have taken with the most deliberate coolness, notwithstanding the haste and impatience of the captain, and, as his warrant was directed only against the person of Alfred Latimer, satisfied himself with having obtained possession of that, and neglected to secure his goods, chattels, and effects, which, indeed, might have been of great consequence in proving the case against him. The captain, too, though a quick, sharp man, never troubled his head, according to the happy vulgarism, about the lady's trunks and boxes, and poor Lucy's utter unconsciousness of their importance, and the little heed she took of them, prevented anything like suspicion being aroused. Had they been seized she would have been left nearly penniless in a foreign land, either to die of want, or to find her way back how she could. But they were not seized, and everything was landed quietly on the quay at Havre. One box after another was taken to the Custom House; a few articles of English manufacture were detained as contraband, and all the rest were sent up to the inn, whither she had gone by the captain's recommendation. At that inn we shall now leave her, unconscious of the danger she had run, but with her heart already loaded with fully as much grief as she could bear.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

Great was the bustle and confusion in Mallington, even at a late hour of the night on which the notorious Jack Williams and the little less notorious Tom Brown were secured. The inhabitants, the *genii loci*, were sleeping their first sweet sleep; the Crumps and the Martins, the Dixons and the Skinners, were all in the arms of Morpheus; and dear Mrs. Pluckrose pressed the downy pillow, full of unconsciousness, when a loud knocking at the inn door startled her from her fond oblivion. Chambermaids and ostlers were roused in haste, but the knocking continued till they made their appearance at the door; and then messengers were sent off with the utmost rapidity to the house of Mr. Nethersole and to that of Dr. Western, where the knocking recommenced with as much fury as before. All these proceedings not only roused but agitated the inhabitants, and forth from many a window came many a head. The Misses Martin, in curl-papers, and Mrs. Dixon, in her night-cap, were amongst the first to thrust the ornament of their shoulders into the night air; but Mrs. Dixon had the advantage, as the reader is well aware, of lying between the house of Mr. Nethersole and the inn, so that that excellent lady had the opportunity of calling to the ostler, as he hurried back from the former habitation, and inquiring, in dulcet accents, what was the matter with the Bagpipes.

"Why, ma'am," replied the ostler, "it's a sad business. Mr. Morton has just been brought in badly wounded; but they've got Jack Williams and Tom Brown as committed the murder, and that's summut."

After giving this account he pursued his way home again, although the Misses Martin screamed after him from the other side of the street, but screamed in vain. They had recourse to all the fictions of imagination to account for the bustle; and, to say sooth, they did some injury to the reputation both of Betsey the chambermaid, and even good Mrs. Pluckrose herself, by their surmises in regard to the cause of this rapid and noisy appeal to the surgeon.

"What could Mr. Nethersole be sent for at such an hour of the night, if it was not to attend one of the women at the inn?" And having established this position as their starting point, they went on with great vigor to calumniate every one in Mallington except themselves, and then fell sound asleep again, with the comfortable reflection that nobody could think worse of their neighbors than they did.

In the meantime Mr. Morton was assisted upstairs, for by this time he was greatly weakened by loss of blood; and having undressed himself with difficulty, stretched himself on the bed, waiting for Mr. Nethersole. But a very few minutes elapsed before that gentleman appeared, half dressed indeed, but having a large case of instruments under his arm, and his assistant at his back. Without asking any questions, and with a very quiet, deferential manner, he proceeded to examine the young gentleman's wound, and probed it to the bottom.

"There's the ball," he said, "there's the ball. That's lucky, we shall easily get at it. I fear, sir, I must put you to a good deal of pain; but it must be extracted immediately, and then we shall easily take up the vessels that have been cut."

"I do not mind the pain," said Mr. Morton; "but you had better get me a glass of wine, for I feel faint."

Mr. Nethersole, as we have said, was a skilful man, very dexterous in manipulation of his tools; and while Mr. Morton had been speaking he had continued apparently probing the wound with a curious-looking instrument somewhat like a pair of curling-irons.

"Get a glass of wine, William," he said; and at the same moment Morton felt a sort of tug, by no means of a pleasant description, but it was followed by instant relief from a sort of burning sensation, which he had felt just between the right shoulder and the chest, somewhat below the clavicle.

"Here it is," said Mr. Nethersole, with a slight degree of triumph in his tone, although it was low and mild; and he held up before Morton's eyes a pistol bullet, which he had drawn from the wound. "All safe, my dear sir," he continued, "no bones injured; and now we will attend to the hemorrhage. Before ten minutes were over, the bleeding had ceased, and Morton felt himself comparatively comfortable when

Dr. Western arrived, with terrible consternation in his face. Good Mrs. Pluckrose, who had been holding the light with Spartan fortitude, now hastened to relieve the mind of the worthy rector, exclaiming, "It's all right now, sir; the bleeding is stopped, and the bullet's out. There it lies upon the table."

But Dr. Western, without examining the implement of evil, advanced quietly to his young friend's bedside, and took his hand quietly in his. "Oh, it's nothing, my dear sir," said Morton; "the loss of blood made me somewhat faint, but that is all the mischief that has been done. I took the liberty of sending for you, because I knew that you were sitting up, and wished you to communicate the fact to Louisa in such a way as would not alarm her. But I was quite sure there was no great injury done, and therefore would not let them call Mr. Quatterly. I dare say I shall be able to get out to-morrow."

Mr. Nethersole shook his head. "Perfect quiet, my dear sir, perfect quiet is absolutely necessary. For three days, at least, I shall not let you quit your bed. The wound certainly is not dangerous, but we never can tell the result of inflammation, and, as you are well aware, some inflammation must come on, even in order to effect the healing process. At present, I would forbid all conversation. It is my invariable rule, where such injuries exist as this, to prevent every sort of excitement, and I have found the most beneficial results. Upon quiet depends your perfect recovery in ten days or a fortnight, or you remain ill for six weeks or two months. You may, therefore, take your choice. We surgeons don't object to a long case, you know; but still conscience, conscience makes us give the patient his option."

"Oh, the shorter time by all means," answered Morton; "and, therefore, I will merely speak a few words to Dr. Western, and bid him good night."

Mr. Nethersole, taking the hint, retired to the other side of the room, wiped his instruments, washed his hands, and conversed a few moments with Mrs. Pluckrose, while Morton requested the clergyman to take every measure for securing the comfort of poor Mrs. Edmonds, and arranging the funeral of her husband, after the coroner's inquest had taken place. Many were the messages, also, which he sent Louisa, beseeching her not to make herself uneasy, but though Dr. Western, from all he saw, was inclined to believe that his young friend was not seriously injured, he well knew that it would be in vain to attempt to relieve Louisa's anxiety till she herself could see him.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole there, resolved to stay all night by his patient, the rector took his way homeward, and retired to rest, thinking he would spare Miss Charlton all knowledge of the events which had taken place as long as possible. But with the very best intentions, and with the very best judgment, we very often produce greater pain to those we love by the means we take to secure them from it. For, unless we could see the intricacies of the heart, we can never tell how to apply the balm to the exact spot where it is required. Louisa had not been deceived by the air of calmness and indifference with which her lover had set out that night. She saw that he was going upon some expedition of importance, and the very silence which had been maintained in regard to its end and object, had naturally made her suspect that it was of a dangerous character. Sleepless and anxious, therefore, she had lain listening for every sound till the ringing of the bell, and the knocking at the door, and the hurried going out of Dr. Western showed her that some events had taken place, though of what nature she could not tell. Still she lay and listened, but did not hear his return, for he gained admission to the rectory by his own key, and made no noise in retiring to his room. With the earliest light of day Louisa was up, and in less than half an hour afterwards was down in Dr. Western's study. As always happens in such cases, the very tidings which he wished to communicate as gently as possible were told by the housemaid in the most abrupt and exaggerated form. Louisa might, indeed, guess that something had been added to the tale over and above the truth, but still the fact was clear—Morton was wounded; and fear can be as great a magician as hope, although in a sadder way. For a full hour Louisa continued giving way to all the darkest fancies that apprehension could call up; and then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she hastened to the room of Mrs. Evelyn, and, knocking at the door, craved admission. The tale was soon told, and though the old lady endeavored to soothe her as much as possible, it was evident that she was herself frightened, and, as the best means of satisfying both, she went away, half dressed as she was, to her brother's room.

Dr. Western did not make them wait, for he was already up, and dressed; and, hurrying out, he informed Louisa, kindly and tenderly, but with perfect truth, of the state of the case.

"Morton is certainly hurt, my dear," he said, "but not dangerously. I cannot counsel you not to be grieved for his sufferings, Louisa; but I assure you there is not the slightest cause for apprehension, and you know that I would not say so unless I had good grounds."

"I am perfectly certain of that," replied Louisa; "and your assurance is a great comfort to me; but yet I should be more happy if—do you think there would be any harm or impropriety in my going with you to see him?"

"No, my dear," answered Dr. Western, "circumstanced as you are, and with your guardian at your side, I think there would be none; but there is an objection of another kind. Mr. Nethersole recommends perfect quiet for the next three days. Now, I need not tell you, Louisa, that Morton could not see you without very different emotions from those with which he would receive the surgeon, or the surgeon's assistant. Therefore, I think you had better forbear."

Louisa was very reasonable. "Whatever I may feel," she said, "I will do nothing to protract his illness; but at all events, as I suppose you will go to see him yourself, I may accompany you to the door. That will be some satisfaction."

To this there was no objection, and it was arranged that about the middle of the day, Louisa, Mrs. Evelyn, and the good doctor should go

together to the inn, and thence cross over to Mallington Park, on a visit of consolation to poor Mrs. Edmonds. But before they set out, a message from Mr. Nethersole brought the welcome intelligence that Morton was proceeding perfectly well, and that he wished to see Dr. Western, to which the surgeon assented; and when, after having waited in the carriage for about a quarter of an hour, while the clergyman visited the wounded man, Louisa was again joined by her guardian, she received the still better tidings that her lover was apparently better than the night before; and Dr. Western added, with a smile, "The only danger is, that he seems so well it will be difficult to keep him quiet."

They then drove over the bridge, and up the chief road towards the hall; but just as they were turning off, in the direction of poor Edmonds's cottage, they passed a number of men on foot, conversing together, whom Louisa at once understood to be the coroner's jury. She turned her head away with a slight shudder as the sight brought back to her remembrance all the dreadful details of the crime which had been perpetrated, and her heart sunk as she recollected all the consequences which were to flow from the acts which were then taking place. When she thought of Alfred Latimer—of one brought up in the same house, and nearly connected with herself—of his being brought to trial for so dark and dreadful a deed—of having to appear as a witness against him, to aid in his condemnation, and to know that she had a share, however unwillingly, in working his destruction—when all these circumstances came across her mind, she almost feared that she should never have strength for the task. Then came the thought of his execution, of his mother's agony and rage; and although she felt too sadly convinced that nothing but justice would be done if the severest infliction of the law fell upon his head, yet she could not contemplate such a result without deep and terrible grief, and tried to turn away her eyes from the prospect before her. Such is the power of association upon the human mind, that when habituated to the society, even of those we neither love nor esteem, we cannot help feeling with them in misfortune and grief, even when the consequences of their own errors fall upon them. All seemed dark and gloomy around Louisa Charlton, except the one bright spot where love shone, like the sunshine that sometimes bursts through a stormy sky, and her heart was bitterly depressed enough when they reached the poor park-keeper's cottage, and a new scene of sorrow was presented to her.

Mrs. Evelyn and Louisa were left for nearly two hours with poor Mrs. Edmonds, while Dr. Western went up to the hall to make the various arrangements that were necessary, and to learn the result of the coroner's inquest. On his return he stayed with the poor widow for some time, and thus it was nearly four o'clock when the carriage again drove from the door. The beautiful scenery of the park, as they drove through it, the soft lawns and green turf, the brown wood sweeping round, the glistening river, caught here and there, through the gaps in the trees, were all lighted up by the calm evening sunshine, and, by the aspect of the great Creator's works in a state of such tranquillity, seemed to offer a sad but monitory contrast in the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, to the troublous passions and bitter strifes of man, which had filled the hearts of all around with pain, anxiety, and fear. But one sight more was wanting to make that contrast more complete, and it was to be added before Louisa reached her temporary home. The carriage drove slowly over the bridge; and, at the spot where the roads crossed, was turning to the left towards the rectory, when, suddenly dashing down the hill as fast as four horses could bring it, appeared a post-chaise approaching the inn. Louisa's eyes were turned in that direction, when she naturally gazed at so unusual a sight in the little town of Mallington, but the first object she beheld in the vehicle was Alfred Latimer seated between the constable, Harry Soames, and another man, to whom she was a stranger. The face of her step-mother's son, once florid and healthy, was now as pale as death; and there was something in the position in which he sat, in the straitened and forward posture of the arms, which showed her that his wrists were manacled. His eyes were bent down, so that, though seen, he did not see anything that was passing around; and Louisa drew back in the carriage, and pressed her hand upon her brow. Dr. Western's chariot rolled on without pause, and the fearful sight of one who had called her sister brought past his own door as a captured felon was soon removed from her eyes.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

Several days passed, and, at the usual hour in the evening, the London coach stopped at the inn in Mallington with a heavier load than it ordinarily brought. The burden, indeed, was not destined to swell even for a time the population of the little town, for, though several passengers jumped down from the outside, and, while some entered the inn and took the refreshment of a glass of ale, others walked up and down as a relief after their cramped position on the roof, only one passenger got out of the inside and gave any indication of an inclination to remain. That one was a lady simply, though nicely dressed; and one box, or rather trunk, which contained her worldly goods, was taken from the boot by the coachman, and set down at the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was waiting, as she not uncommonly did, to see what fortune fate would send her by the coach, and, after eyeing the lady for a moment, for her features were not clearly discernible through a thick veil which she wore, she approached with a courtesy, asking if she intended to stay in Mallington.

"I will leave the trunk here, Mrs. Pluckrose," said a voice the good landlady knew right well; "but I must go down to Dr. Western's immediately."

"Dear me, Miss Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose, who though the veil was not yet removed, instantly recognized her, as I have said, by the voice, "Dear me! is that you? You have come, at a most sad time, Miss Lucy—Mrs. Latimer, I mean to say—I wish you had come at any other time."

"I know it is a sad time," answered Lucy, "I know it too well, Mrs. Pluckrose; but, nevertheless, I must go down to Dr. Western's directly."

"Oh, don't go there just now, ma'am!" rejoined the worthy landlady. "Don't go there just now, my dear child—or, at all events, stop a little here. Come into my parlor, there you can be quite quiet and private."

"No, no!", answered Lucy Edmonds; "I must not stop for anything. Only just take care of my trunk till I know where I can lie, Mrs. Pluckrose; I am determined to do just what Dr. Western tells me; and wherever he tells me I ought to go, there I will go."

"Well, that's right—that's very right!" answered Mrs. Pluckrose; "but yet, my dear! I wish you would wait here for a little."

Before Lucy could answer, the coachman came up, with his bill in his hand, saying, "Four-and-twenty shillings, if you please, ma'am;" and the landlady was called away to reckon with one of the travelers, who was about to proceed.

Lucy paid the money, received the admonition to "remember the coachman" with due attention, and then crossing over the way, followed the road by the river bank towards the rectory. Her steps were wavering and uncertain—her eyes bent upon the ground, and, to tell the truth, they were filled with tears, for every painful memory of the past, and every dark anticipation of the future, rose up before her, as she proceeded through the scenes of her early days, with none to welcome her, with none to offer one kindly word, or greet the wanderer's return with an embrace. From time to time she looked around, as if fearful that some one should see her whom she had formerly known. She dreaded to meet her father's eyes, little dreaming that those eyes were covered with the shroud. Even the mother who had so loved her—who had always been so tender and so kind—she would fain have shunned, little knowing that that mother was standing by a husband's grave on the road directly before.

When she had advanced about a quarter of a mile, she saw a lady and a gentleman coming slowly towards her, the latter very pale, and apparently languid and ill; the former with her eyes anxiously turned towards his countenance, and her hand resting very lightly on his arm. Lucy instantly recognized Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton, but she could not make up her mind to speak to them; and, anxious to avoid their notice, though she might have passed safely under the thick veil which she wore, she crossed the little bit of green sward which lay between the road and the river, and gazed upon the passing waters, as if some secret treasure lay hidden at the bottom of their course.

When they had passed by, she resumed her walk, and was approaching the rectory, when she caught a sight of Dr. Western's figure coming by a private gate from the church-yard into his own grounds. But upon the open road, before the rectory, there was another sight—two undertakers, in black, were leading the way from the churchyard before a long string of other persons, with all the signs of deep mourning in their apparel and demeanor, who seemed to have been attending a funeral. Lucy hurried forward, in the hope of avoiding them, by the gates which led into the garden of the rectory; but just as she did so, her eye fell upon the form of a young boy, walking beside a woman, whose face was buried in her handkerchief. They were the two first of the sad procession, the principal mourners, and in the one Lucy recognized her brother. Who was the other! The poor girl eyed her with a sinking dread at her heart, which made her whole frame tremble. The woman withdrew her handkerchief for a moment from her streaming eyes to speak a word or two with the boy, and Lucy beheld her mother!

A part of the truth—happily, only a part—flashed instantly upon her mind. Her father was dead! She accused herself of killing him; and, giving way to the sudden impulse of grief and love, she darted forward towards her mother; but ere she reached her, all the exhaustion that a week of agonizing suspense had produced, the weariness of traveling, the lassitude of long endured grief, overpowered her corporeal energies; she felt an indescribable sick faintness spread over her whole frame, the objects swam before her eyes, her brain seemed to turn round, and she sank senseless at her mother's feet.

It needed not the sight of her face to show her mother who she was; and Mrs. Edmonds stooped tenderly over her while one of the men who had followed the body of the poor park-keeper to the tomb lifted the unhappy girl in his arms. There was no look of reproach upon the widow's countenance—there was no reproachful feeling in her heart. She knew well that the grief and agony of her child when she came to learn the whole, would be far more than sufficient punishment for any fault she had committed, although Mrs. Edmonds was not aware of how much there was to palliate Lucy's conduct, or that she was rather the victim than the offender. While she was thus hanging over her, with all a mother's feelings strong in her heart, and while Lucy's brother was rubbing her hand, and gazing at the same time at the wedding-ring upon her finger, the voice of Dr. Western (who had been drawn to the spot by the sudden halt of the funeral party, and the little bustle that succeeded) was heard from within the garden fence, desiring that Lucy might be brought into his house.

This was soon done; and under Mrs. Evelyn's kind management the poor girl was speedily restored to consciousness; but as soon as Dr. Western saw the returning color appear in her cheek he took her mother into the adjoining room, and urged upon her the necessity of concealing from her daughter as long as possible the awful facts of which she herself had become by this time aware. Mrs. Edmonds would willingly enough have yielded to the good rector's advice, but she started a difficulty which he had not foreseen, for she knew her daughter better than he did.

"I will do anything you tell me, sir," answered the widow, in her humble manner, "but I can't help thinking my poor girl is suffering worse than she would do if she knew the whole truth. She fancies, sir, that it has been her going away that killed her father. I could see it in a minute, sir, and if you will ask her, you will find it so."

"Such may be the case, indeed," answered Dr. Western; "but we will ascertain the fact, and act accordingly. Let me speak with her first, Mrs. Edmonds;" and returning to the library, where Lucy still lay upon the sofa, though now much recovered, he sat down by her, while her mother held her hand, and kissed it.

"You are all very kind to me," said poor Lucy, "much kinder than I have deserved; and yet, indeed, indeed, if you knew all, you would see I am not so much to blame as you think. Oh! my poor father, if he could but have known" —and she burst into tears.

"Lucy, my dear child," said Dr. Western, "we have no cause to think that he believed you so much to blame as you suppose he did—at least after his first anger was over. Doubtless, he would have been easily brought to forgive you, especially when he heard of your marriage, had not this fatal accident deprived us of him."

"A fatal accident!" exclaimed Lucy; "then it was not my doing—a fatal accident!"

"Yes, my dear child," replied the rector; "he met his death by violence, it would seem; but as yet we know not the full particulars."

"By violence!" cried Lucy, raising herself, deadly pale, and gazing in the clergyman's face. "By violence!—and my husband—Oh heaven! —my husband!—violence!—murder!" — and she fell back again, as if life had utterly departed.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

It is extraordinary how near we are in point of time to barbarism—how very lately we have emerged from a state which in many particulars was worse than that of the savage tribes which roamed the forests. Not three quarters of a century have passed since scenes daily took place within this island which, if recorded by a modern writer, would not be believed by the great majority of his contemporaries; and of all the curious histories that could be written, perhaps the most curious would be the history of prison discipline in this realm of England. It is no longer ago than the days of our fathers that in all great prisons a system of inconceivable licence reigned within the walls of the jail, and every excess and every vice that the corrupt heart of man can devise was not only tolerated, but actually encouraged, by those who conceived their only charge and only duty to be the safe custody of those accused of, or condemned for crimes. Though the judges on the bench might be pure and upright, the magistracy were corrupt and profligate, the whole system of police vicious, and the men and women awaiting the sentence of the law, or its execution, were not only suffered to mingle together without restraint or supervision, but were supplied, as long as they had money to pay for it, with everything that could drown thought, or stimulate the passions. We have long since gone into the opposite extreme. Brutal harshness and severe infliction are now the consequences of mere suspicion; solitude and close confinement, deprivation and rigor are awarded to the accused, with even a less sparing hand than to the guilty and condemned, and the English jail is, in many respects, modeled upon the prisons of the Inquisition. The cause of both these extremes is the same—the want of fixed principles in legislation and civil polity, which want will always, according to the tone of the day, produce either laxity and corruption in practice, or severity and injustice, springing from cold and unsubstantial theories. It is a great fundamental principle of all law that every man should be supposed innocent till he is proved to be guilty; and if such be the case, those who treat him as if he were not so, before proof, are deeply guilty themselves. It may be a necessary evil, that a man accused, should be for a certain time deprived of his liberty, and it may even be granted that it is scarcely possible that the country should make him compensation for the injury inflicted, if the charge be not established; but there is no excuse whatever for depriving him of aught but liberty till he be condemned. To deprive him of his freedom at all, is a wrong, if he be innocent, to inflict anything else upon him is a crime; and who can doubt that to subject an untried prisoner to silence, solitude, the loss of all companionships, of the consolations of friendship and of love, to the deprivation of all accustomed amusements and healthful exercise, of the comforts of his station, of even the luxuries that have become necessaries, and to confine him in silence and in secrecy, numbered and clothed like a galley-slave, for months, for weeks, or even for a day, is one of the grossest iniquities, one of the darkest political crimes that an age of theoretical cruelty has yet produced. Not less evil, and not less unjust, was the system which sent every suspected person, innocent or guilty, young or old, confirmed in crime or trembling on the brink of the great moral precipice, to herd with felons, to share their orgies, and to be driven by the lash of continual scorn and ill-treatment to take part in vices and excesses which many of them, on entering those doors, shrunk from with horror. Yet such was the custom some seventy or eighty years ago, and it is well known to every one that the horrors of the bagnio, the gambling-house, and the gin-shop, seemed all concentrated within the criminal prisons of England. But between these two extremes there is a mean, but that mean is, unfortunately, what men never seek, and which is seldom arrived at in the natural course of events. Thus, at the period to which our tale refers, which is nearly midway between the present epoch of iniquitous severity and that former time of careless and demoralizing laxity which I have mentioned although some of the evils which had preceded had been done away, many still remained to be removed; and although we had not yet adopted all the harshness of the present times, a good many unnecessary inflictions were sometimes endured by the prisoner. All was, in fact, irregular; and in that state of transition, had any wise and good man stood forward to propose a reasonable system of prison discipline, it probably might have been adopted. We might then have seen some classification of prisoners before trial—a classification easily devised, and which would have been most beneficial in its results. We might have seen those persons accused before a magistrate for the first time, kept apart from

those who had been accused more than once; those who had been accused more than once of offences within the summary jurisdiction of the justice, separated from those who had been actually convicted. We might have seen those persons who had been convicted of minor offences by a magistrate, divided from those who had been convicted of graver crimes by a jury; and many another distinction might form the limits of different classes, remembering always that accumulated causes for suspicion, vouched by the authentic records of different courts, must always naturally justify, to a certain extent, the presupposition of guilt, and greater strictness of confinement.

This is all very dull, dear reader; and, though not unimportant, is, perhaps, not profitable. I will, therefore, go on with my tale, from which I have been somewhat led astray, when I set out, at the beginning of this chapter, simply with the purpose of giving some notion of the state of the prison at Sturton, in which Alfred Latimer, with his two companions in crime, Williams and Brown, were now confined. A good deal of laxity existed. The prisoners were allowed to purchase anything they thought fit, if the governor of the prison did not judge it dangerous. They were suffered to walk out in the yard, to converse together, to arrange any plans they might think fit, and to see any one who might come to visit them, favored by a magistrate's order, on the governor's caprice. The three persons I have named, all charged with the same crime, and committed very nearly upon the same evidence, were, nevertheless, very differently dealt with. Alfred Latimer, undoubtedly the most criminal of the three, knew little of the rigors of imprisonment but the name. He was a young gentleman, and was treated in a very gentlemanly manner indeed. He had a comfortable room in the governor's own lodging, a well-furnished table, wine at will, books to read, paper to write, and occasionally a game at piquet with another favored culprit committed to the same jail. When he walked out in the yard, no clanking irons announced the felon; and had it not been for the downcast look and gloomy brow, the quivering lip and the abstracted air, one might have supposed him a visitor, brought by curiosity to examine the interior of the jail.

Neither was Williams manacled, though the desperate resistance he had made when he was taken, and the wound he had inflicted upon Mr. Morton, might have well justified such a precaution. But since his confinement he had shown himself perfectly calm, tranquil, and obedient. His resistance, in the first instance, he shrewdly explained away, saying that, suddenly startled out of his sleep, after a long and fatiguing walk, he did not know what his captors wanted, and expressing great and apparently sincere regret that he had hurt the young gentleman, who, he added, had always been very civil to him. He frequently asked after his health, and seemed well pleased to hear that he was recovering rapidly, displaying a great wish to see him, and ask his pardon for having wounded him.

Tom Brown, on the contrary, never appeared without being accoutred with what he himself called the "darbies;" but, to say truth, he had given cause for this severity, having knocked down and nearly murdered one of the turnkeys two days after his committal. He thought himself very ill-used, indeed, when walking out in the yard, he found Williams left to the free use of his limbs; and a feeling of rancor was generated in his bosom by the distinction which did not fail to bear fruit in time. The most brutal of human beings, however, have generally a sort of animal cunning about them which serves instead of reason, and he took care not to show his companion what he felt, but would walk up and down with him, conversing in a low and grumbling tone, and trying to concoct a scheme of defence which would harmonise with the evidence which they knew had been brought forward against them.

For several days after their committal Alfred Latimer did not appear in the yard at the same time with themselves, and at first Williams concluded that he had effected his escape, expressing to Brown some satisfaction that such was the case. Brown gave no answer but by a savage laugh; and as secrets will find their way out even in a prison, they soon found that their comrade in crime was within the same walls.

Williams accounted for his non-appearance by the supposition that he was purposely kept apart from them by the authorities of the prison, which, as the management of unconvicted prisoners at that time greatly depended on caprice, was not at all improbable. But the facts of the case were very different. Alfred Latimer, on his committal, had affected to desire no communication with the persons under the same charge with himself, and had requested, as a favor, to be allowed to walk in the yard at a different hour from that assigned to them. He said, and said truly, though not for the purpose of truth, that his acquaintance with Williams, and having suffered himself to be led into several wild adventures by that man, had been the cause of all the evil that had befallen him; and he added that he wished for no more of his society. But very speedily a change came over his views after speaking in private with a shrewd solicitor who had been brought from London to prepare his defence. He then saw that the evidence of Maltby, which clearly established the fact of his having been in company with Williams and Brown, would require a combination of measures with them, and he thenceforward became as anxious to speak with them as he had before been desirous of disclaiming any connection with them at the period when the offence took place. He so contrived it the next day that at the hour assigned for his own walk he was apparently busy in drawing up notes and memoranda for his lawyer; and afterwards, at the hour when he knew that they would be in the yard, he pretended to be suffering from headache, and requested to be permitted to take some exercise. The governor informed him in reply, that the two men Williams and Brown were then out; but Alfred Latimer affected a tone of indifference, answering, "Oh, I don't care for meeting them—I am not afraid to meet anybody;" and having obtained leave, he went forth.

There were several people in the yard besides the turnkey who was watching them at the door; and the young gentleman, on first enter-

ing, had to abide all the insults and annoyances which usually await a new prisoner on first mingling with his fellow-captives. A few pieces of money, however, for beer and gin, which were unceremoniously demanded to make him free of the worshipful company into which he now entered, soon delivered him from the most importunate, though not without encountering many of those stinging sarcasms which are so rife amongst the vicious when all the restraints of fear and risk are taken away. As soon as he could free himself he crossed over direct towards Williams, who was pacing up and down the yard with Brown, as if keeping watch on the deck of a ship; and, after a slight hesitation, he shook hands with him, and entered into conversation with him as they walked. They could pursue no topic long and uninterruptedly, for many of their fellow-prisoners either crossed them, or came up for the express purpose of teasing the new-comer, but from time to time they spoke of the subject that was naturally uppermost in the thoughts of each, though in low tones, and with anxious looks around.

"I don't think it will do, Mr Latimer," said Williams, in reply to some observation of the other; "I think they have got us tight, whichever way we turn, unless they break down at the indictment. You see that cowardly blackguard Malthy has sworn that he saw us all together on the very night that we came over the river, just after the time when the thing was done. Then, there's that unfortunate job of your bloody clothes being found, and a dozen other things will come out besides, if they havn't come out already; no, there's nothing for it," he added, "but to get out of this place, if we can. I've a scheme on hand, which would be easy enough done, if it wern't for these irons on Brown; but we'll talk about it to-morrow, for it will soon be shutting-up time."

Alfred Latimer returned to the room in which he was confined more gloomy than he had been since he had entered those walls. Hitherto his mind had found occupation in devising schemes for his defence, and he had buoyed himself up with hopes that all the criminating circumstances which had been proved against him might be explained away. But the more firm and reasonable view which Williams took of the case had undermined all such expectations, and he sat down to contemplate his probable fate in horror and despair.

I will not recapitulate all the dark images that fancy called up before him, but only say that there he sat for more than one hour, with the thought of a dreadful death before him. The chance of escape from the walls of the prison seemed so faint that it gave him no relief. He looked upon it merely as a thing to be justified by despair, and he gazed trembling on into the future, tasting all the bitter fruits of crime.

While he thus pondered and thought, the shades of night began to fall, and the faint light and the gray and gloomy sky, which he saw through the barred windows of the jail, harmonized sadly with the sensations in his own bosom. Was there yet penitence? was there yet the repentance which is not to be repented of? Alas, no! there was fear, despair, and bitterness of heart; but his character was not changed; it was such as we have always represented it. Vanity, in some shape, is at the bottom of one-half the crime and three-quarters of the madness of the earth, and it is a bar to all repentance. Still, still, Alfred Latimer cast the blame on every one else but himself. He fancied he had been driven to crime, step by step, by others. Every one he knew—every one who had any share in his education, or any control over his conduct, came in for their part of the charge which he brought against the whole world but himself. One had not given him aid when it was needful—one had irritated him in youth till he had been driven to low companionship; another had been over indulgent; another had been too severe; and he hated them all with that intense and violent passion which had led him on from act to act in the dark and fearful course he had pursued. No, oh, no! there was nothing like repentance in his spirit; but let it be remarked, I have not said that there was no remorse, but that is a very different sensation. When he thought of the dreadful act he had committed—when imagination brought up before his eyes the form of poor Edmonds, weltering in his gore, it seemed as if a scorching and a seething flame passed through his heart and brain—not withering, not consuming, but inflicting agony indescribable. As far as he could command his own mind, he shut out all such images. He said to himself, "The deed is done—it cannot be undone; I will think of it no more." He called it weakness, folly, indecision. He resolved to think upon the future, to struggle with the past. But the fatal past—the dark, the certain, the irretrievable—the only thing fixed, permanent, unchanging, unchangeable—still held him in its adamantine grasp, and, like a chained bird, when his mind had fluttered away for a short distance, and fancied itself free, it was still brought back to the stake, and found itself bound down to horrors that could never be cast off. At night, too, in darkness and solitude, when every sound was still, and every sight removed, and the spirit left alone to deal with the things within itself, the oppressive burden of the heart was felt in all its weight, and the grievous load of sin pressed down every hope, and extinguished every light. It seemed as if a gloomy curtain was drawn round between him and all external things, leaving nought within that sad and solemn arcove but himself and his fearful crime. The spirit of the dead, whom his hand had slain, rose up as if to reproach him for the past, and to tell him, with the prophetic tongue of the future—the future not of this world alone, but of another—the interminable future, with all its store of agony, to which the temporary suffering of the gibbet and the cord was but an idle nothing. He thought of standing face to face, before the throne of God, with him whom he had murdered. He thought of the comparison that must then be drawn between the life of the victim and that of the slayer. He thought of taking his place amongst those who had spilt man's blood, from Cain down to the last crime, and of being driven before the face of the assembled universe into the place of endless punishment! He felt that the agony of hell had already

begun; he felt, too, that it could never end, for something told him that remorse must be eternal—that the crime, and its memory, and its woe, could never, never be swept away—that the worm that dieth not was within him, the flame that cannot be quenched in his heart. But yet, if it be asked, did these awful impressions give an inclination to do better, did they teach him to submit, to resign himself to Heaven's will, to make atonement? I must answer, no. Far, very far from it, his whole feeling seemed embittered towards every one that was better than himself. By a strange and indescribable and almost unaccountable perversion of feeling, the very agony of remorse that he suffered seemed to him an injury; and to cast it off, to drown it I may say, he was ready, in the impatient irritation of his pride, to commit any other crime, as if in the hope of doing away the bitter impression of the first by familiarizing himself with the guilt of many more. In some sense he said to himself, like the fallen seraph, "Evil, be thou my good."

Such thoughts and feelings were crowding upon him fast on the evening of which we have been speaking, while the shades of night drew a dim veil over the sky, and the light within his room faded gradually away. He would have fain fled from them, he would have read or written, or done anything to escape, and he grew angry and furious that they had not brought him lights, as they usually did about that hour. At length, however, he heard the bolts withdrawn, and the door unlocked, and the next instant the governor himself entered with the turnkey, who bore the candles.

"Your mother, sir," said the officer, "is in my room, wishing to see you. I don't know any reason why she should not. The magistrates have given me no directions. So, if you like to see her you can."

To the governor's surprise, and it must be added to his horror, Alfred Latimer's first exclamation was, "Curse her! she has done me more mischief than any one else. If it had not been for her I should not have been here. I don't want to see her. I should like to see my wife, indeed, but I don't care about this woman."

The governor was turning away in some disgust, and without reply, but then the hardened villain seemed to think better of it, and exclaimed, "Well, never mind, let her come in, she may as well see what a terrible state she has brought me to;" and in a minute or two after Mrs. Charlton entered, supported by the governor.

I will not pause upon the first part of the scene that ensued, for it is too horrible to be dwelt upon. Bitter, horrible, and impious invectives was all that the mother heard from the lips of her son; and strong as was the spirit of Mrs. Charlton herself, it was completely cowed under his wild and outrageous violence. She strove to pacify him, to soothe him, and, with her usual skill, she soon divined that the only means of doing so was by holding out hopes. That quieted him a little; and when she went on to speak of the means to be taken for his defence, he listened sullenly, and answered from time to time, in few words, and in a bitter tone. His mind was led on, however, by several things she said, to think over some cunning scheme for evading the grasp of the law. Neither mother nor son for one instant took into consideration the truth or falsehood, the justice or the iniquity, the right or the wrong of anything they proposed to say or do. To save him from an ignominious death, by any means, was all that they considered. Mrs. Charlton never inquired whether he was innocent or guilty—the truth was, in her own heart, that question was by this time settled; but after suggesting several schemes, all of which presented some insurmountable objection, she said, in a low tone, "Don't you think I could bribe some of the jury? Three or four thousand pounds would tempt any common man to do more than that."

"How the devil will you know who the jury are till the very day!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer; but then, a moment after, he said, "Stay, stay! I have thought of something, perhaps you could bribe the fellow who draws up the indictment—the Clerk of the Arraigns I believe he is called—to put in a flaw, and that would be sure work. But it will take a great sum, depend upon it. You must not offer him less than five or ten thousand pounds!"

"But where am I to get it!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "If I were to sell all my jewels and plate they would not produce more than four thousand."

"You must get it from Morton!" said her son; "he will give treble that, I am sure, to marry Louisa."

"He won't—he won't!" cried Mrs. Charlton; "I tried that before all this happened. He is as proud and haughty as Lucifer, and will not enter into any bargain whatever. If he would not do it then, I am sure he will not do it now."

"You must try!" replied Alfred Latimer, doggedly; "or see me hanged—that's all. I don't suppose you care much about that, on my account; still, you won't like to have it said that your son died on a gibbet, for that would not suit your own purposes. So you must try; and if you can't get him to do it any other way, set Louisa to ask him. He will do it for her, if not for you, for I suppose you have quarrelled with him by this time."

"Quarrelled with him!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "I hate him, I abhor him. He treated me with cool and shameless insolence, and, for my own part, I would rather die than ask him anything. Oh! if I have to give my consent that that saucy girl shall marry this conceited, mercenary upstart, it will break my heart—it is well nigh broken already."

"No fear of it," answered her worthy son, "it's tough enough, or else you wouldn't hesitate when your son's life is at stake. I dare say you think that under your new name of Charlton it will never be known that the accused person is your son; but I'll take care of that, for I'll call you as a witness at the trial, and have the whole story in my last dying speech and confession, that you may have it hawked about under your windows for a penny—ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed bitterly.

"Do not, do not—for heaven's sake, do not, Alfred!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, wringing her hands; "you know I would do anything

for you—I will do even this, let it cost what it may. The girl will surely never refuse me; but I will try him first. If I could but drive them," she continued, in a lower tone, after pausing, and thinking for a moment—"if I could but drive them to a sudden marriage, without my consent, then the whole property would be mine, and I could give any sum I liked to the Clerk of the Arraigns, or whoever the man is."

"That's all nonsense," answered Alfred Latimer, "there's no time for such manœuvres. The assizes are to be held in ten days, and it will take you a year to bring about what you want. You always talk as if you and I were to live forever. Better take what you can get at once, and drive a bargain with Morton. He's a very good fellow, in spite of all you may say, and gave me help once before, when you wouldn't."

"I could not, Alfred, I could not," answered his mother. "You know very well I had not the means."

"I know nothing of the kind," said her son, harshly; "and all I now know is, that your son will be hanged if you don't do as I tell you. So you can finish the work you have begun; if you like. And after having contrived to bring me here, can go on, and take me to the gallows; but I shall say there, and tell everybody that it is all your doing."

"My doing!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "what had I to do with it?"

"Oh! a great many things," answered her son; "education and example, too. I know a good deal that there is no use talking about now; but it shall all come out, by-and-by, if my mind is not made easy."

He spoke in a threatening tone, and his mother was profoundly silent.

Now the reader is well aware that Mrs. Charlton was not usually embarrassed with any very fine feeling; yet she might be, and, doubtless was, shocked at the cold heartlessness of her son. But there were other causes for the emotion that she felt, which was great. Let every one arm himself in the triple brass of selfishness, as strongly as he will—let him dip himself in the Styx of the most profound egotism—there will still, as in the fabled hero of the "Iliad," be some vulnerable point by which the arrows even of a weak and inexperienced hand may reach some vital part, and render every precaution vain. The consciousness, too, that there is such a weak spot about us must make the persons thus carefully, but insufficiently guarded, always the more fearful lest others should discover the assailable point. My belief is, that a man would go into battle more boldly naked; without shield or buckler, than one who knew that in his armor there was a flaw.

Now, Mrs. Charlton knew that all in her schemes there was a vulnerable point, and though, perhaps, selfishness might have so far predominated as to induce her to leave her dearly-beloved son to his fate rather than sacrifice any of her comforts or her future prospects; yet there was something in his words and in his tone that alarmed her, and made her resolve to submit to the greatest sacrifice to save him. I do not mean to say that she had any inclination to see him hanged, though there are mothers on record who have indulged in such a desire. Far from it; she would have done a great deal to deliver him from his perilous situation, and herself from the shame of having a son in such a position. But, nevertheless, it may be doubted whether maternal love and tenderness would at once have settled the question, if fear had not had something to do with it. After an instant she replied, however, "I do not know what you mean, Alfred, and I certainly do think you very ungrateful. But that does not matter; I will do all that you wish, all that I can, to deliver you. I will sacrifice even my just resentment, and condescend to see this man. I will even sue to an ungrateful girl, who, forgetful of all the benefits I have conferred upon her youth, now turns upon one who has been more than a mother to her, I am sure; and if I fail there I will contrive, notwithstanding, to raise the money in some way to save my son. I will sell everything—I will even pledge my income, and live in penury, if he too will not show himself ungrateful."

"Ay, come now, that is something like!" answered Alfred Latimer; and, after some further conversation in regard to the means and the agent to be employed in this scheme for frustrating the ends of justice, the mother and her son parted apparently better friends than they had met. Alfred Latimer remained revolving a new plan which had occurred to his mind for making all doubly sure, and preparing such a defence as would meet all the evidence against him; but Mrs. Charlton, entering her carriage, rolled away towards Mallington with thoughts which would not have been very pleasing to him if he could have seen into her heart. "I will do the best I can for him," she thought, "but if I do not succeed, I must, at all events, make him think that everything is arranged; for there is no knowing what he might say in one of his wild passions if he were driven to despair." Self, self, was ever uppermost in her thoughts, whatever were the circumstances in which she was placed, and not even maternal affection could act pure and unmingled. All was affected still by the great ruling principle of her nature.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

As Mrs. Charlton's carriage rolled somewhat slowly on its way homeward, a post-chaise passed her going in the same direction. Had she known who was the tenant of Mrs. Pluckrose's rumbling vehicle, she might have felt inclined to stop it; but as she did not, and the chaise rattled on, with the postilion bobbing up and down like one of the dampers of a piano, we will not exactly follow it, but rather precede it to the place of its destination.

The human mind has a marvelous and very pleasant power, as the reader knows, of adapting itself to circumstances. Were sorrows and misfortunes to retain the same intense effect, even while they themselves endure, the corporeal frame, if not the mental powers themselves, would give way under the continued pressure; and did the memory of each grief remain unimpaired, the accumulation in any one man's short career would abridge life or destroy

reason. Memory, however, is but a painter of the past, and though the canvass will in some cases retain the lines and hues much longer than in others, yet she always uses fading colors, which lose part of their brightness even while she is laying them on. The grief—I might, indeed, call it the gloom, for with grief there was something besides grief—which had spread over the little party at the rectory, in consequence of the dark and terrible events which we have lately recorded, had passed in a degree away. Cheerfulness had to a certain extent returned, and the feelings of all were at that point where amusement of any quiet and tranquil kind is sought by the mind to relieve it from the painful consciousness not only of the sad things gone, but of others that are to come. Gaiety, indeed, was yet far away, and with Louisa Charlton, perhaps, could never wholly return. The lightness of heart that finds beauty and rejoicing in everything, the bloom of life's fresh fruit, can never be long preserved; for though the knowledge of good may and must be the source of the purest happiness, the knowledge of evil combined inseparably in the fatal apple, is death to the warm and happy confidence of innocence. Nevertheless, Louisa had shaken off the deeper depression, and following the example of good Dr. Western, would suffer her mind to dwell neither upon the gloomy and terrible events which had lately taken place, nor upon those which were soon to follow. They would come rushing upon imagination indeed, from time to time, whether she would or not, and cast a dark but temporary shadow on all around. But still there was light beyond the cloud, and hope having good ground to rest upon, waved her on into the sunshine of coming years when the storm should have passed by.

The worthy rector had dined somewhat later than ordinary, and he, his sister, and their fair guest were still sitting round the table, evidently waiting for some one who was expected, but who did not come. Louisa seemed somewhat uneasy, and her kind old friend jested with her on apprehensions without a cause.

"Well, perhaps it is foolish, and perhaps it is wrong," answered Louisa, "but I am afraid it is natural too, when we have seen such terrible and unexpected things take place, to lose, as it were, our confidence in the future, and never see a friend depart from us without asking ourselves shall we ever behold him again! Will he be safe, well, uninjured where he is going!"

"Is not that something very like losing our confidence in God!" asked Dr. Western, in a graver tone. "If, my dear child, it is our duty to bear any griefs or adversities that he may send us with tranquil submission to his will, depend upon it that it is no less a duty which we should inculcate and practice to look forward to all his dealings towards us with trust and hope in the full knowledge of his goodness and mercy. One of the best and most beautiful exemplifications of faith in ordinary life is the serenity with which a good man waits for the future developments of God's will. We have no right to anticipate one evil, except as a consequence of our own bad acts; and he who has a conscience clear of offence may well feel sure that if adversity do befall him, it will prove ultimately a benefit rather than an infliction. I know, my dear child," he continued, seeing a shade come over Louisa's countenance, "that the flesh is weak, however willing the spirit may be, and I but wished to furnish you with some motives to guard you against the very natural apprehensions which first misfortunes generally produce in young and enthusiastic minds. In the present instance, however, you have no probable cause for fear, and I will not have you cultivate unreasonable terrors. Some people are constitutionally more brave than others, but depend upon it the highest point and the highest quality of courage is afforded by true faith. Who can be, who ought to be afraid of anything, when he knows that an Almighty arm shields and supports him!"

"Well," said Mrs. Evelyn, who did not take quite so high a view as her brother, and was anxious to cheer Louisa by more human means, "there can be no danger to Mr. Morton in this case, and here I think he comes, to show that no evil has happened."

The sound of wheels grating through the gravel was heard as she spoke, and in another minute Morton himself appeared. He was still pale and somewhat languid from his wound, but his face was bright and cheerful. Louisa would fain, if she had given way to the feelings of her own heart, have run out to meet him, when the chaise first drew up to the door. The customs of society, however, which bind in their strong bond many of the better impulses of the heart, as well as restrain that which is evil, prevented her from so doing, but could not keep her from springing up with extended hand to greet him as soon as he entered the room.

"Here is a fair lady who has been frightening herself about you, my young friend," said the clergyman; "indeed, you must take care to get no more wounds and bruises, or her courage will all go, and she had once a good deal."

"There was no danger in this instance, at least," replied Morton, "for I had a phalanx of jailers and turnkeys about me sufficient to have protected a monarch. My journey has been successful, too, my dear sir," he continued, putting a small pocket-book into Dr. Western's hand, and seating himself by Louisa.

While the worthy rector opened the pocket-book, took out one paper after another, put on his spectacles, and examined them carefully, Louisa Charlton inquired somewhat timidly of Morton, whether he had seen Alfred Latimer?

"No," he replied, "on asking for him, I found that his mother was with him, and of course I could not break in upon their conference; but I will go and see him some other day, dearest girl, and offer him every means of defence. For, whatever may be my own conviction, it is but right that he should have the full opportunity of proving his innocence if possible."

"God grant it!" answered Louisa, sorrowfully—"God grant it! Even if he could show that it was not his hand that did it, what a matter of rejoicing it would be."

"They are all here, then," said Dr. Western, abruptly, raising his head from the small scraps of paper he had been studying, "there's no link wanting?"

"The only one that was missing is there sup-

plied," replied Morton, "so that every difficulty is removed."

"Well, then, you can have no objection now," said the worthy rector, rising from his chair. "Sister, allow me to introduce to you a new acquaintance. Mrs. Evelyn, the Earl of Mallington—my lord, my sister, Mrs. Evelyn."

Morton took the old lady's hand, laughing at her brother's formal introduction, and saying, "You must forgive me for my concealments, my dear madam, but as long as there was any doubt whatever of my being able to prove my title, I did not choose to assume a name that might be taken from me. And having, when I first came down here in search of different documents, judged it best to drop my final name of Wilmot, retaining only the two first as Edmond Morton, I could not well resume the other without betraying the whole secret."

"And do you think you deceived me?" asked Mrs. Evelyn, with a quiet smile; "I can assure you, my dear lord, I have been well aware of the fact for the last fortnight. From the time when you were declared the owner of Mallington Park, I settled the matter quite quietly in my own head that you were the heir of the peerage."

"Nay," answered Morton, "I might have been the owner of the park, my dear lady, without being the heir of the peerage, for the title to the estate was more easy to be proved than the title to the rank. But you have certainly concealed your knowledge very well, for I never imagined that you ever suspected how the case stood."

"Oh! a woman can keep a secret, notwithstanding all man's libels upon her," replied Mrs. Evelyn. "There is Louisa, who sits smiling there, as if it were a great relief to her to be freed from the burden. She has borne it most heroically, I can assure you, and never hinted it even to me, her oldest friend."

"From her I felt bound to have no concealment," answered Morton, "and never will," he continued, taking Louisa's hand; "though I won her as a simple gentleman, yet, when once won, she had a right to share all my thoughts."

Louisa gazed at him with dewy eyes, brilliant yet moist, like a landscape in the early morning; but, before she could reply, Mr. Western's old servant opened the door, saying, "Mrs. Windsor, sir, wishes to speak with you."

The words were addressed to Morton, and Dr. Western added, "She has been here twice this afternoon, and seems burthened with her secret also, for she did not think fit to communicate it to me, yet seemed very anxious indeed to bestow it upon you, asking particularly when you would return. You will find a fire in the library; and we shall be in the drawing-room when you have done with the good lady."

"She mentioned once before that she had something to tell me," answered Morton, going out. "Oh, come into this room, Mrs. Windsor," he continued, finding Mrs. Charlton's housekeeper in the passage.

Mrs. Windsor followed him into the library, and closed the door behind her, looking, as usual, perfectly prim and quiet, as if she had come about the most ordinary business in the world. "I remember you told me, when last I was at Mallington House," said Morton, leaning on the table, "that you had something to communicate to me. Is it on the same subject you wish to speak with me to-day, or another, Mrs. Windsor?"

"The same, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in her usual, quick, brief manner. "I heard you had been wounded, sir, and did not like to intrude; but now you are well again, and things must soon come to a conclusion, I thought it best to come down, because there is no reason why Miss Charlton, who has always been good and kind to everybody, should be made a bit more unhappy than necessary, or why she, or you either, should be plundered of what you have a right to."

"Certainly not, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton; "but may I inquire what you allude to, or why you think your young lady is likely to be made unhappy at all?"

"Why, sir," replied the housekeeper, "I know my mistress very well. I have known her for a great many years. Now, one can't do that without seeing and understanding what she means just as well as she does herself. Now, with regard to you, sir, and Miss Louisa, I have understood everything from the beginning, though I don't think you did."

"Certainly not from the beginning," replied Morton; "but I very soon found that there was something to be discovered, Mrs. Windsor."

"Oh dear, yes, sir," answered the abigail, with one of her axioms, which were rarely without a certain portion of good sense—"'It's a very easy thing to conceal a great deal, but a very difficult thing to conceal that we are concealing something;' however, as Mrs. Charlton never thought that I saw anything but what she wished me to see; I saw a great deal, as you may suppose, and I very quickly made up my mind as to what was her game with you."

"And, pray, what might it be, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Morton, desirous that the good lady should develop her own views.

"Why, sir, she took it into her head, when first you came down, that you were a painter," replied the housekeeper, "and she held to that opinion, because she was fond of it, long after she should have known better, if she ever gave it up at all. She thought, because you did not bring down servants, and horses, and a carriage of your own, that you must be a poor gentleman, at all events, who would be glad to marry a young lady with a good fortune at any price. She had been laying it out in her head for a long time, I know, and you were just the sort of person that suited her, for you were introduced by Dr. Western, and had the sort of air with you that would give her a good excuse for letting you always be with Miss Charlton without pledging her to anything in case you did not come up to her price. So you were quite a godsend in her way, and she had you a great deal more to the house than she ever had any one before."

Morton smiled to find how accurately Mrs. Windsor had calculated all her mistress's steps, and he inquired, "What might be the original cause of all this, Mrs. Windsor? for, taking it for granted that your view is quite correct, it seems to me that she has somewhat hurried all her proceedings."

"Ay, sir, that's because she's hard pressed just now," replied Mrs. Windsor; "she owes a great deal in different quarters, and people are getting impatient. She intended, some months ago, to have gone to London, and played the same game there, but there was a difficulty about money then, and you came down just at the time, and saved her the trouble. So she did everything in her power to let you love Miss Charlton on the one side, and, on the other, to make Miss Charlton love you; and when she found out that it all went on as she wished, she was quite delighted. She got in a little fright, indeed, when she found out that you had more money than she had fancied, but as she had sat down to the game, there was nothing for it but to play it out, which she did, I suppose, the last time you saw her."

Morton was not satisfied with such vague explanations, and, determined to bring Mrs. Windsor to the point, he said, "Why, what do you suppose she did, my good lady!"

"I suppose, sir," said Mrs. Windsor, with a smile at the question, as if it were quite superfluous to put it, "that she told you she would be very happy to see you Miss Charlton's husband, provided you gave up one half of her fortune; that if you didn't, she would not give her consent, and, if you married without it, it would all come to herself. I am sure that was her plan, whether she put it in execution or not."

Morton paused and meditated, but the subject of his reverie was not exactly what the reader may suppose. He was considering with himself the exact topography of Mallington House, and calling to mind the relative positions of the drawing-room, the library, the dining-room, and the hall, with a view to ascertain whether Mrs. Windsor could have overheard what passed between him and Mrs. Charlton, for, under any other supposition, the precise knowledge which the worthy lady displayed was marvelous in his eyes. He settled it at length, however, that such a thing was impossible, and, therefore, that the housekeeper must have derived her information from some other source. "You are not very far wrong, Mrs. Windsor," he said, "but before we speak further on these rather delicate subjects, it will be as well for you to tell me what the intelligence you have to give me is, and how it bears upon these matters."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor. "I am sure I ought to beg pardon for speaking upon them at all; but you see I came into the house when Miss Charlton was very young, and I have seen her grow up as nice a young lady as any in the world, and I cannot bear that she should be wronged. All I have, therefore, to say is, that Mrs. Charlton has no more to do with Miss Louisa's marriage than I have, whatever she may say."

"But," said Morton, "there is a codicil to Mr. Charlton's will, by which it is provided that if Louisa marries without her step-mother's consent, the whole property falls absolutely to Mrs. Charlton."

"Pooh, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Windsor, "that codicil is not worth a piece of packing-paper, and I can prove that it isn't."

Morton smiled at the boldness with which she spoke, though far from being convinced that she was right in her assertion. "Women, I am afraid, my good lady," he replied, "are not the best judges of the law. The codicil is all written in Mr. Charlton's own hand, signed with his name, and, though not witnessed, is as good as any other part of the will. However, set your mind at ease about your young lady; it luckily happens that I am not so poor as Mrs. Charlton supposed. As my wife, she will feel no difference in point of comfort and ease from that which she has been accustomed to; and to one thing I have perfectly made up my mind, not to drive any bargain whatsoever with regard to her fortune. She shall have all or none. Her hand is too precious a thing to be bought or sold."

"I was quite sure you would think so, sir," replied the housekeeper, "otherwise I should not have said a word. But with regard to the will, I am quite sure you are mistaken, and, as I fancy, things standing as they do, Mrs. Charlton will not be long before she begins the matter with you again, I think you might as well ask her one or two questions, and see what she answers."

"There can be no harm in doing that," replied Morton; "but what may the questions be, Mrs. Windsor?"

"First, sir, I would ask," rejoined the housekeeper, "whether she was in the library for an hour and a half, when everybody else was in bed, on the night that Mr. Charlton died, and whether she didn't write a great number of papers there, and burn several of them that were not quite done to her mind? Then I would have you ask her where Mr. Charlton was on the 25th of July, 18—?"

"Why that was the day that the codicil was signed," rejoined Morton, with the light beginning to glimmer in upon him.

"That is the day it is dated," answered Mrs. Windsor; "but what I want to know is, where he was on that day, for it is dated Mallington, too, I think, and there must be a mistake somewhere."

Morton gazed at her steadily for a moment; but the woman's face was all calm and quiet, adding nothing whatever to her words. "I think, Mrs. Windsor," he said, at length, "I had better call in Dr. Western to hear our consultation, as he is one of Louisa's guardians, and an executor under the will."

"I don't know, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in the same quiet, but quick tone, "you are the best judge; but, perhaps till you have considered the matter, it would be as well to keep it between you and me and Miss Charlton. Dr. Western is a magistrate, you know, and may think himself bound to take strong measures, which, when once they are begun, must be gone on with. I don't wish to do my mistress any harm, and I think if you were to talk quietly with her, and just ask her the questions I have told you, all would go right, and things wouldn't happen that I'm sure would break poor Miss Charlton's heart. It would be a sad thing, sir, to have mother and son in jail both at once, especially for Miss Louisa, when it is her own father's wife she has to do with."

"You are right, Mrs. Windsor, and I thank you for the hint," answered Morton; "it will,

indeed, be as well to say no more upon this subject than is absolutely necessary. Is there anybody else besides yourself who knows any of the facts?"

"A fellow-servant, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, "knows that my mistress was in the library a long time that night, and that she burnt several papers, but no one ever thought of the date of the codicil, as it is called, but myself. Whenever it was read, I thought 'why, master and mistress were both away at that time, or I am much mistaken; and when I went and looked at my books, I found it was just so. They went away four days before, and did not come back till the week after."

Morton mused, but again the subject of his meditation was very different from that which might be supposed. The first question he put to himself was "Might it not be better to do anything this unhappy woman demands, rather than expose so disgraceful an affair?" But the moment after, he replied to himself "No, I see not why she should be suffered to triumph in her knavery. If she escapes prosecution, she is, perhaps, too leniently treated." "Well, Mrs. Windsor," he continued aloud, "I am very much obliged to you for the information you have given me; I will soon bring the question to issue with Mrs. Charlton, even if she does not do so herself; and, should need be, I will send for you to speak with me further. At all events your services shall not be forgotten, you may depend upon it."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, with a low courtesy, "but I wish for nothing but to see right done, and I am quite sure that neither you nor Miss Charlton will see me suffer for speaking the truth. I must get home now as fast as I can, for my mistress may soon come home now," and thus saying, she courtesied again and quitted the room.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

When Morton entered the drawing-room after his conference with Mrs. Windsor, he found Dr. Western with a note in his hand, which the rector handed to him without comment. Morton took it and instantly recognized Mrs. Charlton's hand-writing, which he had often seen on sundry neatly-written, neatly-folded, and neatly-sealed billets of invitation to Mallington House. The contents of the present epistle, however, were of a very different character, and as he read a smile came over his countenance, the internal causes of which I will leave the reader to divine when he sees the substance of the lady's note, which was as follows:—

"My dear sir,

"I must really remonstrate upon the conduct which Miss Charlton pursues, and is suffered to pursue. You must be well aware that I have no false or affected prudery about me; and I trust that, though my own conduct has always been governed by propriety, I have ever shown full consideration for the feelings, and sometimes more than consideration for the foolishness of young people. I learn, however, that Louisa, since you thought fit as her guardian to remove her from my house, has been permitted to walk about the whole neighborhood with Mr. Morton alone, when that gentleman has not even yet obtained my consent to his engagement, as I suppose it must be called, with Miss Charlton, whom you must know I have always looked upon and treated as if she were my own daughter. I should have thought that gentleman's own good sense and good feeling, of which he is by no means destitute, would have shown him the impropriety of such conduct; but I cannot sit by and neglect my duty by suffering it to proceed any longer without some explanation between himself and me. If, therefore, he is now at your house, where I understand he is usually to be found, I beg you will communicate to him what I say, and hint that it will be expedient that we should have some conversation without delay.

"Believe me to be, my dear sir, yours, &c.,

"Emily Charlton."

Such was the present well-concocted epistle which met Morton's eyes, and, returning it to Dr. Western, still smiling, he said, "Well, my dear sir, what do you think of it?"

"Very bad—very bad!" said Dr. Western, shaking his head, "you must act as you think fit, my young friend; this is a matter in which I cannot advise you."

"Perhaps the best way will be to see the lady at once," observed Morton, after some consideration; "for though I must speak with Louisa fully upon the subject before I can finally determine upon anything, it may be as well to hear what Mrs. Charlton can say, in the first place."

"I will abide by anything you determine," replied Louisa; "for I am sure, Morton, you will remember that she was my father's wife, and will not do anything that is harsh or unkind."

"Undoubtedly I will not, Louisa," answered Morton; "but yet, my love, you do not know the whole. To-morrow morning, if it be fine, I will ask for one of those walks which Mrs. Charlton's notions of propriety so strongly condemn just now, and then I will tell you the whole. I wish much that my good friend Quatterly was down here still, for I want a little of his legal help in judging of these matters. I am afraid there is a certain perversity in my nature which induces me to resist desperately one part of the fate of all human beings."

"What part is that, Morton?" asked Louisa.

"Being cheated, dear girl," answered Morton, laughing; "but now I will run away, lest I be tempted to give you any more of such blunt answers."

Taking his hat, Morton walked slowly up the hill to Mallington House, considering as he went how he should act under the circumstances in which he was placed; and coming to Sterne's conclusion, that it would be better to determine upon no course at all, but let events take their own way. He had twice to ring at the bell before he was admitted; and there was something in the whole appearance and state of the house, negligence in the air of the servants, a want of that activity and propriety which had been formerly observable, with a number of little circumstances, very nearly indescribable, which showed Morton that a

great change had taken place since Louisa left her own dwelling; and that the respect as well as affection of the inferior persons it contained, was gone from those about them. The butler, who opened the door, replied, in answer to his questions, that Mrs. Charlton was at home, and disengaged; and Morton, as he followed the man, said deliberately, "Have the goodness to tell her that the Earl of Mallington wishes to see her." The butler instantly put on a deferential air; and while Morton remained for a moment or two without, he could hear his name announced, and Mrs. Charlton exclaim, in a sharp tone, "The Earl of Mallington—what Earl of Mallington?"

"Mr. Morton as was, ma'am, if you please," answered the butler.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a dry and somewhat sneering prolongation of the sound, "show his lordship in—show him in, by all means."

Morton was accordingly introduced; and the fair lady, rising, made him a profound, and too ceremonious courtesy, saying, "I am informed that I have the honor of seeing the Earl of Mallington—pray be seated, my lord."

"The same, my dear madam," replied Morton, calmly, for he easily understood that it was not particularly agreeable for Mrs. Charlton to find his rank and station such as would afford no reasonable ground of objection to his marriage with Louisa. Finding she remained silent, "however," he continued, "my friend, Dr. Western, informs me that you wished for some conversation with me; and although I should not under all circumstances have ventured to intrude upon you just yet, without such a communication, I thought it better to come up at once, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour."

"And perhaps thinking," added Mrs. Charlton, who had rapidly arranged her plan, "that the Earl of Mallington might find my views different from those expressed to Mr. Morton. In that, my lord, at least you are mistaken, for, taking it for granted that your present rank is not, like your former name, assumed, that fact will only strengthen the opinions I before expressed."

"Let me correct one error," said Morton, as she paused for an instant, "neither my present rank, nor my former name, was assumed, my dear madam; my name is simply Edmond Morton Wilmot, or Wilmot Morton, and as I never assume anything that is not clearly my own, I did not take the title of Earl of Mallington so long as any one could entertain a doubt of my right to it. As all doubts and difficulties, however, are now removed, I should be deceiving you were I to give myself any other name."

"I am glad to find, sir, you did not deceive me before," replied Mrs. Charlton somewhat sharply, "and I only wish you had carried your candor a little further and informed me of your pretensions, as I should certainly, under those circumstances, have neglected the honor of your acquaintance. I have an objection—I may almost say an insuperable objection—to young women of an inferior rank marrying persons of family and title. I have myself experienced all the evils which result from such unequal connections, and am most indisposed to sanction them in any case."

Morton could not refrain from a smile. "I am very sorry to hear it," he replied, "but I fear, my dear madam, there is no help for it in this instance, as I have no power to give up my rank, and no inclination to give up Louisa."

"You speak with prodigious coolness, my lord," answered Mrs. Charlton, with her cheek flushing and her eye gleaming, "and I doubt not in the least that your fortune is so enormous as to make six or seven thousand a year with your wife a matter of no consequence to you at all—oh dear, no, such a thing is quite a trifle to the new Earl of Mallington! But one thing I must say, that Miss Charlton's guardians will not do their duty unless they see, when such a sacrifice is made, that a settlement quite equal to the loss is secured to their ward."

"That will all be easily settled," answered Morton, in a tone of the most provoking indifference. "I have the consent of both her guardians, which is, I believe, all that is necessary."

"To her marriage with you, sir, perhaps it is," answered Mrs. Charlton, "but to your obtaining a penny of her fortune something more is required—my consent. Unless that is obtained, every shilling she has, this house, and all it contains, is mine. You take her a beggar if you take her at all without my approbation—pray remember that."

Morton was provoked more than he had fancied his contempt would suffer him to be. "If what you say, my dear madam, is true," he replied, "I think—taking the whole matter in a mercantile point of view, and dealing with it as a matter of business—you would be very foolish to give your consent at all. You seem to forget that it would be a dead loss to you, and I cannot conceive how a lady of such correct calculations can even consider the matter at all, unless, indeed, you entertain the opinion which some people have, that the grounds of your pretensions are not quite so sure as they seem at first sight."

"Not sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton vehemently. "What says her father's will? You have seen it, doubtless, sir?—studied it deeply, I am pretty certain. It is proved, registered, acted upon, and admits of no doubt. How will you get over that, I should like to know."

"There are two or three ways in which I might answer that question," replied Morton; "in the first place, my dear madam, a Court of Chancery, though an inconvenient resource, yet gives the means of putting a right and lawful construction upon wills; and it would be for that court to consider whether the refusal of consent, which would entitle you to the whole of Mr. Charlton's property, must not absolutely be made upon reasonable grounds."

"There is nothing to that effect in the codicil!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "the word is simply consent."

"True," replied Morton; "but the codicil premises that it is made on the consideration that heiresses are too often the dupes of sharpers; and that the power given to you is to prevent that result in the case of Mr. Charlton's daughter. Such being the case, and I not being a sharper, the construction of the will may, perhaps, afford a curious and intricate question to the bar."

Mrs. Charlton remained silent and very pale for a minute or two; but at length she answered, "I see, my lord, that you wish to frighten me with the idea of a long lawsuit, but it won't do. I am not easily frightened, I can tell you."

"I should think not," replied Morton; "and, therefore, what I am going to say will, probably, produce no alarm. The law proceedings, Mrs. Charlton, may, probably, be reduced within a very narrow compass, for there are other questions connected with this will, which may be much more easily decided than its construction. The first will be, is the codicil genuine?"

"Genuine!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, grasping the arm of the sofa—"genuine!"

"Yes, my dear madam, genuine," replied Morton; "there are two minor questions affecting that greater one, which it will be well for you to consider before you proceed farther in the course you have thought fit to adopt. The first question is, whether on the night after Mr. Charlton's death, and in possession of all his keys, you did or did not pass a considerable time, when the whole household were in bed, in the examination of different papers, and writing others in the library? The next question will be, whether the codicil to Mr. Charlton's will is not dated Mallington, on a day when Mr. Charlton himself was many miles distant from the spot? I would recommend these subjects to your consideration, and until you have considered them, I think we had better delay any farther consideration on the subject, for there are acts which place people in very great danger, and which none of those connected with them can wish to be investigated too closely."

Thus saying, Morton rose, and, bowing to Mrs. Charlton, walked towards the door. She sat however, on the sofa, still and silent as a statue, with her horrified eyes fixed upon the table, and the agony of detected guilt at her heart.

Notwithstanding the contempt he felt for her, Morton was moved with compassion when he beheld the intense suffering which his words produced; and, after pausing for an instant at the door, he turned back, and, approaching close to Louisa's step-mother, he said, "Mrs. Charlton, listen to me for a moment."

She remained perfectly silent and motionless, however, as if she were deprived of all thought and sensation. Her face was deadly pale, her lips were white, and it seemed as if she hardly breathed. "Listen to me, I beg of you," he continued. "Louisa and myself are disposed to do anything that is kind towards you. We cannot recognize a claim that we do not believe rightly exists, and, therefore, anything you desire must not be put in such a shape. We have no inclination to stir this question of the will, unless it be forced upon us; and farther for myself, allow me to say, that, out of affection for her, I am ready now, or at any time, to do all I can to assist or befriend her father's widow. Pray, think of this, and let me hear from you, when you will not find me unwilling to serve you."

A ray of consciousness came into Mrs. Charlton's eyes, and she held out her hand to him. Morton took it for a moment, then released it, and left the room.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

There are times and seasons when intense corporeal suffering is a relief, for mental agony is far more terrible to bear; and it fortunately happens, in the strange mysterious union between soul and body, that in general the powers of the human frame give way when the pangs of the spirit reach a certain point, affording either a diversion or a cessation of thought. At her mother's earnest request, Lucy Edmonds was conveyed from the rectory to the park-keeper's house at Mallington Park, under a strict promise on the widow's part not to say a word that could give her any certainty upon the terrible subject of her suspicions. Caution, however, was not very long necessary, for though Lucy was placed in bed and kept perfectly tranquil, yet before nightfall she began to show symptoms of fever: her thoughts wandered; her cheek grew flushed, her eye dull, her breathing quick; and about midnight delirium came on, in which she seemed to lose all consciousness of her actual situation. Sometimes, indeed, she would rave of Alfred Latimer, but then it was as connected with the past, not with the present. She would tell him to leave her, not to ask her to disobey her father; she would assure him that she loved him, but that she could never be his; and then, at other times, she would go back to still earlier days, and mutter about the scenes of her childhood, and her brother who was dead. For nine days this state continued, and then, carefully and tenderly nursed, and with constant and skillful attention on the part of Mr. Nethersole, youth and a good constitution began to triumph over disease and grief. The delirium ceased; she became quiet and more at ease; but it would seem that for a time memory of more recent events was altogether obliterated. She spoke little, and only uttered a word or two at a time, but those words showed that she had forgotten her marriage and all the terrible events connected with it, her husband's situation, her father's fate, her hapless journey with Alfred Latimer, and her own sad return to the scenes of her youth. There was a blank in memory, a cloud over a part of the past—dark and fearful, it is true, but yet for some time impenetrable, though she often tried to scan it, and with feeble efforts strove to call forth the figures that were behind that gloomy curtain. She felt that there was something dreadful, but she knew not what; and the mind's powers were not yet sufficiently restored to let her dwell long upon any one train of thought. Doctor Western visited her, after watching with the most kindly care every change that took place, anxious to seize the right moment for administering the only sort of consolation she could receive. One day it seemed to him that the time was fast approaching, for Lucy was much better. She could sit up; she could hold a longer conversation; she listened with attention, and apparently with deep thought to all he said, and he ventured to dilate in general terms upon the duty and necessity of submitting patiently to the will of God under all afflictions, of moderating grief, and receiving every painful dispensation with firm faith in the inscrutable mercy of the Almighty. He made no personal

application of his words, and left her, as he thought, calmer and better prepared. But when he was gone, Lucy fell into a fit of deep meditation, and then gave way to bitter tears. Her mother, who slept beside her, perceived that she wept through a great part of the night, and though her health did not suffer, as might have been expected—though she rose the next day, and dressed herself with apparently greater strength than she had yet displayed since her illness—though she took food, and everything that was recommended to her—yet a deep gloom hung upon her, and in the evening she spoke with her mother, for the first time, of her husband and of her father.

Mrs. Edmonds endeavored to turn the conversation, though the irrepressible tears rose in her own eyes, as she sought to speak of more indifferent subjects; but Lucy, though, from the agitation she perceived in her mother, she would not press the subject of her father's death, could not be brought to refrain from asking further questions in regard to Alfred Latimer.

"Where is he, my dear mother?" she said; "do not be afraid to tell me, for I now recollect all. They took him away from me, and put him in prison, I know. You must tell me where he is confined, for I must write to him—when I am able."

The widow, seeing that she would not be satisfied without information, thought it best to tell her the truth, that her husband was in Sturton Jail. But about ten the following morning she set out to inform Dr. Western of what had occurred, leaving her son to sit with Lucy during her absence. When she went the poor girl was up and dressed, and apparently trying to amuse herself by reading; but as soon as Mrs. Edmonds had quitted the cottage she called her brother to her, saying. "John, I want you to tell me one thing, and then I won't ask you any more. Who killed our father?"

Her voice was perfectly calm, though low, and her manner displayed little or no agitation. But the boy, who had been warned beforehand, replied with glistening eyes, "Indeed, I don't know, Lucy. People say that tall man, Brown, or the other, Jack Williams; but nobody can tell rightly yet."

Lucy was silent, and looked at the book again, but her eye did not move along the line; and had the boy been very watchful, he must have seen that her thoughts were busy with objects beyond her sight. About five minutes afterwards his sister looked up, and said "I wish you would run up to the hall, John, and ask Mrs. Chalke to lend me the great book full of pictures, that she once showed me. Tell her I will take great care of it, and you bring it down carefully, there's a good boy."

Perhaps her brother might have hesitated to obey before his mother returned, if it had not been for the thought of the pictures in the book, which he was well inclined to look at himself. He paused an instant, indeed, but Lucy repeated her request, and, taking his hat, he set off as fast as he could for the hall.

As soon as he was gone his sister rose suddenly, went into the other room, searched for her bonnet and shawl, and having found them, hastened to the door and looked out, then darting away with a quick step she made a circuit round the house, gained the shelter of the wood, and hurried along one of the paths which led towards the stile near Dame Hazlewood's cottage. As she approached, however, she heard voices in the road, and turned away to the left, to another stile further up the hill, and then issued forth from the park, and bent her steps direct towards Sturton. She walked on for some way with much greater strength than might have been expected, not taking the path through the wood, but following the road to the left through several small villages. When she had gone about half the distance, however, her strength failed her, and she sat down to rest for some time by the way side. In about twenty minutes she rose again, and with tottering steps hurried on till she came opposite to a little public-house on the other side of the road, where she paused, and looked up with a hesitating and uncertain air. But she felt that she could not proceed further on foot without refreshment, and knowing the people to be good and honest country folks, well acquainted with her family, she crossed over and went in. At first the landlord and his wife did not recollect her, for she was much changed both in dress and appearance—pale, thin, wan, and with her lips parched and dry with recent illness—but when they did call her person to mind, they showed her such kindness as their somewhat unpolished air permitted, and seeming to divine whither she was going, set before her some refreshments without asking any questions. The good man and his wife talked together, indeed, for some time in a low voice; and Lucy, terrified lest any one should stop her, remarked that their eyes were directed towards her as they spoke, and rose sooner than she would otherwise have done to depart, asking what she had to pay.

"You are not fit to go, my dear," said the landlord, coming forward to her; "I suppose you are walking to Sturton; but it's a long way for a poor sick girl like you, on foot. I wonder your mother let you come, and alone, too."

"I must see my husband, you know," answered Lucy, judging from the man's words that her whole history was known.

"Well, I don't say but you must," replied the landlord; "I suppose that's right, whatever may have happened. But I'll tell you what, my dear, you had better have our chaise-cart. Bill will soon drive you over."

It may easily be conceived that this offer was a great relief to the poor girl's mind. The little tax-cart was soon brought out, a pillow was placed in it to render the seat more easy, and in about three-quarters of an hour poor Lucy Edmonds was at the gates of Sturton Jail. Her heart sunk when she approached them, and gazed up at the awful and gloomy masses of stone, which seemed to harmonize but too sadly and darkly with all the crime and sorrow which, from time to time, they contained. She rang the bell, however, and on the wicket being opened asked to see her husband, Mr. Latimer. The man gazed at her with a cold look, indifferent both by hardness of nature and long habit to every species of grief, but a piece of money slipped into his hand soon softened him, and bidding her wait a minute in the lodge,

while he asked the governor, he hurried away, leaving Lucy with one of the turnkeys, who was smoking a pipe at the table. Both remained silent, and the porter returned in a minute or two with the joyful tidings that the governor had no objection.

With eyes bent down, and wavering steps, and a heart beating wildly at every door they passed, poor Lucy followed the jailer along the passages of the prison to the room where her husband was confined. By the time the two large bolts were drawn back, and the door unlocked, she could hardly stand; but the moment after, the sight of her husband sitting at the table revived her, and, running forward, while the man said, "Here's your lady, sir, come to see you," she cast her arms round his neck, and wept.

Alfred Latimer's eye was haggard, and his whole look anxious and despairing; but, nevertheless, he was truly rejoiced to see poor Lucy again. She was the only being on earth for whom he had ever felt anything like real tenderness and affection; and, in the moment of his affliction and his danger, her coming was a true consolation and comfort to him, reviving for the time the faint light of better feelings in his dark and obdurate heart. He pressed her warmly to her breast; he soothed, he caressed her, and even so far forgot himself as to remark her altered appearance, and to say, "You look very ill, love. You must have suffered a great deal, I am sure, my poor Lucy."

"I have been very ill," answered Lucy; "they thought me dying, I believe, for I quite lost my senses, after I came back; and they would not have let me come now, I am sure, if they had known it."

"They have no right to stop you!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer, sharply. "Are not you my wife? They can't stop a wife coming to see her husband."

"No; it was because I have been so ill, and am so weak," replied the poor girl. "I feel as if I should faint now."

"Here, take some wine," said Alfred Latimer, placing her in the chair where he had been sitting, and reaching a bottle from the mantelpiece. "You must keep up, Lucy—you must keep up, for I may want you to help me—I am sure you will, Lucy, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, that I will!" answered Lucy. "I will help you, whatever be the case, Alfred, for that is my duty now; yet I would fain ask you one question, Alfred," she continued, in a sad and hesitating tone—"only one question."

A dark and fiend-like scowl came upon his face, and he replied, "Ask me no questions at all, for I shall answer none—that's to say, at present—for small words often do great mischief. Your only business is—if I am your husband, and you really love me—to do the best you can to get me out of this scrape."

Lucy was silent for a moment, with her eyes bent down in bitter thought; but looking up the instant after, she said, gravely, "I will do all I can."

"That's a dear girl!" answered her husband; "and I'll tell you what you must do. In the first place, you must know nothing about this business at all; and if any one asks you, say so."

"I do know nothing," answered Lucy; "they have told me nothing yet."

"Well, that's all right," answered her husband, sitting down beside her, and putting his arm round her waist. "Take some more wine, my love, that has done you good already. I'll tell you how it all is, Lucy: the best scheme I could devise has failed. My mother, some how or another, got together ten thousand pound, and tried to bribe one of the clerks to put a flaw in the indictment against me. It was the lawyer Hazzard, who managed it all; but the fool of a clerk would not take the money, and threatened to peach besides. My mother told the lawyer not to tell me that it had failed—some of her own cunning schemes made her want to keep it from me; but he was here this morning, and let it all out; so the only chance is by what I am going to tell you—but you do not listen, Lucy—would you, too, help to ruin me?"

Lucy had remained with her eyes bent down, and with a look of deep and bitter thought upon her face; but she instantly raised her head, saying, "I do listen, Alfred; I hear every word; and you know I would give my life to save you. Only tell me what I have to do, and I will do it, if I have strength; but I have very little, Alfred, and I fear what little I have will fail me very soon."

"Pooh, nonsense!" answered Alfred Latimer, all whose selfishness had returned upon him in full force again; "you must get a chaise, dear Lucy, and that will save you; then bid the post-boy drive you over by the bridge here, round the common behind Mallington House; make him stop near the gravel pits, and seek out Mother Brown, who has a cottage there. You know Mother Brown?"

Lucy shook her head. "Why here is the cottage close by the pits," replied Alfred Latimer, "where I was taken when I got such a fall. But you must find her out, at all events, and tell her if she would save her son's life, she must get some pheasants or hares, or game of any kind, and hide them away in the very back part of the cave in Wenlock Wood. She'll know the place quite well. You must give her some money to pay for the game, for I don't think the old wretch would spend a penny if her own life depended on it; and tell her that you will give her more when you know that it's done, for she's not to be trusted. I don't care what the game is like, and the longer it has been killed, the better, especially if there be a good deal of blood about it."

A sharp shudder passed all over poor Lucy's frame, but her husband did not remark it, and went on to say, "Simpkin, the poacher, will get her as much as she wants; and the more she gets the better. Do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Lucy, "I hear, and I will go and do it directly. Can I do anything else, Alfred?"

"No, my love," he replied, "but bring me some money with you the next time you come. What have you got with you now?"

"Seven or eight guineas," answered Lucy; "I brought two hundred over with me from France, thinking you might want some, and I have spent four or five."

"Well, bring me a hundred next time you

come, and take care that no one sees you with it, for most likely they would stop it."

He paused, and thought for a moment, and then added, thoughtfully, "I wish to Heaven I could see Tankerville! he would soon help me to get out of this place. Couldn't you write to him, Lucy, and tell him my mother will give him a thousand pound if he can get me over safely to France!"

"But where is he to be found?" asked Lucy Edmonds, leaning her head upon her hand.

"Ay, that's the question," answered her husband. "Well, there's no help for it; if you can find out where he is, tell him what I say; but, at all events, do the other, and come back and see me as soon as you can, there's a dear girl."

"Would it not be better for him to come and see you himself?" asked Lucy; "he could manage it all better than I could, I am sure."

"They won't let him in," answered Alfred Latimer, impatiently. "You, or my mother, or the lawyer, well and good, but they'll let me see no one else; but, stay a bit, love, I'll tell them to get you a chaise into the court of the jail, and you can tell the boy to drive towards Mallington House, then they'll think you are going to my mother."

Lucy made no answer, and her husband rang the bell, which was one of the conveniences granted in those days to a prisoner who could afford to pay for good accommodation. A turnkey speedily appeared; a chaise was ordered, and quickly brought to the gates, for it was not allowed to enter the court, and Alfred Latimer took leave of Lucy, embracing her, and kissing her tenderly. She suffered him to do so, for it cannot be said that she returned his caresses; a great change, indeed, having come over her demeanor towards him since she first entered the prison. It is needless to enter into any long explanation of the cause, for a few words that she murmured to herself, after having entered the chaise, and told the postilion where to drive, may probably be sufficient. As the vehicle drove rapidly away towards the bridge over the river, the unhappy girl sunk back in the seat, clasping her hands together, and saying, "Oh, my father, I am helping your murderer; but he is my husband—he is my husband!"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

About five o'clock on the evening of the same day the woman called Mother Brown might be seen returning to her own cottage, laden with a large bundle of broken sticks and dry gorse. As soon as she had entered the hovel she deposited her load upon the floor, bolted the door, and then taking a quantity of the thorns and wood laid them upon the nearly extinct embers which glowed faintly upon the hearth. The dry faggots speedily caught fire, and blazed up; and then, hanging her pot upon the hook, she filled it with water; and, returning to the bundle, spread the furze and sticks abroad, drawing out from the very heart of the whole a fine barn-door hen, stripped of the feathers. The neck hung down limp and pliant, as if it had not been long killed, and the old woman, with a low, chuckling laugh, muttered, as she raised it, "Ah! thou'lt lay no more eggs for Dame Johnson; she'll find thy feathers, if she wants them, under the hedge."

After certain preliminaries, such as cutting off the head, which was given to her one-eyed cat, that sat by the fire, the fowl was consigned to the pot; and the old woman continued to hover about, moving now this thing, and now that, to very little purpose, and talking to herself the while, in a rambling incoherent sort of way, "Ah! they may hang him, if they like, for me," she said, picking up the sticks, and putting them in a corner by the fire—"the varmint! to go away, and rob a rich house, and never think of giving his old mother a penny of it all; he'll make a prettier corpus than Jack Williams, any how, for he's a devil of a sight a bigger man, though t'other is so strong. That Latimer is a smart youth, any how; I should like to see him cut a tumble, but I suppose the boys would hoot me if I went to have a peep. Well, I can stay away; I've seen many a one hanged in my day, so it's no great loss; I wish half the world were hanged!—that pot's a-boiling over," and she ran and lifted the lid, and took some of the water out. "Well, it's a funny world," she continued, in the same moralizing vein; "people seem born to be hanged, or get into trouble; but I'd rather be hanged, arter all, than go to Botany, and then have to work for them as sent me. The lad was not a bad lad, if he would have kept within compass, and not put his head in Jemmy's cravat; but if a man will pull a rope, he must—there's no stopping him. I should like to get him out of the pitcher, notwithstanding"

She was by this time stooping down to put a bit of tile under one leg of the table, which was either naturally shorter than its brethren, or had met with an inequality in the floor, which offered a very good exemplification of the ups and downs of life; but just as she was in the act some one from without lifted the latch, and pushed the door sharply. Up started Mother Brown, giving an apprehensive look towards the door, and then another at the cat, who was still busy with the fowl's head. With a somewhat blasphemous objurgation of her feline companion, for not finishing her meal quicker, the old woman tried to take away the head, and meeting with the gratitude she might expect, in the form of a sharp scratch, she drove the beast and its prey into the neighboring room, while the personage without shook the door again and again, exclaiming, "Come, open it, or I'll burst it in; I see you quite plain, you old jade!"

Finding her castle likely to be stormed, Mother Brown thought it best to surrender at discretion, and, opening the door, exclaimed, in a tone of surprise, as Captain Tankerville walked in, "Lord, sir, is that you! I couldn't think who it was, and I was afraid, for I am quite a lone woman now, since they nabbed my boy Tommy."

"Well, you may shut the door, if you like now," answered Captain Tankerville, for I have come for a night's lodging, and I want to hear about your boy Tommy, as you call him, and my friend Alfred Latimer."

"Lawk, sir, I can't take you in," answered Mrs. Brown.

"No, that you can't, granny," answered Tankerville, playing on the words; "though you have taken many a one in in your day, I dare say; but I'm not so easily done, and I intend to stay here all night, I can tell you. You shall have half-a-crown for your pains, so don't say another word about it. Now, tell me about your son Tommy, and where they've put him and Jack Williams and young Latimer; I shouldn't wonder if there's a penny to be made out of that blade yet."

"You've just got out yourself, I dare say, captain," said Mrs. Brown; "my son told me, when he brought you here, that you're a famous one for diddling the beakies; and so you want to lodge here, not to be seen."

"No, you're out, old woman," answered Captain Tankerville, who, whether her surmise was true or false, was not willing to make her his confidant. "The old gentleman who had me in couldn't make out his case; but you don't answer my questions—what have you got in that pot?"

"Hush!" cried Mother Brown, "there's some one a coming."

"Is there, by Jove!" cried the worthy captain; "then I'll make myself scarce," and away he went into the other room, closing the door carefully behind him.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when a gentle knock was heard at the door, and Mother Brown exclaimed, in her gruff and indifferent tone, "Come in, whoever ye be!"

The person who appeared, as the reader may suppose, was no other than poor Lucy, who inquired, as she entered, "Is your name Brown, ma'am?"

"Yes, my pretty lady," answered the old hag; "and I'm not a ghost either, though you look as pale as if you seed one."

"I am very tired," answered Lucy, "and have been ill; but I want you to do me a service, Mrs. Brown, and you shall be well paid for it."

The idea of money always had an immense effect upon the person to whom these words were addressed; and she speedily became extremely civil, asking Lucy to sit down, eying her shawl with a certain sort of glance, which was in itself an evident breach of the tenth commandment. Lucy's business, however, was soon entered upon, and she was going on to tell all that Alfred Latimer wanted the old woman to do, when Mother Brown raised her finger with a monitory gesture and elevated eyebrows, saying, in a whisper, "Hush! there is some one in there; we had better go out before the door, and talk." But before her suggestion could be followed, Captain Tankerville, who had heard the name of Alfred Latimer more than once mentioned, walked in, with his usual swaggering air, wishing Lucy good evening, as an old acquaintance.

"Oh! this is so fortunate, Captain Tankerville," said the poor girl, "for I was told to write to you on the part of my poor husband."

"Husband!" repeated Captain Tankerville. "Oh!—aye, very well—but we had better shut and bolt the door, and then we can talk without being interrupted."

Lucy's cheek had flushed at his first words; but she replied at once, "No, there is no need of that, I have very little to say;" and she drew nearer to the door, in order to go out, if he attempted to close it, for there was something she dreaded exceedingly in that man, and then, going on, she gave both to him and the old woman the messages with which she had been charged by her husband.

Captain Tankerville, for his part, mused in silence for a moment or two over what he heard; but the old woman at once exclaimed, "But the money! the money! one can't buy swishtails, or lions either, without money."

"Here is enough for that purpose," answered Lucy, drawing forth her purse, and giving the old woman all it contained, except what was just sufficient to pay the expenses of the chaise. "When you have done what I tell you, and I am sure the game is there, you will receive five guineas more."

"Five guineas!" said Mother Brown; "that's very little, considering I have to walk so far."

"Why, you old besom!" exclaimed Captain Tankerville, joining in, "you wouldn't hang your own son for the sake of a walk, would you?"

"I don't care whether he's hanged or not," answered the hag; "howsomever, I'll do it—but where am I to get the five guineas, my pretty lady?"

"Come down to me at Mallington Park," answered Lucy, "and you shall have it—come to Mrs. Edmonds's; but remember you do not speak a word of this to any one but myself. Ask for Mrs. Latimer."

The old woman answered only by a low unpleasant chuckle, and Lucy took a step towards the door; but though her heart was sadly wrung by contending feelings, she thought she had not yet done her duty fully to her husband; and turning again to Captain Tankerville, she added, in a trembling voice, "I hope, sir, you will be able to do what I asked. You had better see Mrs. Charlton as soon as possible, for no time is to be lost."

"I suppose not," answered Tankerville, dryly; "I will do my best; for, to be frank, a thousand pounds is something worth having; and besides, it's always as well to help a friend out of a scrape. We sometimes get a help in return; and I like Latimer, too. He's a devilish good fellow."

"He seems quite sure you can do what he wishes, if you please," replied Lucy. "I trust —I hope he is not guilty."

"Oh! as to guilty or not, I have nothing to do with that," said Captain Tankerville, with a laugh, that made the poor girl shudder; "but as to getting him out, that may be a different affair. Stone walls are stone walls. He's not very prudent, as he has shown already; and he has got two other fellows in with him, who must be of the party, I suppose. If I were in myself, I could manage it, I dare say; for then I could direct the whole; but now it can only be done by a good lot of money."

"That will not be wanting, I am sure," replied Lucy. "Mrs. Charlton will supply all that is needed; but now I must go, for I have been away long."

"Well, well—I dare say we shall manage it," said Tankerville, whose imagination warmed at the idea of the thousand pounds, and who saw

the prospect of extracting considerable sums from Mrs. Charlton, at all events; "I'll do my best, Lucy, and come down and tell you how all goes on; for we may want your help to tell him news, and let him know what we are about."

There was a familiarity in his tone that pained Lucy—I might say, that punished her—for she felt that the situation in which she had been seen by the man before her had degraded her even in his eyes, all degraded as he was himself—and, with a brief word or two of reply, she hurried away again, got into the chaise, and drove sadly back to her mother's house. She had gone through the fatigues and the exertion of that day with resolution that conquered even bodily weakness, with powers that she herself had not known she could display; but the moment that she had crossed the threshold, and was clasped in her mother's arms, she fainted away, and lay for some time as if she were dead. When she recovered, Mrs. Edmonds asked no questions, fearful of agitating her, and Lucy herself was the first to speak of her going. "My dear mother," she said, "I have been to see my husband: you must forgive me—for, whatever he has done, I am his wife, and must do my duty to him. I must go again too, and you must not try to stop me, for if you do I shall die."

"It is only for your own sake, I would try to stop you, Lucy," replied her mother; "for, indeed, my child, you are not fit for such exertion. You have almost killed yourself now."

"It would do me much more harm to stay away," replied Lucy; "but I will not go to-morrow, I will take that day to rest and recover." Much, indeed, did she need it; until the following evening she remained in bed.

In the meanwhile Captain Tankerville sat for more than an hour in Mother Brown's cottage, spending part of the time in cogitations as to the course he should pursue, and part in devouring his full share of the old woman's stolen fowl. He made no inquiries where it came from, indeed; and as he was a man without any scruples, it is not improbable that had he known the facts of the case his viands might have been eaten with even a greater relish, though he derived some satisfaction from forcing his hostess to let him be a partaker of her supper, which, it must be added, was much against her will. As soon as it was quite dark, the worthy captain set out for Mallington House; and, ringing at the bell, desired to see Mrs. Charlton. His appearance, just having come out of prison, was—to use a very expressive, though somewhat vulgar term—rather seedy; and the servant, after eyeing him for a moment, told him that Mrs. Charlton was engaged and could not see him. Captain Tankerville, however, was not a man to take a refusal easily, and assuming an authoritative air, he replied, "Go in and tell her, my good fellow, that I must see her on business of importance. I have not a card with me, but my name is Captain Tankerville, of the royal navy, a friend of her son's, from whom I have a message."

The servant, after some slight hesitation, obeyed, but took care to inform his mistress that the applicant was "rather an odd-looking fellow." Nevertheless, there was something aristocratic in the name of Tankerville, and that, together with the dignity of a captain in the navy, proved a passport to Mrs. Charlton's presence. Captain Tankerville was accordingly admitted, and though very different people, perhaps no two persons were ever better qualified to deal with each other than that worthy gentleman and that fair lady. The captain opened his business with the utmost coolness and effrontery as soon as he had seated himself, informing Mrs. Charlton that he had received a message from her son, with the promise of a thousand pound from her, if he succeeded in effecting Alfred Latimer's liberation. "Now, my dear madam," he continued, "I think I can manage the matter, but the first thing to be ascertained is, whether you are disposed to ratify the engagement. A thousand pound, a thousand pound, you know—promises from a man in prison are worth nothing, and you may view the matter differently from my friend Latimer."

"I shall not grudge the thousand pound, sir," replied Mrs. Charlton, "if my son is actually liberated; but I certainly shall not pay it before."

"That's very prudent," replied Captain Tankerville, who seemed to have an instinctive appreciation of the lady's character; "it would not be pleasant to give a thousand pound, and have him hanged too."

"Good heaven! sir, you need not use such shocking expressions," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "I trust there is no chance whatever of such a dreadful event."

"I don't know, my dear madam," replied Tankerville, dryly; "he seems to think there is, and he's the best judge, I fancy; but business is business, and it is best to use plain terms. Although, of course, I do not expect you to be such a goose as to buy a pig in a poke, and pay before your son's out, you will not object, I dare say, to sign a little memorandum that I am to have the thousand pound if I get him out; then we shall both be pinned fast, you see. If you don't pay me, you might chance to be required to visit New South Wales for your share in the transaction; and then again, you have got a hold upon me, for I can't peach of you without subjecting myself to the same voyage, which, though a naval man, would not be agreeable to me."

Mrs. Charlton leaned her head upon her fair hand, and considered the matter with due deliberation, but at length she made up her mind to consent, and before showing his game any further, Captain Tankerville thought it best to have the paper drawn up and signed, which was accordingly done.

"And now, my dear madam," he continued, as soon as he had got the document in his pocket, "the next thing to be considered is the means."

"The means," repeated Mrs. Charlton, "I thought you had arranged all that already. You told me you thought it could be done."

"True, true," replied the worthy captain; "but when I say means, I would imply the sinews of war, my dear madam. I am a poor captain on half-pay, and I cannot be supposed to supply all the finances for such a transaction as this. The sum required won't be a trifle, I can tell you, and you can judge yourself what your

son's life is worth, as well as if you kept an insurance-office. "There are jailers to be bribed, and turnkeys to be fee'd—ay, and the governor of the prison himself, in all probability, to have his little recompense, for I don't see how we can get on without making him wink with one eye, if not with both."

"Then I am very sorry it can't be done," said Mrs. Charlton, in a low but decided tone. "The thousand pound I can command, but I cannot go much further, for the truth is, I have not the money; and besides," she added, with a slight smile, "how could I tell in what way the money was applied! I could not be sure that it was used at all for the purpose intended."

Mrs. Charlton's mind rose highly in Captain Tankerville's estimation, and he mentally observed, "A very different lady from her daughter-in-law! We must try to give her some security." Nevertheless, before he proceeded in that course, he said, with a frank and good-humored air, "Oh, my dear madam, you must have some confidence in those you employ!"

"True; but, as you said just now, business is business, Captain Tankerville, and I always like to know how my money is spent."

"Well, as to some part of it," replied the worthy captain, "that can be done. You had better come over to the place yourself. I can prepare the way for you, and when the turnkeys are off duty, can have the honor of introducing them to you quietly, when you can pay them with your own hands, for they must be trusted, even if you don't trust me."

"Ay, but I have some hold upon them, Captain Tankerville," replied Mrs. Charlton; "if I can prove that they have taken money from me, and if they don't do what they promised, they can be punished, you know."

"Well, so be it," answered the captain; "you may be quite sure I shall do my best to get the thousand pounds; but some money must be had in hand even to begin with. They will never risk coming to see you, nor talking much with me either, without having something to make it worth their while."

"How much will be required, do you think?" asked Mrs. Charlton.

"Why, there will be the porter, and the principal turnkey, and one of his fellows," replied Tankerville, thoughtfully; "I should think three hundred pound would do"

"Three hundred pound!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, "what, to begin with?"

"You can't expect men to risk transportation for nothing," replied the captain.

"There is no risk of transportation for coming to speak with a lady at an inn," rejoined his fair companion. "In one word, Captain Tankerville, I must see my way clearly in this business. I am not a person easily deceived, and, besides, I have not got more than a hundred pound in the house."

"Well, we must make that go as far as it will," he answered, perfectly unconcernedly; "we will meet at this place, Sturton, as soon as you like, Mrs. Charlton; and I trust with the hundred pound, if you will have the goodness to fetch it, I shall be able to get two of them at least to come and see you."

Mrs. Charlton went away, and returned in a minute or two with the money, Captain Tankerville having amused himself in the meanwhile with taking a pinch of old very dry snuff out of a valuable gold snuff-box of the late Mr. Charlton's, which stood upon the mantel-piece, and then immediately putting the box in his pocket.

"Oh, very well, this is the money," he said, holding out his hand as soon as Mrs. Charlton appeared; but the lady, instead of giving him the notes, took up the pen, dipped it in the ink, and proceeded to write a regular receipt for one hundred pound, specifying in good set terms that it was to be applied to the purpose of bribing the jailers and turnkeys of Sturton Jail to facilitate the escape of Alfred Latimer, Esq. To this she requested Captain Tankerville's signature; but that gentleman hesitated, and Mrs. Charlton then added, holding the notes tight in her hand, "Our hold must be mutual upon each other, Captain Tankerville; I shall not pay a single penny without a similar receipt."

The captain laughed, and signed the paper, saying, in a complimentary tone, "Well, you are the cleverest woman I ever had to deal with." And, after some further conversation, in the course of which it was agreed that Mrs. Charlton should go over to Sturton on the following day, and sleep at the inn there, the worthy captain took his leave, assuring her that he would lose no time in commencing the preliminary negotiations. Instead, however, of returning to the cottage of Mother Brown, as he had proposed, he walked straight down to the inn at Mallington, where he indulged in a couple of bottles of sherry and a broiled fowl.

CHAPTER XC.

The yard of the prison was not so full as ordinary, and the greater part of the prisoners which tenanted it at the time were busily amusing themselves in one corner with different games which they had devised to pass the troublous hours of captivity, and which were in those days permitted to the unconvicted. It was curious to see how, in this state, old habits came back upon all—old habits, which in many instances must have dated very far back—some had even returned to their boyish days, two or three were playing at marbles, and one was spinning a peg-top. But we must not pause to particularize all their occupations; suffice it that while one part of the prison yard was thus engaged, the other displayed Jack Williams and Alfred Latimer—the former taking his short walk up and down, the latter keeping by his side and talking eagerly.

"It won't answer, Mr. Latimer, it won't answer," said Williams, in reply to something that his companion had just communicated. "They have proofs enough against us all, that's the truth; and we had better look at it straightforwardly. I had a hint yesterday afternoon that they have got hold of everything we took in the place where we hid them away."

"They havn't got what I had," answered Latimer eagerly; "that's all safe in France; and they found nothing upon me that they could swear to."

Williams looked at him steadfastly for a moment, and then said "You are thinking of getting yourself out of the scrape, and leaving us in; but it won't do, Mr. Latimer."

"I am thinking of no such thing," answered Alfred Latimer sharply, with the color mounting in his cheek; "such a thing never crossed my thoughts, but I was thinking it was a pity you hadn't been as careful as I was. Even now I don't see, if they cannot prove that you put the things there, how it can tell against you, or Brown either. Any one who took the things might have hidden them as well as you."

"There's some truth in that," answered Williams thoughtfully. "Well, let us hear what's your plan, with this business of the game?"

"Why the object is," answered Alfred Latimer, whose wit had been sharpened by his danger, "to account for two or three of the strong points against us. In the first place, if we are all in the same story, that we were just out bagging a few pheasants, which is very likely, seeing that we have all been in the same scrape before, it will show how we all came to go across the water together, and will knock down that cowardly rascal Maltby's evidence. Then, again," he said, "it will show a cause for the blood upon my clothes; and almost everything else will be affected by it, one way or another. So you see I was not thinking of getting out of the scrape and leaving you in it, though I cannot fancy what good it could do you to have me hanged as well as yourself."

"Perhaps not," answered Williams, with a grim smile, "but we are all in the same boat, Mr. Latimer, and must sink or swim together—not that I mean to say, if judge or jury were inclined to let you off, for any want of proof, that I would speak a single word to stop them. That's all fair, but if you were to contrive any plan for saving yourself without giving us a chance, I would spoil that for you, I can tell you. Now let's think of this scheme a little more. It's not a bad one, and we may as well let it go on, for it may make the folks doubt, and that's something; but the hope is so very faint a one that we must leave nothing else untried."

"But why is it so faint?" asked Alfred Latimer; "Maltby did not see us go into the house—nobody saw you and Brown hide the rings and things, and on me they have found nothing but ten guineas in my own purse."

"But they found well-nigh a thousand with me and Brown, in Wenlock Wood," answered Williams, "so we should have that to account for, any way, and your story won't match."

"That's awkward, indeed," answered Alfred Latimer; "but as the game is there by this time, I dare say, it may as well stay—what's to be done now, I wonder."

"Oh, yes; the game had better be left there, and we had better keep to the same story, if the worst comes to the worst. But the first thing is to try to get out of this place."

"Ay, but how is that to be done," asked Alfred Latimer, "I should be glad enough to get out, if I saw any chance of it."

Williams gave his under jaw a twist, as if there had been something in his mouth, and then answered "It is to be done, Mr. Latimer, and though the less that is said about it the better, yet, as you must have some share in the thing, and must give us some help, I may as well tell you part of the plan, especially as we can never tell how long we may have an opportunity of talking over it, for if these fellows in the jail knew what they were about, they would never let you and I be walking up and down here, laying our heads together in this way; and if the visiting justices hear of it, they'll have a finger in the pie, that's clear. Wait till that fellow's gone by, and I'll tell you."

One of their fellow-prisoners at this moment came up, and asked Williams a question of no great importance, to which he obtained a short reply, and then moved away. As soon as he was gone, the fellow continued, "That wall's a good height, you see, but yet a ladder could soon be made that would reach to the top, if we could only get some thin but strong cord."

"I could soon get that," answered Alfred Latimer; "my wife would bring that in—what sort of cord do you want, how thick?"

"It doesn't much matter," answered the man, "how thick, so that she can carry it, without being seen; and if it be strongly twisted, I shall have to work it up into the thickness I want, myself. That would be soon done, if I could sit to it long enough at a time; but the people are always coming into my cell, and as I have got no light to work at night, I should be obliged to do it by the feel."

"Oh, I'll get her to bring me in a phosphorus-box and some candles," said Alfred Latimer; "but when you have made the ladder, I don't see how you could use it. You are locked up at night, I suppose, as well as myself; and if you were to try it in the day, you'd be stopped in five minutes."

"There's such a thing as mortar between stones," answered Williams, dryly; "and such a thing as working the mortar out; Brown's at it, and I shall take my turn by and by; we are half way through the wall already, as near as I can calculate; and in two days more, we shall be within half an inch of the outside."

"Why, Brown and you arn't in the same cell, surely," said the young gentleman.

"Oh, no, not at night," answered Williams, "but during the airing time, as they call it, as our cells are close by the yard door, and as there is no means of getting out that way, they don't much watch, if we go in for a minute or two, and then nobody notices if he goes into his cell or mine."

"But how will he get into your cell when you want to get away," asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh, we've a plan for that," replied Williams; "that won't be difficult to manage."

"And how am I to manage, Williams," demanded his companion; "it seems to me that you have been laying out for yourselves to get out of the scrape, and leave me in it."

"I shouldn't be telling you all about it, if I had," answered Williams; "but you must do something for yourself, Mr. Latimer. You shall know whenever all is quite ready, and the time fixed, then you must pay one of the turnkeys well to let you come at night and have a little private talk with me. You know a stout swivel-eyed fellow, with a hook-nose;

ie's the man you must speak to. Just give him a hint that you want to consult me about our defence. Now, for ten pounds he won't mind letting you do that, for they think that's all fair; and to make everything sure, you can tell him he may lock you in, and come for you in a couple of hours again. He did so for Brown two or three nights ago, for the little sum I could give him, which was but two guineas."

"How did you get that?" asked Alfred Latimer. "They took all I had from me, and let me have all I want on my mother's account. The blackguards searched me to the skin."

"So they did me," answered Williams; "and if I had had two guineas about me, they would have soon found it; but I had what was worth more than two guineas—a certain bit of paper belonging to a friend of yours, one Mr. Morton, for which at one time he offered a reward of fifty pounds. I had slipped it in between my jacket and the lining, where they never thought of looking; and after I had been in for awhile I sent for Mr. Morton, on pretence of wanting to confess something to him, and then asked him if he was willing to give the same sum for the paper as ever. He was glad enough to do it, so I got the money and he got the paper—but that's nothing to do with what we were talking about. I wanted to try that turnkey, for I've a strange notion of picking out men by their faces, and I thought I was pretty sure of my mark. I have seldom seen a fellow with a swivel eye that hadn't got some sort of a twist inside as well as out. You may talk to him, therefore, quite safely, the first time you can get him into your room, and he'll do what you want any time for ten pound. Then when I tell you all's ready, you can get him to bring you to my cell about one or two in the morning, and while you are locked in there, as he thinks, we can be walking away towards Portsmouth."

"But won't he see the hole you have made in the wall," asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! dear, no," replied Williams. "In the first place there is never a stone out of its place when they come in, and besides the bed-head is against it."

The younger of the two villains ruminated for a minute or two over what he had heard. The scheme seemed to him certainly feasible, and he had heard of such things being attempted with success, but yet the risk seemed to him so great that he said at length, "Won't it be better, Jack, to keep this shift till the last—I mean, till the trial is over?"

"Why, you fool," answered Jack Williams, sharply, "we shall be in irons then. It's a wonder we ar'nt now, and only because there are one or two old women amongst the justices, who are trying what they call a new system here, in order to reclaim us, as they say—devilish little chance of reclaiming me, I think, irons or no irons." He and his companion both laughed, and he proceeded—"Brown got his darbies off yesterday by good behavior, and we must take good care to use our legs and arms while they are at liberty, so you get the cord and the phosphorus-box and the lights—one of those long rolls of taper will be better than candles—furnish yourself with all the money you can scrape together, and we shall do the matter easily enough. If I were you, Mr. Latimer, however, I would not neglect the other scheme. That can do no harm, and we might be stopped, you know. Another thing is, I don't see why you should be worse off, if it does come to a trial, than any of us, and as things stand now you are so, for that young lady, that Miss Charlton, knows nothing of me or Brown, but her evidence may be devilish unlucky for you. I should think, when you are so nearly related to her, that you could easily get her out of the way."

"Not so easy," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I'll try—yes, that I will; I'll try. She's kind enough, but there's a great deal of determination about her, too, when she takes a thing into her head."

"I'd try every way," answered Williams; "but here comes Dick, the other turnkey, as if he were making for us. Don't say a word to him, mind, for, though he's devilish civil, yet you'll find him a dogged fellow, who won't take a sixpence."

The turnkey beckoned to Alfred Latimer as he approached, and told him that his lady was waiting to see him, in very reverential tones. There must be something most extraordinary in gold that the very name and reputation of wealth should obtain the respect which virtuous poverty cannot command.

> "Plate sin in gold,
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
> Armed in rags, a pigmy straw doth pierce it,"

said the great poet. But there's something more than all this, it is not alone immunity that can be won by wealthy vice, but reverence; and virtue ungilded can command but scanty courtesy. When we doff our hats most humbly, 'tis to the purse in a man's pocket, not to the gem in his heart; and, let him be ever so loaded with crimes, the awful power of riches shall still affect all who approach him, and the very hangman tie the noose more reverently. Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar! thou wert a politic king, but scarcely didst thou know thyself the extent to which thy decrees would be obeyed, for we still, even at the end of more than two thousand years, bow down and worship the golden image thou didst set up.

Alfred Latimer, to return from our didactics, followed the worthy jailer into the prison, and in a few minutes was in his room again with Lucy, who seemed to have gained strength, notwithstanding all she had suffered. Lucy had a long tale to tell, for, since she had last seen him, many things had happened. Mrs. Charlton had opened a communication with her, had been to see her, and, upon the strength of the occasion, had been as gentle and kind, and sweetly maternal as possible. Not choosing to visit the prison again too soon, the lady had instructed her son's wife to communicate to him secretly the efforts that were making to liberate him, and to warn him to be prepared to take advantage of whatever might be done on his behalf at a moment's notice. Lucy had been instructed, too, to convey to him the means of disguising his person, and over her own ordinary dress, she now wore a second gown and shawl, which she had been told to leave with him. She had received all these directions, and promised to follow them, with her natural gentleness, but Mrs. Charlton remarked, in their interview, a

sort of apathetic coldness, which she attributed, perhaps, to the right cause, and feared that it might interfere with Lucy's exertions on Alfred Latimer's behalf. Now, Mrs. Charlton never scrupled, when she had an object in view, to say what was not, and, therefore, in taking leave of her daughter-in-law, whom she might have treated at any other time as the dirt beneath her feet, or as a politician treats an elector who has served him, and can serve him no more, she kissed her tenderly, adding, "You must be very well aware, my dear Lucy, that nothing would induce me to take all these steps, even for a son, were I not fully convinced that he is perfectly innocent. The truth is," she continued, seeing some surprise in Lucy's face, "poor Alfred, whose wild ways you well know, had engaged to go out with these men, to shoot in the preserves here; it was very wrong and very foolish, certainly, but more a boyish frolic than anything else. However, he had nothing to do with the rest of the sad affair. That they did alone when he left them, but as he was seen with them just before and just after, there is no means of proving his innocence, unless they would confess the truth, and even then their words would not be believed; besides, these people are always so malicious. But I have heard quite enough to show me the true state of the case, and that poor Alfred was never nearer to the house than the willow-ground by the water."

Had Lucy been very clear-sighted, had she had a full knowledge of all the evidence that had been given, she would easily have perceived that Mrs. Charlton's story could not be true. But what we wish for, that we believe—at least in nine cases out of ten—and she gladly caught at the hope afforded her that her suspicions had done her husband injustice. If Mrs. Charlton, she thought, with full information in regard to the whole, could be perfectly convinced that her son was innocent, why should she doubt it? And though vague and shadowy suspicions would still haunt her, and facts occur to her remembrance which shook her trust, yet still she labored, and successfully, to explain them away, and to convince herself of that which she wished to be true. She thus returned to her husband with warmer feelings and a more eager desire to serve and save him than when she left him, and she detailed all the information she possessed as rapidly as possible, stripped off the gown and shawl in haste, and aided to hide them amongst his clothes.

It may easily be conceived that the tidings were joyful to Alfred Latimer, and he loaded poor Lucy with caresses, calling her the best and dearest girl in the world. He did not forget, however, the conversation which had taken place between him and Williams, and judging that it would be much wiser in every respect to carry on the scheme of escape which had been developed between them, in case that of his mother and Tankerville should fail, he directed Lucy to bring him the phosphorus-box and taper, and inquired eagerly for the money which had been spoken of at their last interview. It was instantly produced by Lucy, neatly rolled up into the smallest possible compass. But Alfred Latimer had still directions to give, and after meditating for a moment, and saying to himself, "Even if this scheme of Tankerville's succeeds, I must not let Williams and Brown know what is going on, and, to hide it all, I must seem as busy about their plan as ever; but in case both fail, I had better try to get the evidence against me out of the way;" he proceeded aloud, "There's one thing, dear Lucy, I wish could be done. If you could give my mother a hint that, at all events, she had better persuade Louisa to marry and go abroad for awhile, I should be very glad. Louisa would do it, I am sure, if she's asked, and my mother can always coax her to do a thing, if she takes the right way. If young John Blackmore, too, were gone, it would be all the better. Maltby, I am afraid, they can't get hold of, for I have heard that they have shut him up."

"But do you think Miss Charlton will consent?" asked Lucy, doubtingly; "she is not with Mrs. Charlton now, you know."

"The devil she isn't!" cried her husband; "I suppose, then, my mother has quarrelled with her like a fool; but I'm sure, after all, Louisa could be persuaded, for she could never wish me to be condemned when I am innocent."

He said the words boldly enough, for he had accustomed himself to the assertion, and even to the lawyer who had visited him, to prepare his defence, he had never admitted the fact of his guilt. Nevertheless, there was some slight hesitation observable as he spoke; and Lucy asked, in a low and anxious tone, while her heart sank with doubt as to what his answer might be, "And are you really innocent, indeed, Alfred?"

Not more than a fortnight before, such a question would have cast her husband into a fearful state of agitation, for remorse at that time had mingled with apprehension; but selfishness had now resumed her full sway, and his only thought was to save himself, whatever might be the means required. He answered, then, vehemently, almost eagerly, "To be sure I am. How could you ever doubt it, girl? It is only that appearances may be against me. I can tell you, Lucy, there's many an innocent man in England hanged upon what they call circumstantial evidence; and here, because two or three things are proved, which might have had something to do with the robbery, but which could be easily accounted for, I am already treated like a guilty person, and should very likely be found guilty by the jury."

Lucy replied nothing, but murmured to herself, "Thank God!—thank God!"

"Thank God that I am likely to be hanged!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

"No, no!" she cried, placing her hands upon his arm—"thank God that you are innocent, Alfred."

"You should never have doubted it!" he answered, pushing her from him; "but that does not matter," he continued; "you tell my mother what I say, bid her go on with what she's about with Tankerville; but in case the worst comes to the worst, let her get Louisa out of the way as soon as possible; she can easily manage it if she tries, and then it will be pretty nearly all sure."

Lucy was pained, for every moment showed

her more clearly that he thought of nothing but himself; but still the increasing assurance that he was innocent was the greatest of comforts to her. Whatever she might have to suffer herself—whatever he might make her undergo—whatever his harshness, or the selfishness that she too clearly perceived, might inflict upon her—she could bear with calmness, with fortitude, with resignation, provided the awful fear was removed from her mind that she was willingly aiding the escape of her father's murderer.

And after having made him repeat all his instructions, she again took leave of him to depart. A momentary fit of tenderness seized him at the last instant of her stay; and he even so far forgot himself as to ask her to remain a little longer. Did I say he forgot himself!—perhaps it was wrong to say so; for, after all, it was but a softer kind of selfishness, less hard, less brutal than the other. He felt a comfort, a relief, in her society. There was something in the clinging affection of the poor girl, in her devotion to him in that hour of peril, that seemed to cheer and mitigate the dark solitude of crime. It seemed as if, while she was there—with her love and her tenderness—she who had no share in the deeds he had done—that he was not so utterly separated by the darkness of his crime from the rest of human creatures—that the barrier was not so completely fixed against him—that there was something innocent, and good, and true, that loved him yet, and it was a mighty consolation. He seated himself by her—he threw his arms round her—he leaned his head upon her shoulder, while her hand lay clasped in his; and as they were thus placed, one of the jailers suddenly entered, perhaps with some doubt as to what might be the object of Lucy's visit. All seemed natural and easy, however—both started at the interruption, and Alfred Latimer withdrew his arm; and the turnkey, making some excuse for his entrance, returned to the rooms of the governor, from which he had come. Shortly after Lucy quitted the prison; but this time she went on foot, and took her way towards the best inn in the place.

CHAPTER XCI.

The Bell at Sturton was, as the reader is aware, a large and handsome inn. It had multitudes of bed-rooms, it had multitudes of sitting-rooms, multitudes of waiters and chamber-maids, and, amongst all its multitudes, the greatest was the multitude of bells. There they hung in three tremendous long rows; and had the bell-hanger but possessed a musical ear, and arranged them properly, and with due discretion, one might have heard, when the house was full, some of the finest pieces of music that Beethoven or Haydn ever produced, played from morning till night. There were eight full octaves, and they surely might have been put to a much more harmonious purpose than they were by the guests who continued ringing the changes upon them all day long. I throw this out as a hint to all future keepers of great inns, or possessors of large flocks of sheep. Depend upon it, if they but arrange their bells, in thirds and fifths, there would be much more harmony in their several establishments.

The great bell of the Bell, however, was the bell of the house-door, which was so sized and situated that every waiter and every chamber-maid, unless deep in wine, love, or sleep, could not avoid hearing it, wherever he or she might be, from the remote garret of Boots down to the profound storehouses of Bacchus.

One night, about the period of which we have just been writing, towards half-past nine, *post-meridiem*, that great bell rang vehemently. The roll of wheels had previously called forth the ostler, and now, out of sundry chambers, darted two or three waiters in black silk-stockings, like spiders darting along the toils at the first touch of a fly's foot. The glass doors were thrown open, the landlord himself was summoned, and the housekeeper lighted a bed-candle. The first object that presented itself to the eyes of landlord and waiters, when they rushed out upon the step, was a traveling chariot of somewhat antique construction, and apparently of a green color. The lamps were lighted, and the postboy stood beside his horses already undoing the harness. Ostler was in a hurry to call out "horses on," but the head-waiter opened the door of the vehicle, politely saying, "Won't you please to alight, sir?"

"What's o'clock?" said a voice from within. The waiter took a step back, looked at his watch by the light in the hall, saw the time, added half an hour, to give the inn a better chance, and replied, "Ten o'clock, sir."

"Then I'll stop here to-night," replied the gentleman from within; "though, dickory, dickory, dock, the mouse must have run up the clock, for it was only eight when we left, and that's but ten miles."

"This way, sir, this way," said the waiter, without any reply to the gentleman's last observation. But our good friend, Mr. Quatterly, who stepped out of the carriage as the man spoke, did not think fit to follow him immediately, but remained for the space of about three minutes, paying the postboy, and seeing sundry tin-cases and small green leather boxes, which he had with him in the interior of the carriage, safely brought out and carried on before him. He then duly followed where the waiter led, Mr. Gatton's housekeeper exclaiming "Number forty-two, Jackson," as the party passed; and, ushered up to the first floor, Mr. Quatterly was introduced into a sitting-room, the neatness of which, together with the sparkling fire in the grate, were very satisfactory to his corporeal feelings. He looked at his watch, nevertheless; it was a large, round, turnip-shaped commodity, which told the time with great exactness, and shaking his finger at the waiter, he exclaimed, "You vagabond! you said it was ten o'clock, and it wants twenty minutes."

"Bless my heart, sir," cried the waiter, twitching out his own chronometer, as if horribly shocked at the thought of such an error, and then looking confounded, he added, "Really, I beg pardon, sir, I made a mistake, that light there below is so wery bad. Will you take tea or supper, sir?"

"Ay, I understand, I understand," said Mr. Quatterly, good-humoredly, "but you shall have sixpence less for cheating me. I thought we

couldn't have taken all that time, or I must have been dreaming, like David Dribble, who dreamed he drove a dragon, for it seemed as if the horses were going as fast as they could—tea or supper! I'll have dinner first, if you please, for I have not put a morsel between my grinders since seven o'clock this morning. Let me have what can be soonest ready—a little soup, no fish—I hate fish in the midland counties, and anything else that the house can afford, together with a bottle of sherry and an apple-tart, not baked above three days, if you please, Mr. Waiter."

"Baked this morning, sir," said the waiter.

"At ten o'clock?" inquired Mr. Quatterly, slily. "Now be so good as to put those boxes in order upon that table—regularly, regularly, if you please; the big ones behind, the little ones before; the light companies in front, and the grenadiers behind. And now show me my bed-room. I always like to see the thing I have got to lie upon."

"This way, sir, this way," said the waiter. "Chambermaid, forty-nine." And candle in hand, he lighted Mr. Quatterly about ten steps along the passage, towards the door of a bed-room on the opposite side. In ten steps, however, very wonderful things may happen, and in this instance something did happen which surprised Mr. Quatterly a good deal. A door opened on the same side as his own sitting-room, and a head and face, with a part of the body, appeared at the aperture. Mr. Quatterly saw the countenance distinctly, for the waiter held the light in a very illuminating direction, and there were the precise and identical features of his worthy and accomplished friend, Captain Tankerville, which, though withdrawn again as soon as seen, produced from Mr. Quatterly's chest the significant interjection, "Ah, ah!"

"Sir!" said the waiter.

"Number forty-five," said Mr. Quatterly, "who's staying in forty-five, waiter?"

"Mrs. Charlton, sir, the Honorable Mrs. Charlton," replied the officer in black silk stockings.

"Ah! when the pie was opened the birds began to sing," said Mr. Quatterly, and without any more pellucid comment upon the information he had received, the worthy solicitor followed the waiter and the chambermaid, by whom they were just then joined, into the bedroom, examined the bed, ordered the mattress to be put uppermost, called the chambermaid "my dear," and then returned to his sitting-room, pausing every second step to think for a moment. When he had reached the door, his cogitation seemed to have arrived at some result, for he turned to the waiter, saying, "Get the dinner, and serve it. I shall be back by the time it is on the table. And going into the room he took his hat, and issued forth from the inn on foot.

In the streets of Sturton Mr. Quatterly walked on, looking to the right and left at the different houses he passed, as if he were enjoying a strange town—one of the greatest pleasures to a thoughtful man that can be conceived. It is so full of mysteries, so replete with work for the imagination, that I could easily find an excuse for a man spending his whole life in visiting strange towns, even if he never saw any more of them than the outsides of the houses. However, Mr. Quatterly, it would appear, was differently occupied, and after having gone for a couple of hundred yards, or somewhat more, he crossed over to a chemist's shop, which was one of the few that was open in the place, and walked in, with a low bow to the proprietor thereof, who was standing taking leave of his goods and chattels for the night.

"Pray, sir," he said, "can you inform me where the mayor is to be found? and, if not, which is the house of the nearest magistrate?" The chemist did both, and the magistrate's dwelling being near at hand, and the mayor's far away, Mr. Quatterly proceeded to the door of the former, and was soon after admitted. His visit was not long, for in about five minutes he issued forth again, and, in all, was about a quarter of an hour absent from the inn. His dinner did not seem to have made much progress during his absence, for the cloth was still unlaid. But all was bustle as soon as he summoned the waiters by the bell, and in about ten minutes more the soup was before him. That part of the feast was discussed, and Mr. Quatterly was entering upon the wing of a fowl, when one of the host of waiters came in, and inquired, "Pray, sir, is your name Quatterly?"

"It used to be," replied the worthy solicitor, "and if it has been changed, it was done without my consent."

"Mrs. Charlton, sir," said the waiter, "would be glad to speak with you for a few minutes, with her compliments."

"Well, then," answered Mr. Quatterly, "pray tell Mrs. Charlton, my friend, that I am particularly occupied at this moment, but that I will wait upon her in a quarter of an hour, with my compliments;" and Mr. Quatterly applied himself to his meal again with all due devotion. He did not eat much, it is true, but what he did eat was with a right good will, and he added four glasses of sherry to the meal, and a glass and a half to the apple tart, then raising himself, and rubbing his hands, he thanked heaven for a good meal, and directed the waiter to inform Mrs. Charlton that he was ready to attend her. The lady sent back word that she was eager to see him as soon as he could come, and the minute after Mr. Quatterly entered the sitting-room number forty-five.

With one of her sweetest and most engaging smiles, and the utmost courtesy of demeanor, the lady received her guest, and declared that she was delighted to see him, besought him to take a seat by her on the sofa, and spared no blandishments to produce a favorable impression. But as we have shown before, Mr. Quatterly combined with very great simplicity of manners, and a peculiar fondness for many very juvenile things, a shrewd and keen intellect, great knowledge of the world, and a vast experience of rogues and vagabonds of every class and degree; and all Mrs. Charlton's arts were lost upon him, for he saw through and through her, as if she had been a piece of rock crystal cut and polished. "Delighted, my dear madam," he replied, "to renew my acquaintance with you under less disagreeable circumstances than those with which it commenced. I trust I see you in good health."

"As well as I can be expected to be," replied

the lady. "Ah, that was a terrible day, indeed, Mr. Quatterly. I was quite beside myself, but even the timid pigeon, you know, will peck when its young ones are assailed."

"The hen pigeon, madam," replied Mr. Quatterly, somewhat dryly; "but I did not think you were beside yourself at all. You seemed to me to do it all very well."

Mrs. Charlton did not altogether like his answer. Some people are not well pleased to have their characters fully understood, and after pausing for a moment, and nibbling her pretty lip, she said "I was very glad to hear from a friend that you were here, Mr. Quatterly, for I thought that you might be the means"——

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," replied the solicitor, "but the friend, I presume, is Captain Tankerville."

"Ye—s," said Mrs. Charlton, with some hesitation, "poor man, he is—he is," and there she stopped.

"Exactly, ma'am," rejoined Mr. Quatterly, ending the sentence for her, "he is a swindler, ma'am, and a felon."

"Good gracious, I hope not!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in affected surprise and consternation; "he seemed to take a great deal of interest in my son, and so"——

"It is exactly as I say, my dear madam," replied Mr. Quatterly. "Your son, I beg leave to say, he pigeoned in the most egregious manner, and was one of those who greatly aided to lead him or drive him into acts which have produced his present unpleasant situation. As for himself, I am sorry for him, poor fellow, for he has been but a tool in the hands of others, I am quite sure."

"I can assure you he is perfectly innocent," said Mrs. Charlton, earnestly, "that is to say of the offences with which he is charged. That he was very culpable in going out at night to shoot the earl's game I admit, but that was his only offence."

"Then let it be his defence likewise, my dear madam," answered the solicitor; "prove that, and he's quite safe."

"But how can one prove it?" demanded the lady. "Meeting with these men on his way back, he crossed over in the boat without knowing anything of what they had done. But who could suppose, for a moment, my dear Mr. Quatterly, that any one would go and marry in the morning the daughter of a man he had murdered at night?"

"It is not a usual proceeding, indeed," answered the solicitor; "and I trust it may be, as you say, impossible. Nevertheless, his situation is, indeed, very awkward, and how he is to get out of it, I don't see. It will depend upon thirteen contingencies, namely, twelve jurors and the judge. A hanging judge and a hungry jury are hard things to deal with. But we may have something more favorable in this case, and I trust such may be the result, not alone for your sake, but for that of Miss Charlton, to whom the whole business must be most painful."

"Ay, that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mr. Quatterly," said the lady; "it will be very terrible to poor dear Louisa, and still more to Alfred, who has ever looked upon her as a sister, to see her appear as a witness against him, whose testimony will be very likely to turn the scale, and doom him to death. Do you not think, Mr. Quatterly, that it would be much better for her, and for all parties, if she were at once to give her hand to Lord Mallington, and take a little tour on the continent. It would do the health of both good, I am sure."

"May I ask, madam, if you consult me as a friend, a lawyer, or a physician?" inquired Mr. Quatterly."

The natural impulse of Mrs. Charlton's art, if I may use such a contradictory expression, would have led her to reply at once, "Oh! as a friend, of course," but a moment's thought stopped the words on her lips, and she said "as a solicitor."

"Six-and-eightpence, then, madam," said Mr. Quatterly, dryly; and Mrs. Charlton, with a smile, took out her purse, and laid seven shillings on the table. The worthy solicitor swept it up, put it in one huge pocket, and drew forth fourpence from the other, which he duly handed across to the lady. "Now, madam," he said, "I am your lawyer, and in that capacity I beg leave to reply, that the very best thing for your son, be he guilty or innocent, would be to get some of the witnesses out of the way, especially Miss Charlton. The lad Blackmore is another who may be disposed of with advantage, and those are the only two you can deal with. But you must excuse me if I decline to undertake the operative part of the affair, as it is out of my practice. I can't blame you if you do it, but I should blame myself very much if I did."

"But surely, my dear Mr. Quatterly, you will not refuse to take a message from me to Louisa and the earl," said Mrs. Charlton, "or to urge them most strongly to hasten their nuptials, for which they have my fullest consent—and—and—"

"And go to the continent," said Mr. Quatterly. "Well, my dear madam, I will take the message, and though I do not promise to urge them most strongly, yet I will say nothing against it."

"Oh, pray do urge them," said Mrs. Charlton, eagerly; "I am sure a word from you would do a great deal."

"My dear madam," rejoined the solicitor, "I never yet saw a man whom it was necessary to urge to take a glass of wine if he was thirsty, and liked wine, or to take a walk if it was a fine day, and he liked walking; no, nor any two young people either, who were in love with each other, to marry at once, if there was not the slightest impediment in nature. I, therefore, think your proposition has a very good chance, even if it come plain and unadorned from my lips."

Mrs. Charlton mused for an instant, and then replied, as Mr. Quatterly rose and stood before her, about to depart, "I am sure you will do what you can; but now tell me about Captain Tankerville."

"I have nothing to tell, my dear madam," replied Mr. Quatterly; "you have his character, according to my best powers of portraiture—he's a swindler and a felon. He fleeced your son, and he's now fleecing you, I suspect; or at least would be if he wern't in jail, which he is by this time, if the magistrates have done their duty."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Charlton; "I can hardly believe he's such a character."

"The powers of credulity required are not very great," replied the solicitor; "but nevertheless, it is so. And now, my dear madam, good night, for I have a great many papers to look over."

"Well, thank God!" said Mrs. Charlton, as soon as Mr. Quatterly was gone, "I have seen both the porter and the turnkey myself, and know where to find them, and how to deal with them, so it's no great matter. If he's in jail, it will save money."

CHAPTER XCII

The morning was bright and beautiful, though an occasional shower, more like one of those which checker the sunshine of an April day, swept over the sky, and passed away again, leaving the whole world sparkling. Breakfast was just over at the rectory; Dr. Western had gone into his library to speak to some of his poor; Mrs. Evelyn had retired from the breakfast-room, whether on business or from discretion I cannot tell; and Morton and Louisa stood together at the window, gazing over the pleasant scene before their eyes, catching the glistening river through a break in the shrubs, and gaining a view beyond that again of Mallington Park, with its sweeps of woodland, and wide broken lawns, and a gray angle of the hall itself appearing from behind a mass of giant chesnuts perched upon a gentle rise. It was natural for Louisa's mind to be led on by the sight she beheld into the future with which it associated itself. There was to be the dwelling of her after years—there was the ancestral mansion of him she loved so deeply—there the spot in which all the bright imaginations of youth, all the fond visions of affection, congregated themselves before the eye of hope. Was it unnatural that, with so many dark and painful circumstances as then surrounded her, she should feel a yearning for the coming time—a longing to hurry forward to the period when the cloud should be passed away, and the sun shine all bright again? It is seldom, very seldom that the bright fancies of early love, that all the ornaments and gay colors with which we decorate the object of early affection, are found to retain their lustre after the first glow of enthusiasm has passed. Seldom indeed that the qualities which we attribute to the being whom we love are not found, more or less, to be the work of our own imagination. But it had not been so with Louisa and with Morton. His character, like his circumstances, had only seemed the brighter from every day that passed. He had come to her in lowly guise, without pretensions and without claim; he had won her regard as a simple gentleman, with no ostensible title to aspire to the hand of the rich heiress; and it was not till that hand was promised that she had learned that he was the possessor of wealth superior to her own, and of claims to a rank which she never dreamed of seeking. Thus, too, with his heart and mind, the treasures with which they were stored, the true nobility with which they were dignified, had revealed themselves by degrees. Plain and unaffected in manner, seeking neither to dazzle nor to strike, hiding rather than revealing the richer things within, every day he had grown upon her affection, and advanced in her esteem. At the same time he, on his part, summed up all his feelings towards her by saying that he had come to Mallington in search of an idle name, and had found a real treasure by the way. Loved her he certainly had from a very early period of their acquaintance. He had soon learned to think her the most beautiful, and what is of more importance, the most interesting being he had ever beheld; but now such sensations had warmed by intimacy into a passion as ardent as it was deep, and as he stood there and gazed with her from the window on the scene I have described, he felt even a more eager longing than she did to hasten forward to the time when the tie that was to unite them for ever should be theirs, and every cold restraint and worldly barrier done away. They spoke not, indeed, of such sensations, though their conversation might glance to the future even while dealing with the things of the present; yet if eyes are books in which men can read the secrets of the heart, there were looks that told the tale of what was passing in the bosoms of each, even while they were talking of more indifferent things.

What might have been said next I cannot tell, but certainly a more propitious moment could not have been found for any proposal that might tend to hasten their union, but as they were still gazing forth, and speaking of the changes and improvements that were by this time going on at Mallington Park, the green chariot of worthy Mr. Quatterly drove in through the gates, and stopped at the door before their eyes. His voice was then heard in the hall, giving various directions for the safe custody of the numerous little boxes which the chariot contained, and the next moment he was ushered into the room by Dr. Western's old servant, one of whose arms was heavily laden with the cases by which the worthy solicitor set such store. With an air of mock ceremony and reverence, Mr. Quatterly advanced towards the young nobleman, bowing profoundly, and then taking Morton's extended hand, he shook it heartily, seizing upon Louisa's next, and gallantly raising it to his lips.

"My lord," he said, "I have the honor of informing your lordship that all your lordship's affairs are finally wound up, settled, and arranged. You are now, my lord, recognized by all parties as the undisputed possessor, in fee simple, of the Mallington Hall estate, as both heir at law and next of kin to the late Earl of Mallington, to every stiver of whose real and personal estate, goods, chattels, messuages, tenements, and effects, of every kind, sort, or description whatsoever, your lordship has an indisputable, an undisputed claim, as well as to the style, title, and honors, with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining of Earl of Mallington, as I am ready to prove by the contents of those green boxes, and upon which I sincerely congratulate your lordship."

"There's an harangue," he continued, turning to Louisa, while Morton inquired, "But what's in the red box, my dear friend. I hope nothing of the Pandora kind."

"Faith, I don't know," answered Mr. Quatterly; "let's see—yes, that's the right one. But there are two more which he has not brought in. In this, my lord, there is a very dangerous document. I scarcely dare to pronounce the name of it in a lady's presence—it is a draft neither for money nor of wine, but of a thing which I will whisper in this fair lady's ear, lest she should be too terribly shocked—a marriage settlement," said Mr. Quatterly. "Having received a hint that such a thing might be needful, I thought there could be no harm in having a little conversation on the subject with my friend Quin, the solicitor of the guardians and executors. The whole matter was settled with the most illegal haste and irregular rapidity. The draft made as short as possible, much to my own loss, and that of my clerks, laid before Bell, flaws discovered and corrected, the deed engrossed, and the draft lies at the top, and the parchment at the bottom; if it is not wanted it can't be helped," and Mr. Quatterly rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"Shall we look at the papers, Louisa?" said Morton with a smile.

"Oh, no, no, Edmond," she replied; "I can have nothing to do with them."

"Oh, but you must have to do with them, sweet lady, as far as signing them goes," answered Mr. Quatterly; "as to all the rest, I believe that can be settled between myself and Dr. Western. This noble personage's instructions I received before, and they have been attended to to the letter."

"The annuity?" asked Morton.

"Yes," replied Mr. Quatterly, "a thousand a year extra, which is nine hundred and ninety-nine pounds, some shillings, more than she deserves. However, I have nothing more to do but to obey. Don't let me forget, though, that I have a proposal to make from her to you two young people. I saw her last night at Sturton, you must know, consorting with a certain Captain Tankerville, whom I have taken care shall be laid in limbo again. That's one good thing done, and this time I have so framed my charge that he will be transported for life, not hanged, as would have been the case if I had pursued the other business—I'm not fond of hanging people, my dear. I can't even bear to see a mouse caught in a mouse-trap, its large black eyes look so reproachfully at one."

Louisa's face grew grave in a moment, and Morton inquired "But what of Mrs. Charlton? Any new demand, I wonder?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Mr. Quatterly; "a simple suggestion, conceived in the most tender and considerate spirit, with a regard to the eagerness and impatience of two young people on the eve of marriage. She proposes, my dear lady, that you and this noble lord should, with her full consent and approbation, be linked together in Hymen's fetters without the least delay or hesitation, and take what is called the wedding tour—as if matrimony were nothing better than a roundabout at a fair—on the continent, or to any other sweet and delectable spot, at a distance, that you may fix upon."

Morton smiled, but Louisa looked gravely up, saying, "But that is impossible, you know, my dear sir, for I shall have to appear at this dreadful trial."

Mr. Quatterly took Louisa's hand in his, and gazed at her with a kind and an affectionate look, while he replied, "That is just what Mrs. Charlton wishes to prevent, my dear lady; and as she has a glorious and penetrating view into human nature, she judged that such a proposal would neither be very unpleasant to you, nor to my noble friend here."

Louisa moved to the table, and seated herself, leaning her brow upon her hand; and for several minutes she made no reply, while Morton gazed at her, feeling the struggle which was going on in her breast the more from that which was taking place in his own. After a long pause, he approached and took her hand, and Louisa, looking up in his face, suffered him to see that her beautiful eyes were full of tears. "What shall I say, Edmond?" she inquired, in a low tone. Before he could answer, however, Dr. Western entered the room, and Louisa turned towards him, as her best and secret adviser, but when the matter was explained, it proved that the worthy rector brought no decision into the council, for he was as much embarrassed as any one.

"You must not ask me, my love, you must not ask me," he said; "I feel deeply for you, Louisa, I feel deeply for the unhappy woman herself, but—no, you must not ask me. It is a difficult case."

Louisa turned again to Morton, and he replied, in answer to her look, for she spoke not, "I am as much embarrassed as yourself, dear one. Were I to give way to the feelings of my heart, I should say 'Come at once, let our marriage take place without delay, and leave the rest to fate.' I do not know that one is called upon to sacrifice every feeling of the heart in such a case as this; but I will not enter into any casuistry, for I feel I am too much prejudiced by my own wishes."

"Well spoken, Lucius Junius Brutus!" said Mr. Quatterly. "I suppose I must say a word, though I told the good lady I would not. Remember, however, I don't speak as a lawyer; and, moreover, remember, I don't speak as a magistrate, but merely as a friend, and as your friend, fair lady, more than even his. In the first place, then, let me tell you, that it isn't for the sake of Mrs. Charlton I speak—no, nor for that young scamp, her son—but for you, my dear. My own opinion is, that for you to go into the witness-box, in a public court of justice, to give evidence against one who has called you sister—to endure the badgering and insinuations of cross-examination by a clever counsel—and, after all, to think, throughout your life, that your testimony went far to doom this young man to death, would well nigh kill you; and if it did not at once, would injure your health for years."

"It would," replied Louisa; "of that I am well aware."

"Then the question is settled," said Morton; "I join my voice to his, and say, 'Let us go, Louisa.'"

"I will put it in another point of view," said Mr. Quatterly. "You are bound down in recognizances to appear and give evidence. The law itself has, therefore, fixed your responsibility at a certain sum of money; if you choose to sacrifice that, the law has nothing to say to

you. So much for the law of the question; and, in good faith and truth, I can't help thinking that you have no occasion to deal more hardly with yourself than the law does."

"With me there is but one question," said Morton, "what may be the effect of this upon your own health and happiness, Louisa. If they are both likely to suffer in a serious degree, I must hold that you are not bound to risk such a result. I trust I am unprejudiced in what I say—at least, I try to be so."

"You know, Edmond," replied Louisa—laying her hand upon his, and looking up in his face—"that I am not one to yield weakly; and if it be right to stay and give evidence, I will do it at any risk; but I will acknowledge that the very thought of standing in a court of justice, and saying those things which, however true, may deprive Alfred Latimer of life, terrifies me, and takes my courage from me. I believe that I should hardly quit the court alive; and I am quite sure that if anything I said were to produce the effect of his condemnation and execution, a gloom would come over my whole life which I could never shake off. The idea that I was right and just would, I fear, have very little power in consoling me; for we women, I believe, can seldom look at the simple question of justice as men do; and if there were any doubt also—if he persisted in denying his guilt to the last—I am very much afraid my own weakness would sometimes make me look upon myself as his murderer—Oh, it would be very horrible!—and yet, and yet, I fear that he is guilty!"

"I don't know," said Mr. Quatterly; "as the case stands at present he will be hanged to a certainty; but that does not at all prove that he is guilty, for there is a great deal of hanging honest men in England; and the palladium of English liberty, the trial by jury, is very much like tossing up a penny—heads win, tails lose. His defence is, I find, that he was out poaching on your manors, my lord—that he got his hands and his clothes stained with the blood of some bird or beast that he shot, and never was near the house. He says, I find, that he left the game he had procured, in a place called Gammer Mudge's Hole, somewhere in a wood near this place."

"A quantity of game was found there yesterday," said Dr. Western, "quite in the back part of the cave. The constable, who discovered it, says that it is nearly in a state of putrefaction, so that the story may be true. I pray God, that he may be able to prove it."

"He'll be hanged, notwithstanding, I should think," said Mr. Quatterly; "if the evidence remains as it is, and the very fact of this story having been put forward will have the effect which this dear young lady fears, and make her ever fancy that she has aided in condemning an innocent man."

Louisa pressed her hand upon her eyes, and her cheek turned deadly pale; but Morton seated himself beside her, and asked, in a low voice, "May I decide for you, Louisa?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Louisa Charlton; "do, Edmond, do. I shall be quite satisfied and confident that you are right, and whichever way I acted on my own judgment, I should always fear I had been wrong."

"Very well, then," said Morton, turning to Dr. Western, "it only remains for Louisa to fix the day, sometime between this and the first of next month, when I think the assizes commence. Under all circumstances, dear Louisa, I think it will be wise to let the marriage be as private as possible, and, therefore, I shall not regret that all your establishment is not prepared for you, and that we shall go without new carriages and liveries, and wedding favors, and all the *et ceteras* of a smart bridal."

Louisa looked up, and smiled, but did not reply; and Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly left the lover and her he loved alone together, while the worthy solicitor carried off the red box, containing the marriage-settlement, into the rector's library, and spread the parchment before him. They were soon after joined by Morton himself, with the news that Louisa had fixed that day week for the wedding; and Dr. Western smiled gravely, not at all doubting that love had not a little to do with the decision at which they had arrived on the difficult question submitted to them.

The dearly beloved reader can have no doubt that they were both exceedingly wrong; that Louisa ought, with unhesitating decision, to have gone into court, and given her evidence against Alfred Latimer, as if he had been a perfect stranger; that the love of public justice should have outweighed every private consideration; and that Themis should have triumphed over not only old associations, womanly weakness, a gentle heart, and a feeble frame, but even over Cupid and Hymen both together. She was very wrong, indeed, there can't be the least doubt of it; but still, I can but tell the story as it happened, and only begging to be remembered that I never set her up as a perfect character, and that I beseech all my lady loves, heroines, and others, not to follow the very bad example that she set them in the present instance.

CHAPTER XCIII.

The inhabitants of Mallington were as happy as heart could wish; for I must now return to give a general glance over the state of the population in that little town, whose interests I have neglected too long. For years, for long years, perhaps never before in the history of the place, had such an inexhaustible fund of amusement and excitement been afforded to the Mallingtonians as the events of the last few months had supplied. Fortune had been prodigal to them and given them abundantly of all her most esteemed stores. In their humility and moderation, a simple highway robbery would have been considered by them, some six months before, as a great treat; but now they had had two people knocked down, a mansion broken into, a murder committed, and a young gentleman, bred up amongst them, lodged in prison, charged with a capital felony. These are what the French cook would call the *pièces résistance* of the feast; but there were numerous corner and side dishes, such as examinations before magistrates, coroners' inquests, constables galloping and searching, a wounded gentleman, a prospective marriage, and the discovery that Mr. Morton was neither more nor less than the new Earl of Mallington.

Besides all this, there were the various *hors d'œuvres* of the imagination. To judge from the satisfaction that was seen on every countenance, the bustle and activity displayed by the streets, and the eternal cackle that was going on at different doors, and at different counters, one might have supposed that the whole town, and every individual in it had won a prize in the lottery. There wanted nothing but a fire and a suicide to make their happiness complete.

The Misses Martin, the Crumps, the Dixons, and all the rest of the fraternity, were in a state of high glorification; but the unlearned reader may imagine that Miss Mathilda Martin would have a somewhat difficult card to play, considering how completely all her surmises and prognostications in regard to Mr. Morton had been falsified. A difficult card, indeed, it would have been to any unscientific person; but Mathilda—fair Mathilda!—was a complete mistress of the art and mystery of gossip; and she knew how and when to turn round, and take up the most opposite position to that which she had before assumed—to attribute the insinuations that had been proved false, and the assertions that had been contradicted, to the exact reverse of all the causes in which they had originated, and to vindicate her own claim to infallibility by skillfully proving that she knew the truth the whole time, though, for reasons of her own, she thought fit to conceal it. Oh, blessed and beautiful powers of imagination! what a resource are ye to numerous most industrious classes of society, especially to the rogue, the swindler, the scandal-monger, and the detected gossip! What shifts and turns will ye not supply!—what schemes and plots will ye not furnish!—what evasions and prevarications will ye not provide in a moment! Not even the poet, the romance writer, or the historian—all deeply indebted to you as they are—owe you half so much as Miss Mathilda Martin! When Mr. Crump one day bought half-a-yard of coarse calico at the shop of the two spinsters, for the express purpose of maliciously condoling with Mathilda upon the discovery that Mr. Morton was the exact reverse of all that she had stated him to be, any ordinary mind would have been overthrown, any mere mortal cheek would have blushed—but not so Mathilda Martin—she laughed, she nodded, she winked to her sister; and then, with a sweet giggle, inquired of Mr. Crump, "And do you really think, my good sir, I didn't know?"

"I really can't tell, Miss Martin," replied the gentleman; "all I can speak of is what you said."

"To be sure I said it," answered Miss Mathilda, with a look of compassion, and a toss of the head. "And I did more, Mr. Crump, I went up to Mr. Middleton, and let him know what every one said in the place, as well as myself. But I knew very well, all the time. And are you blind enough not to see why I did this?"

"I am, indeed?" answered Mr. Crump, in some amazement, for his powers were of a very inferior order to Miss Mathilda's.

"Poor man! Well, I'll tell you, then," said the lady, "I knew quite well who he was before he had been here three days—oh, yes, I had good information, I can tell you; and I saw quite well that he had come down here to see what we were like, and to spy us all out in disguise; and I determined that I'd force him to explain himself, and show who he really was. I've no notion of a gentleman—and a nobleman, too—coming down and pretending to be what he is not, just to take poor people in, so I determined he shouldn't carry on that game long—I put down upon a piece of paper who he was a long time ago, and said to those I could trust—see if I am not right?"

Mr. Crump took his half yard of coarse calico, and retreated home, saying to his wife, when he arrived, "She pretends that she knew all about it, and only told all those lies to make him explain himself. But I don't believe a word of it." Neither did Mrs. Crump, nor any one else in the place.

Miss Mathilda, however, as soon as the worthy gentleman had evacuated the shop, turned to her sister with a laugh, saying, "I don't choose those Crumps to get the better of me."

Miss Martin quite agreed in her sister's view of the case; but a new source of satisfaction was about to be opened before them, treading upon the heels of a slight disappointment. Before half an hour was over, some of the neighbors came in to inform them that Alfred Latimer would certainly get off, for that the story he had told was found to be quite true, and that the game he said he had been shooting, and which had blooded his clothes, had been discovered in Gammer Mudge's Hole by Harry Soames, the constable.

This was a terrible shock to the feelings of the Miss Martins, not only because they had hoped with all their hearts to see Alfred Latimer hanged, but because they had predicted years before that his life would terminate by that process, and, consequently, if he escaped, another of their prognostications would fall to the ground. It made them seriously uneasy; it even suggested itself to the mind of Miss Mathilda that it might be as well to supply some little bits of evidence against him from her own copious manufactory. But that she did not dare to do eventually, though she was, as the reader knows, of a bold and adventurous character. She could not altogether, however, refrain from insinuations, and, for once in her life, she did not hit far from the mark. When Mrs. Dixon told her, because she was sure it would mortify her, that Mr. Latimer's acquittal was quite certain now that the game had been found in the cave in Wenlock Wood, Miss Mathilda replied sharply "to the creature," as she always called her, "Pooh, nonsense! of course he got some one to put it there for him." These words of Miss Martin were taken up by Mrs. Dixon, and were repeated, far and wide, during that evening and the next day, throughout Mallington. They did not reach the ears, however, of Mr. Harry Soames till two days after, and as soon as he could, which was not till the next morning, he went into the shop of the Misses Martin in order to hear further particulars, for he looked upon it as some imputation upon his skill and penetration that any one should suppose such a thing possible without his having discovered it.

"So I hear, Miss Mathilda," he said, "that you declare Mr. Latimer has got some one to put the game that I found, in the cave since the murder. Now, I should like to know what evidence you have got upon the subject, for it doesn't do to say such things unless you can prove them, 'specially when a young man's life's at stake."

"Oh, I've got no evidence," said Miss Mathilda, sharply; "I only guessed it was so. It was so likely a thing, it might strike a baby."

"I don't think anything of the kind," answered Mr. Soames. "The game had been there a long time, I'll swear. There were five pheasants and two hares, all stinking; and one had got its head torn off, as if a fox had been at it."

"Just as easy to put stinking game there as fresh," said Miss Mathilda, dryly.

What the constable would have answered cannot be told, for just as he was about to reply, and that somewhat hotly, as it appeared, who should trip in but Mr. Gibbs, with his usually important air still more important than ever. He began by purchasing a number of yards of white muslin for neck-cloths, and while Miss Martin attended to his orders, and cut off, with the aid of her thumb, a quarter of a yard less than she charged him for, Mr. Gibbs turned round and greeted Harry Soames, whom he had not seen for ten days or a fortnight.

"Well, Mr. Gibbs, you have been to London, I suppose," said the worthy constable.

"Yes," answered the traveler; "I went up to account to my employers, and they made a great piece of work at my having remained in these parts so long, although they couldn't deny that I had sold more of the fragrant Balm of Trinidad than either of their three other travelers. They were very unjust, Mr. Soames, both to me and to that precious balsam, whose peculiar quality it is to nourish and revive the growth of the hair, to restore the natural curl, and impart—"

"Well, but how did it all end?" asked Mr. Soames, who had heard all about the Balm of Trinidad more than once before.

"Why, in my resigning, to be sure. What they said was tantamount to a vote of want of confidence, so I instantly tendered my resignation, which was accepted; and, having a slight inkling that something was to be done here, I set off from London immediately, and should have been here yesterday afternoon, had I not stopped at Sturton, to hear all about this new discovery there."

"What new discovery?" asked Mr. Soames. "Do you mean about the game?"

"Game! oh, dear, no," cried Gibbs. "I mean about the receiver of the stolen goods—the fence, as they call him. He's a Jew, and having been taken up on suspicion, has confessed it all. How Williams and Mr. Latimer came to him the night before, and made a bargain with him about the sale of the plate and things they were going to steal."

"There, I told you so!" cried Miss Mathilda Martin. "Why, the whole thing's as plain as the nose in a man's face."

"That depends upon the length of it, my dear madam," said Mr. Gibbs, whose own proboscis was of no very extraordinary extent. "However, what I tell you is quite true. The man was taken up at St. Albans, it having been proved that he was down here at Sturton just at the time, and a great many odd things were found in his chaise. Seeing, I suppose, that he couldn't deny the facts, he thought, as Shakspere says, Miss Martin, to make a merit of necessity, and told the whole."

"Lor! does Shakspere say that, Mr. Gibbs?" cried Miss Martin. "I didn't know that; and so it's all up with Alfred Latimer. I said it would be so, a long time ago, for if there was a bad one, it is he."

"It's all up, indeed," said Gibbs; "this business of the receiver, Levi, has settled that quite, and so the story of the game is proved to be all fudge."

"No fudge about finding the game," muttered Harry Soames, turning to the door of the shop, and out he went, without waiting for the further comments of Miss Mathilda.

"Ah! poor man," said the lady, "he thought he could persuade me that Mr. Latimer was innocent. He's an innocent himself, I believe, to fancy such a thing. He who has known him so long, too."

"Pray, Mr. Gibbs, what do you want the muslin for?" asked the elder Miss Martin. "I only want to know how you would like them hemmed; if it's for neck-handkerchiefs, we can get them done for you."

"You must get them done very quick, Miss Martin," said the traveler, "for I shall want them soon. The truth is, I have just engaged myself in the service of the Earl of Mallington. I am first to act as his groom of the chambers, you know," he added, with a significant look; "we've been in a good many little affairs together; the apprehending those two ruffians, and the like; so each knows his man. I can depend upon him, and he can depend upon me."

"Very true, Mr. Gibbs," said Miss Mathilda; "that's a great advantage, Mr. Gibbs. I hope you won't forget us when you are established at the hall. We shall always be very happy to see you; and though we don't make as much show as some people, who have less substance, perhaps, than we have, yet our goods are of the best quality, and that you may depend upon. And when is my lord to be married, for that's the next thing, I suppose?"

"I really don't know," answered Mr. Gibbs; "as soon as possible, I believe."

Mr. Gibbs spoke the exact truth, for he did not know, Morton and Louisa having settled themselves that it would be better to keep the period of their intended union perfectly secret from all who were not necessarily acquainted with it. But the Misses Martin could never believe that anybody was perfectly candid with them, and they both, therefore, determined to worm the truth out of the worthy traveler, whether he liked it or not.

"Ah, poor things, they will have a long time to wait!" said the elder of the two ladies, "for Miss Charlton will have to give evidence on the trial; and then there will be the execution, you know; and then it won't be decent for her to marry at least for six months after her step-brother has been hanged. I shouldn't wonder if it did not take place at all, for my part. It

would not be pleasant, you know, Mr. Gibbs, to hear any one say to his wife, 'Your ladyship's brother, that was hanged!' would it now?"

"Not particularly, I should think," answered Gibbs; "but I don't suppose anybody would say so. It would be grossly indelicate, Miss Martin."

"Now I, for my part," rejoined Mathilda, "should not wonder if it took place immediately. I saw the beautiful new carriage that came down yesterday. It's mighty handsome, that's certain; but very plain, for an earl: no arms, no coronet, nor anything. But I dare say he wouldn't have been in such a hurry to have it down, if he weren't soon going to make use of it."

"And Miss Wilkinson's got a number of things to make, too," said Miss Martin; "and the hall is getting full of servants."

"Oh, he'll not be such a fool as to let the cord stand in the way of the heiress," replied Miss Mathilda, "and if he's a wise man, he'll get it over as soon as possible, and then cut the Latimers altogether. It will be very easy for her ladyship to say, 'the man was no relation of mine.'"

"And true, also," said Mr. Gibbs, "for he is no relation of her's. But as to the marriage, I think you are mistaken, for I found the earl and the young lady sitting quite quietly together, and looking anything but very merry.'

"Oh, that's no sign," rejoined Miss Mathilda, "he always has a grave look; and though she was as gay, lighthearted a thing as one could see before her father took up with this Mrs. Latimer, she has never been so cheerful since that, I will say. See what comes of old men marrying intriguing widows!"

With this moral reflection terminated the more important part of the conversation between Mr. Gibbs and the Misses Martin, and we must now for a time leave the party in the shop, as it may be necessary to show what was the effect produced in other quarters by similar tidings to those which the worthy traveler brought over from Morton to Mallington.

CHAPTER XCIV.

It was just the governor's dinner hour—an hour at which, occupied in a function that had its peculiar delights for him, as well as for many other men, the worthy officer was not likely to disturb himself—when the swivel-eyed turnkey whom Jack Williams had commended to Alfred Latimer's notice, entered the young gentleman's room, and fixing upon him one of his eyes, closed the door quietly behind him, saying "I've got some news for you, sir;" then approaching alone to the table, he continued in a whisper, "That game story is no go, for they've caught Levi, the fence, and he's stagged. It's all out, how you and Jack saw him at the Bell, and made a deal with him about the stuff."

Alfred Latimer struck his hand against his forehead in a fit of rage and despair, but the turnkey took upon himself, on this occasion, an office which turnkeys are not very frequently found to perform. "Pooh, nonsense!" he said, "don't take on so. The matter's not a bit the worse for that, I can tell you; if you had stood the trial, it would have gone hard with your neck, even if the fence had not peached. Why, the judge as is coming down is Sir John ——, and he always sums up agen the prisoner. He keeps the black cap close beside him, and is sure to get it on one way or another afore he's done."

"If I had stood the trial!" exclaimed Alfred Latimer; "I don't understand what you mean. How could I help standing the trial?" and he looked in the man's face, apprehensive lest he had discovered the means employed by Williams and Brown to effect their escape from the jail. The turnkey's countenance, however, was very difficult to read, for the peculiar construction of the eyes, and the impossibility of knowing which of the two was looking at you, rendered the meaning always doubtful. If the one seemed to say one thing, the other said another, so that they neutralized each other.

"Oh, you knows wery well what I means," rejoined the turnkey, winking his right eye; "it's all settled, and if you manages anything sharp, there'll be no more difficulty about it nor drinking a glass of small beer."

"Still I don't understand you," answered Alfred Latimer; "you must give me a hint of what is to be done, or I shall never know how to do it."

"What, hasn't your wife told ye?" asked the turnkey. "Didn't ye see her this arternoon?"

"No," answered Alfred Latimer, "she hasn't been here for these two days."

"Oh yes, she wer, this wery night," rejoined the other; "but I know how it is. There's been a bit of a row about all the liberty granted here. One of the justices has been a-jawing of the governor, and so he's sent her away. I shouldn't wonder, now all this has come out, if they put Williams and Brown in irons again. I don't suppose our gentleman will do that with you, and if he do, we must get 'em off, that's all."

"But what is to be done—how is it to be effected?" demanded the prisoner.

"Stay a bit," said the jailer, and opening the door, he looked up and down the passage to ensure that there was nobody there who might remark his long conference with the young culprit. Having satisfied himself in this respect, he returned to the room again, and proceeded "Why, if you've heard nothing, I must tell you, for we can't get on without your knowing. You see one night last week, when I was off duty, and out at the Green Man a-drinking on a pot of beer, up comes to me a feller they calls Captain Tankerville, and he taps me on the shoulder, and says he wants a word with me. And so he had a word; and then he introduces me to a lady at the Bell, as is your mother—and a mighty cunning lady she is too, as ever I see."

The jailer meant this as a compliment, for shrewdness was in his estimation the highest quality of the female mind. Alfred Latimer received it as it was intended, and merely asked, "Well, well, what was done?"

"Why, we come to terms," replied the swivel-eyed turnkey; "and she bound me

down pretty tight, didn't she? But she was free enough of the cash, and that's the principal; so I promised you should see your way out some dark night, and you must keep yourself ready."

"Can't it be to-night?" demanded the prisoner, eager to ensure that no new circumstance might intervene to deprive him of this fresh-sprung hope.

"To-night! Lord 'a mercy, no!" replied the turnkey. "Why, there's nothing ready, and Dick's on night-duty. No, no—wait a bit; there's plenty of time. The day arter to-morrow the governor must go away to Huntingdon, and he'll be away all night. I know quite well that Mallet, who'll be left in charge, will take that minute to get drunk, for he harn't been drunk this half-year, and he can't stand it much longer nor that. Dick, mayhap, will help him; at all events, he'll take more than usual; and if he is frightened to do it outright, we can contrive to hocus the last glass of his grog. Then we shall have all this ward to ourselves; and as the porter is in the job, you'll have nothing to do but to walk out. However, I'll tell you all about it another time. I must be off now, for fear the folks should think something."

Thus saying, he hurried away, and left him to his own meditations. Those meditations, however, were lighter and more joyful than they had been for many a day. He had new hope, looking all the brighter from the darkness out of which it sprung. Previously, although he thought his scheme was well laid, and gave him some chance of a favorable verdict, yet the uncertainty was so great, the probability of condemnation so terrible, that he had not ventured to indulge expectation; and in the plan of Williams and Brown he had placed but little confidence. Now, however, with assistance within the prison, and from the very officers who were bound by their duty to oppose him, his escape seemed certain; and he fancied that, with twelve or fourteen hours before him, and with the means of flight which he knew his mother would have prepared, he anticipated no difficulty in reaching the shores of France, where, at that time, a secure asylum could be obtained.

It may have been remarked by the reader that he made no inquiry of the turnkey as to whether his companions in guilt and misfortune were to benefit with himself in the means to procure his liberation; and the truth is, Alfred Latimer had no intention that they should. Even in the story which he had told, both to the governor of the jail, and to one of the turnkeys, in regard to the game which he said he had left in Wenlock Wood, he had shown no consideration for them, leaving their own share of the transactions of the night of the murder to be explained by them as they best could; and instead of declaring, as he had assured Williams he would, that they had all been out upon the same expedition together, had stated that he met the other two accidentally, and merely asked a passage in their boat. It was not, therefore, to be expected that, on the present occasion, he would pay any great attention to their safety. He determined, then, to keep the whole project which had just been revealed to him a profound secret from his two companions; and when he saw them in the yard, to affect the greatest interest in their scheme for escape, as if he had no other hope but that. We all of us deceive ourselves continually, however, and the cunning and the wily more frequently than the others. We lay our plans, we scheme, we project, we advance in execution, and then comes fate, and throws some little insignificant obstacle in our way, by which all our devices are overthrown.

The next morning early, the governor of the prison came to visit him, with a grave, though civil expression of countenance. "I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Latimer," he said, "that I must make some change in your treatment. I am quite willing to show you any kindness or lenity in my power; but observations have been made, and sharp things said, so that I'm afraid that I must put you in irons, especially after what has come out before the magistrates."

"Good heaven, I hope not!" cried Alfred Latimer, turning very pale; notwithstanding the assurance of the turnkey, that he should soon be freed from those unpleasant appendages, the very idea was horrible to him. "There can be no necessity for such harshness, sir; I have done nothing since I have been here, surely, to make you alter your conduct."

"I can't say you have," replied the other; "and I should not think of doing it myself, but for these visiting justices. It is a great bore to have such a pack of meddling old women always at one's heels, finding fault with this thing one day, and with quite the reverse another. But I can't help myself, Mr. Latimer; and I must either do as I have said, or deny you the liberty of the yard, which would be worse."

"Oh, dear, no!" exclaimed the young man "I would a great deal rather never go out again than have those irons on."

"Well, if you choose to stay in your room," said the governor; "it does not so much matter; but if you were to be seen out in a different way from the other two men charged with you there would be a great piece of work made."

Alfred Latimer repeated earnestly that he greatly preferred confinement to shackles; and after a few more words, the governor left him, little knowing that there was treason in the camp. During the next day, and the day that followed, the prisoner had but small intercourse with his friend the turnkey; though once or twice, when he brought something into the room, the man whispered words of consolation, such as, "It's all right"—"Keep a good heart"—"To-morrow night will do. Mind you be ready."

On the night of the same day, however—when Mrs. Charlton's son had lain down to rest, and, as near as he could guess, about two o'clock in the morning—he was aroused from sleep by hearing the door unlocked, and looking towards it, he perceived his squinting friend entering with a lantern in his hand. Approaching his bed-side, the man set down the light, and seated himself, saying "I'm on night-duty this evening, so I just came to tell you how all was settled. To-morrow there will be a chaise waiting for you at the end of the bridge, so, as soon as you are out, make for it direct, and then off wherever you like. It's

brought from a great distance, so no one will know anything of which way it goes."

"Ay, but how to get out of this place is the difficult matter," replied Alfred Latimer; "how is that to be done, if one of your comrades will be on duty?"

"Never you mind that," answered the man; "I'll manage Dick; only you be ready, and mind what I say. He'll go his round about twelve, and most likely take a look in. You had better be a bed, and asleep. Then, a little while after, you'll hear the door unlocked, and the bolts undrawn; but don't you take no notice, case of accidents. Wait five minutes, and then go down the passage into the yard—you know the way—and you'll find the door open. Then cross to t'other door, where you've often seen me a-standing, what I call watching my lambs at play. Go through that into t'other yard, and then straight through the lodge—it's just up the steps, you know, on the right hand; mind you don't make a mistake."

"No, no!" answered Alfred Latimer, "I know it quite well; that's the way I was brought in."

"Ay, you're the man that has got an eye for the country," answered the turnkey; "well, you'll find both the wicket and the gate open, and nobody there to say anything to you, so just walk out, and it's all done. Everything will be made snug as soon as you are gone, and they'll never find it out till breakfast time to-morrow."

"And what'll become of Williams and Brown?" asked Alfred Latimer, more to say something, than from any great interest in their fate.

"Why, they'll be hanged, you see," said the turnkey, with a laugh; "but they're mighty angry with you. I can tell you; for some of the fellers let them into what you said about meeting them accidentally in the park, after you had prigged the game; and I hear as how Jack Williams says, if you tell that story in court, he'll knock your brains out against the side of the dock; but you'll not need to say it in court, I've a notion," and the man laughed again. Alfred Latimer joined in his merriment; and, after repeating all his directions very distinctly, the turnkey left him.

Little sleep did the prisoner obtain that night, and the next day also passed in the uneasiness of expectation mingled with apprehension. Towards evening, however, various little signs of irregularity showed him that the governor was absent, as had been predicted he would be. The meals were brought half an hour behind the usual time; there was more noise and bustle than was common in the prison; and the turnkeys whistled as they walked along the passage. But time slipped away, one hour passed after another, and the clock of the neighboring church, which had so often told to the ear of the culprit that the few last moments of existence were waning fast, now marked for Alfred Latimer the approach of the period appointed for his liberation; and when at length it struck eleven, he threw down some clothes by the bedside to make it seem as if he had undressed, and then crept in between the sheets, just as he was, without even taking off his boots. Scarcely had he been half an hour in bed when the sound of an irregular footfall, and of a voice, half humming, half singing one of the common slang songs of the day, was heard coming along the passage. In a minute or two after, the door was opened, and Dick, the turnkey, looked in, with his lantern in his hand; and, raising his head, Alfred Latimer could easily perceive that the good man had already taken more of some potent liquor than was quite consistent with the proper execution of his functions.

"Ah, you're a-bed, are you?" he said, with a hiccup, "you're generally one of the late 'uns, as all them are who have candles and such stuff allowed them. If I were governor, they should all be treated alike, every man of them, rich and poor, smasher and flasher, diddler and devil.

"Ye prads, ye scamps, ye divers,
And all upon the lay,
In Tothill fields' blithe sheep-walks,
Like lambs that sport and play
O, rattling up your darbies,
Come hither at my call,
I'm jigger, dubber, here,
So you're welcome to Mill Doll.
Tol de rol de rol."

And, singing this very elegant composition, Dick, the turnkey, retired from the room, locked and bolted the door, and walked away.

Alfred Latimer lay and listened for every passing sound, but the hour of twelve struck, one and two followed, and no one approached his door. Apprehensions took possession of his mind, and all the phantasmagoria shapes of imagination passed before his eyes. Now he thought that his confederate had forgotten him—now, that some obstacle had occurred, and that the attempt must be postponed—now, that the whole had been discovered, and the plan frustrated—now that his mother and himself had been deceived, the money taken, and the act unperformed! Thus, till half-past two, he lay and tormented himself, glancing with a sinking heart towards the future, but seeing nothing before him but the just and terrible retribution of his crimes. At length there was a step, slow and deliberate, along the passage; he heard two other doors tried, and then the footfall came nearer. A key was placed in the lock with as little noise as possible, it was turned, the bolts withdrawn, and the step moved on again, the sound being soon lost as it retreated. For nearly five minutes he lay and listened, then rose, and, approaching the door, put his ear to the key-hole. All was silent, and, opening the door quietly, he looked out. There was a lantern, as usual, hung against the wall, half-way down the passage, but no other object met his eye, and after returning for a moment to take his hat, he stole silently out, proceeded to the door at the end of the corridor, which was unlocked, and then down six steps to another door, which led into the yard; it also was unlocked, but as he drew it back it creaked sharply upon the hinges, and Alfred Latimer paused for a moment or two, dreading that the sound might have called attention. As all remained silent, however, he ventured to go out, and walked on tiptoes across the yard. The night was very dark, the moon shone not, and no stars were to be seen, but he knew the way well, and hurrying on through the doorway, into the outer yard, advanced towards the lodge.

The door was ajar, and a light was burning within, and, mounting the steps, the prisoner peeped in, gaining a clear view of the interior by the light of a long-unsnuffed candle, which stood upon the table. No person was to be seen, and, opening the door farther, he advanced somewhat hurriedly, fancying he heard a step behind him. The wicket was open, but the outer door was closed, and locked; the key, however, was in the inside, and, with a shaking hand, the young malefactor turned it, and was about to open the door. A bolt, below, which he had not observed, had to be drawn first, and he was stooping down to pull it back when he heard a clank and a step, and a strong hand grasped him by the neck.

Starting up, and shaking himself free, he turned round, and beheld his companion in crime, Williams, with a look of dark and bitter determination upon his face.

"You villain and you blackguard!" cried the man, again seizing him by the throat. "So you thought to sneak off in this way, did you?"

"Hush, hush!" cried Alfred Latimer; "if you would save your own life and mine, be silent, and come with me."

"What, with these on!" cried Williams, aloud, glancing at his irons. "No?" and he added a blasphemous oath—"and if I don't serve you, as you served Edmonds," and he made a great effort to dash him against the wall. Alfred Latimer, however, was strongly made, and Williams was encumbered by his fetters; but the struggle was now evidently to be for life or death, and grappling with him, and putting forth all his vigor and activity, the young culprit endeavored to thrust him beyond the wicket, and close it against him, while he made his escape by the door. With a grasp of iron, however, Williams clung to him, now dragging him forward, now thrusting him back; and thus in terrible but silent strife they reeled about upon the floor, sometimes hurling each other against the wall, sometimes against the porter's bed, till at length, as they dashed against the table in the midst of the room, it was overthrown. The light fell with it, and for a single instant after the struggle continued. Then both came down with a heavy fall together, but Alfred Latimer was undermost; the back of his head struck with a violent blow against the edge of the bed, and a long death-like groan followed. The next instant the light began to spread through the room, and a quick flame ran up the bed-curtain, against which the candle had fallen.

CHAPTER XCV.

The hour appointed for Louisa Charlton's marriage was the earliest allowed by the canon. The licence had been obtained, the settlement signed, and all the arrangements made as quietly as possible. Dr. Western was to perform the ceremony, and Louisa's other guardian had come from town in order to give her away. Mrs. Charlton's written consent to the marriage had been obtained; and though she declined to be present at the ceremony, alleging her anxiety for her son as her excuse, she wrote a neat flowery note to the Earl of Mallington, expressing her sense, as she termed it, of the liberality and consideration for her interests which he had shown in the matter of the settlements.

All was arranged and finally prepared before Morton left the rectory, at eleven on the day preceding; and the whole party were about to retire to rest when one of the gamekeepers from Mallington Park came over to tell the worthy clergyman that poor Lucy, who had been very ill for the last three days, was not expected to get through the night, and asked eagerly to see him.

Dr. Western required no pressing, but set out on foot with the man, and was soon by Lucy's bedside. Fever was strong upon her, her cheek flushed, her eye bright and glistening, and her strength all gone, but she was perfectly sensible, and looked up with a faint smile when the good clergyman entered. He very soon found that the disease of the body still owed its cause to the mind, for it seemed that some one had foolishly told her of the revelations made by the Jew receiver, Levi, and that from that moment becoming convinced that all her worst suspicions had been well founded, and that her husband had been accessory to her father's death, she had given herself up to despair and self-reproach. The contention in her heart, between her love for her parent and her duty to her husband, had aided fatigue, grief, and apprehension, in overthrowing what little strength she had regained, and she had sunk rapidly from the hour the tidings reached her.

All the exertions of Mr. Nethersole had proved of no avail; and although Dr. Western entertained but little hope of any change for the better in her corporeal health, he sat down beside her, and tried, first by prayer, and then by argument, to tranquilize and bring comfort to her mind.

At first Lucy murmured more than once, "Oh! if my father's eye could have seen me aiding his murderer, and helping him to escape, what would he have thought of his poor child!"

"You are tormenting yourself, Lucy," replied Dr. Western, "with vain imaginations. The only eye that could and did see the whole was the eye of a holier and higher being; and he saw the motives, as well as the actions, and the heart likewise. You tell me, Lucy, that this young man assured you that he is innocent; God grant that it may still prove so. Do not let us judge him before even human law has pronounced upon his case; and until such is the result, you are perfectly justified in forgetting all, except that he is your husband. But first, my dear child, let us pray to him who sees all hearts, to strengthen and support you under every affliction, for your mind is weakened, and your faith diminished, or you would not suffer such terrors to prey upon your health, and even affect your life." And, kneeling down, the worthy clergyman did pray, with earnestness and devotion.

For three hours he remained with the sick girl, leaving no means untried to soothe her, and his efforts were not without success. She became more calm; she listened, and seemed convinced by his reasoning; she joined feebly in the prayers, and acknowledged that she felt happier and better. An inclination to sleep then

came on; and about three o'clock in the morning Dr. Western left her, and commenced his solitary walk home.

Though a man of an equable mind, and so much accustomed to contemplate the course of human life, with all the joys and sorrows which he was daily called upon to witness, under one point of view, namely, in reference to a future state, yet his heart was naturally too kind not to feel saddened by the sight of suffering and sorrow, and he walked on—melancholy, though not gloomy—along the little path which he could scarcely descry through the thick darkness of the night. As he approached the gates, however, the air seemed to grow lighter, and he could see his way more distinctly. He did not look up till he reached the middle of the bridge, and then a red gleam, which shone reflected from the water through the balustrades of the bridge, caused him to raise his eyes first to the sky, where the heavy clouds were glowing as if with the approach of dawn, and then along the valley through which the river flowed, where the cause of the glare soon became apparent. Up from beyond the gentle slopes of the hills, and the belts of wood which crossed the country to the west, rose large volumes of smoke, glowing with the bright blaze of a fierce fire below, and every now and then dotted with sparks of more intense light, as fragments of paper and linen, caught by the fire, were hurried up by the current into the air; and twice he thought he saw a column of flame rush up for a moment into the sky, as if some roof had fallen in, and given free vent to the blaze. He paused for several minutes to watch the conflagration, but, as far as he could calculate, the fire was at the distance of some seven or eight miles, and it was hopeless to think of rendering any assistance. Even as he gazed, indeed, the light became less vivid, and, judging that the flames had nearly exhausted themselves, the good rector turned his steps homeward, and retired to rest.

Though kept up so late, he rose at his usual hour on the following morning, and shortly after joined the party in the drawing-room to read prayers. Louisa, though evidently anxious and agitated, and dressed as plainly as usual, looked well and beautiful, as brides, indeed, in general do; but scarcely were the morning prayers over, and the whole party about to set out for the church, when Dr. Western was called out of the room, and then in turn summoned Mrs. Evelyn to council. His face was so unusually grave that Louisa marked it with some alarm; but whatever it was he communicated it to his sister. She replied aloud, "Oh, no! on no account. There is no need for it, indeed, and I never like delays in such cases."

They then both returned to the drawing-room without mentioning at all the subject of their conference. But Louisa, who had formed her own judgment of what it was about, inquired somewhat anxiously, "Have you heard of poor Lucy this morning, my dear sir?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Western; "she is somewhat better, they say. I shall see her again by-and-by."

"Then, pray say all that is kind from me," rejoined Louisa. "I have left a little present for her in my room. Tell her I think she will value it, because I have always worn it."

"Now, Miss Charlton!—now, Miss Charlton," said her father's old partner, pointing to the clock on the mantel-piece, "I know the earl is waiting, for I saw him pass with Mr. Quatterly ten minutes ago."

The hint was sufficient; and passing by the garden, through the churchyard, on foot, they entered the church. Only once Louisa Charlton looked to the right or to the left, and that was as she passed by her father's tomb. Mrs. Evelyn saw that her lips moved, and a drop gathered in her eye, and, touching her arm gently, she said, in a low tone, "You've chosen, my dear, as he would have chosen for you."

"I trust, I am sure it is so," answered Louisa; and in a few minutes more she stood before the altar with him she loved.

She was a good deal agitated, but yet her heart beat joyfully as words were spoken which realised the dream of young affection, swept far away all the doubts and apprehensions which had clung about the last few months, and made her the wife of one to whom all the tender feelings of her heart had long been given. Once during the ceremony she raised her look to his face, and their eyes met, but the expression of Morton's countenance was still that which she could have wished, and that which, perhaps, she expected. There was nothing of light and exuberant joy—nothing of careless merriment; it was deep, tender, happy, as if he felt the great import of every word he spoke, and promised to love, cherish, and protect, from the depth of the heart.

When the ceremony was over, the register signed, and everything complete, Louisa turned and bid adieu to Dr. Western and his sister, giving a tear that she could not repress, to the parting with those from whom she had known parental tenderness and affection; and then entering the plain chariot which stood at the church door, was soon rolling away from Mallington with her husband. She owned to herself—she did not conceal from him, that she was happy; and the clouds that had preceded, and the storm that had fallen so heavily at last, only made the sunshine that followed, all seem more bright and sparkling.

More than a fortnight elapsed before the Earl and Countess of Mallington—then stopping for a day or two beside the Lake of Geneva—heard of the events which had taken place at Sturton. Even then there was little in the tidings they received to cast any deep shade upon their young happiness. The county jail, they were informed, in a letter from Dr. Western, had been burned nearly to the ground, on the night preceding the wedding-day. What had become of Mr. Latimer no one knew, the worthy doctor said. Many of the prisoners had made their escape—some had perished in the flames, as well as one of the turnkeys, who was supposed to have been drunk at the time. It was generally imagined, however—the letter went on to say—that Mr. Latimer had contrived to fly, for the wing of the building in which he had been confined was the only part left standing; and the room which he inhabited had been found tenantless, and with the door open, though no one could tell whether it had been unlocked by

one of the jailers or not. The man Williams had also escaped, it appeared; but that, Dr. Western said, was easily accounted for, as the wall of his cell, when examined, proved to be pierced completely through, leaving an aperture communicating with the yard.

There were one or two circumstances connected with the burning of the jail which Dr. Western did not think fit to detail, in the absence of all positive certainty, with regard to several points of importance. In the lodge of the jail, where the fire was supposed to have originated, a body was found, so disfigured with the flames that it was impossible to identify it. The back part of the skull, however, was found to have been fractured; and a celebrated surgeon of the place, upon examination, pronounced that the injury must have been received before death. The worthy rector of Mallington himself visited the spot, and viewed the body; and, though he would not venture to speak positively, yet, from the appearance of one hand, which the fire had not touched, he entertained little doubt that Alfred Latimer had there ended his career of folly and crime.

The man Brown was brought to trial some ten days after the destruction of the jail, convicted of robbery and murder, and executed, as he well deserved; but before death, as was then more common with criminals than now, he made a full confession of his crime, telling all that had occurred when he and his companions made their way into Mallington Hall. He protested to the last that neither he nor Williams had any share in the murder of Edmonds, the park-keeper, but laid the guilt of that terrible act justly upon him who had really committed it.

Dr. Western did all that was possible to prevent these statements from reaching the ears of poor Lucy, but his precaution proved vain; and though she rallied a little, and even sat up for several days, yet six weeks had not passed ere the poor girl lay by the side of her father in the churchyard at Mallington.

What became of Alfred Latimer's companion, Williams, was never correctly ascertained; and the people of the place believe he is still living, and fancy that he appears in the neighborhood from time to time, seeking an opportunity of committing fresh depredations. However that may be, certain it is, that about a year after, in dragging for the body of a lad who had been drowned, the people of Sturton pulled up from the bottom of the stream, just below the bridge, the corpse of a man in a state of complete decomposition. The height was exactly that of the notorious Jack Williams; the depth of chest and breadth of shoulders so remarkable in that malefactor were the same; and the fetters by which the limbs were still encumbered, showed that at all events he was one of the prisoners escaped from the jail. Every person who took advantage of the confusion occasioned by the fire to fly was recaptured soon after, or convicted subsequently for fresh offences, with the exception of Williams and Alfred Latimer, so that in the end little, if any, doubt remained as to the body which had been found in the river.

The rest of the personages mentioned in this history went on in the course to which their several characters prompted them. The Misses Martin gossiped and slandered to the end; Mallington remained nearly the same as ever, till a few years ago, when a railroad was carried past it, and all was changed. Mrs. Windsor fondly flattered herself that she should be the housekeeper at Mallington Hall on the return of the earl and countess from the continent; but she was disappointed in this expectation, receiving, however, as a consolation, a very comfortable annuity for her services to Miss Charlton.

The only person who remains to be mentioned is the mother of Alfred Latimer, and her fate is soon told; she sat down with great resignation under her misfortunes, reposing upon her selfishness, which is a very comfortable pillow for those who have nothing else to rest upon. With an income of two thousand a year, however, her selfishness was very well provided for, and it was said she took other means of consoling herself also—the consumption of wine in her household being considerable. At all events, her sorrow was of the kind that grows fat, and before her death she had extended to an enormous size, and had also become a little coarse in skin and complection. Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn sleep in Mallington Churchyard. And of the earl and countess, what shall I say? I saw them lately, dear reader, and they seemed, as far as mortal eye could see, to be very happy—happy in the means, the opportunity, and the love of beneficence—happy in the respect of those whose respect they value—happy in honor and in virtue, and in calm and placid tempers—happy in themselves, in their offspring, and unchanging affection.

THE END.

BEAUCHAMP;

OR,

THE ERROR.

A Novel.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

"THE STEP-MOTHER," "HEIDELBERG," "RICHELIEU," "FOREST DAYS," ETC.

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BEAUCHAMP; OR, THE ERROR.

CHAPTER I.

THE ATTACK AND THE RESCUE.

It was in the reign of one of the Georges—it does not matter which, though perhaps the reader may discover in the course of this history. After all, what does it signify in what king's reign an event happened, for although there may be something in giving to any particular story "a local habitation and a name," yet there is nothing, strange to say, which gives one — I speak from my own experience — a greater perception of the delusiveness of everything on earth, than the study of, and deep acquaintance with the annals of a many-lined monarchy. To see how these spoilt children of fortune have fought and struggled, coveted and endeavored, obtained or have been disappointed, hoped, feared, joyed, and passed away—ay, passed, so that the monumental stone and a few historic lines from friend and foe, as dry as doubtful, are all that remain of them—it gives us a sensation that all on earth is a delusion, that history is but the pages of a dream-book, the truest chronicle but a record of the unreal pageants that are gone.

However that may be, it was in the reign of one of the Georges—I won't be particular as to the date, for heaven knows I am likely to be mistaken in the curl of a wig, or the fashion of a sleeve-button, and then what would the antiquaries say?

It was in the reign of one of the Georges—thank heaven, there were four of them, in long and even succession, so that I may do anything I like with the coats, waistcoats, and breeches, and have a vast range through a wilderness of petticoats (hooped and unhooped, tight, loose, long, short, flowing, tucked up), to say nothing of flounces and furbelows, beside head-dresses, in endless variety, patches, powder, and pomatum, fans, gloves, and high-heeled shoes. Heaven and earth, what a scope!—but I am determined to write this work just as it suits me. I have written enough as it suits the public, and I am very happy to find that I have suited them, but in this, I hope and trust both to please my public and myself too. Thus I wish to secure myself a clear field, and therefore to declare, in the first instance, that I will stand upon no unities of time or place, but will indulge in all the vagaries that I please, will wander hither and thither at my own discretion, will dwell upon those points that please myself as long as I can find pleasure therein, and will leap over every unsafe or disagreeable place with the bound of a kangaroo. That being settled, and perfectly agreed upon between the reader and myself, we will go on if you please.

It was in the reign of one of the Georges—I have a great mind to dart away again, but I won't, for it is well to be compassionate—when a gentleman of six or seven-and-twenty years of age, rode along a pleasant country road, somewhere in the west of England. It was eventide, when the sun, tired with his long race, slowly wends downward to the place of his repose, looking back with a beaming glance of satisfaction on the bright things he has seen, and like a benevolent heart, smiling at the blessings and the benefits he has left behind him.

The season of the year was one that has served poets and romance-writers a great deal, and which with very becoming, but somewhat dishonest gratitude, they have praised ten times more than it deserves. It was, in short, spring—that season when we are often enticed to wander forth by a bright sky, as if for the express purpose of being wet to the skin by a drenching shower, or cut to the heart by the piercing east wind—that coquetish season that is never for ten minutes in the same mind, which delights in disappointing expectations, and in frowning as soon as she has smiled. Let those who love coquets sing of spring, for my part I abhor the whole race of them. Nevertheless, there is something very engaging in that first youth of the year. We may be cross with its wild tricks and sportive mischief, we may be vexed at its whims and caprices as with those of an untamed boy or girl, but yet there is a grace in its waywardness, a softness in its blue violet eyes, a brightness in its uncontaminated smile, a luster even in the penitential tears, dried up as soon as shed, that has a charm we cannot, if we would, shake off. Oh yes, youth and spring speak to every heart of hope, and hope is the magic of life! Do you not see the glorious promise of great things to be done in that wild and wayward boy? Do you not see the bright assurance of warmer and mellower days to come in that checkered April sky? Youth, and spring, and hope, they are a glad triad, inseparable in essence, and all aspiring toward the everlasting goal of thought—the Future.

It was the month of May—now if poets and romance-writers, as we have before said, have done injustice, or more than justice to spring, as a whole, never were two poor months so scandalously over-praised as April and May. The good old Scotch poet declares that in April,

> Primroses paint the sweet plain,
> And summer returning rejoices the swain;

but rarely, oh, how rarely, do we ever see

primroses busy at such artistical work; and as for summer, if he is returning at all, it is like a boy going back to school, and lingering sadly by the way. Such, at least, is the case now-a-days, and if the advice of another old poet, who tells us,

> Stir not a clout,
> Till May be out,

would seem to prove that in ancient times, as well as at present, May was by no means so genial a month, as it has pleased certain personages to represent it. Nevertheless, we know that every now and then in May, comes in a warm and summer-like day, bright, and soft, and beautiful, full of a tempered sunshine, appearing after the cold days of winter, like joy succeeding sorrow, and entendered by the memories of the past; such was the sort of day upon which the traveler we have spoken of rode on upon his way through a very fair and smiling country. The season had been somewhat early in its expansion; the weather had been unusually mild in March; frequent and heavy showers had succeeded in April, and, pouring through the veins of the earth the bountiful libation of the sky, had warmed the bosom of our common mother to a rich and lovely glow. The trees were all out in leaf, but yet not sufficiently unclosed to have lost the rich variety of hues, displayed by the early buds. The coloring would have been almost that of autumn, so bright and manifold were the tints upon the wood, had it not been for a certain tenderness of aspect which spoke of youth and not decay. There was the oak in its red and brown, here and there mingled with the verdant hue of summer, but beside it waved the beech, with its long arms robed in the gentlest and the softest green, the ash pointed its taper fingers in the direction where the wind was going, and the larch lifted up its graceful spire, fringed with its grass-like filaments, while its beautiful cones, full of their coral studs, afforded ornaments that queens might be proud to wear. The fields were spangled with a thousand flowers, and every bank and hedge was jeweled with vegetable stars; not only the pale violet, and the yellow primrose, but the purple columbine and the white hawthorn, even the odorous-breathed cowslip, the wild geranium, and a long list beside, were all spreading their beauty in the evening air, and glittering with the drops of a shower not long passed by. Overhead, too, the sky was full of radiance, warm, yet soft, deep in the azure, yet tinted with the evening light, as if the sunbeams were the threads of a crimson woof woven in with the blue warp of the sky.

But enough of this, it was a very fine evening, of a very fine day, of a very fine season, and that surely was enough to make any man happy who had good health, a guinea in his purse, and had not committed either murder or bigamy. The horseman seemed to feel the influence of the scene as much as could be expected of any man. When he was in a green bowery lane, with the wild plants trailing up and down the red banks, and he could neither look to the right nor to the left, he whistled snatches of a popular song; when he rose the side of the hill, and could gaze over the world around, he looked at the green fields, or the clear stream, or the woody coverts with searching and yet well-satisfied eyes, and murmured to himself, "Capital sport here, I dare say."

He seemed to be fond of variety, for sometimes he trotted his horse, sometimes made him canter, sometimes brought him into a walk, but it would appear that there was a certain portion of humanity mingling with the latent motives for these proceedings, inasmuch as the walk was either up or down a steep hill, the canter over a soft piece of turf wherever it could be found, and the trot, where the road was tolerably level. Ever and anon, too, he patted the beast's neck, and talked to him quite friendly, and the horse would have answered him in the same tone, beyond doubt, if horses' throats and tongues had been formed by nature with the design of holding long conversations. Such not being the case, however, all the beast could do to express his satisfaction at his master's commendations, was to arch his neck and bend down his under lip till it touched his chest, and put his quivering ears backward and forward in a very significant manner. It was a handsome animal, of a bright bay color, about fifteen hands and a half high, strongly built, yet showing a good deal of blood, and its coat was as soft and shining as satin. There was a good deal of red dust about its feet and legs however, which showed that it had made a somewhat long journey, but yet it displayed no signs of weariness, its head had no drowsy droop, like that of a country member on the back benches at three o'clock in the morning after a long debate. Oh no, there was muscle and courage for forty miles more, had it been necessary, and the noble beast would have done it right willingly. The horseman rode him well—that is to say, lightly, and though he was tall, muscular, and powerful in frame, many a man of less weight would have wearied his horse much more. His hand was light and easy, his seat was light and easy, and his very look was light and easy. There was no black care sat behind that horseman, so that the burden was not burdensome, and the pair went on together with alacrity and good fellowship. The gentleman's dress was in very good taste, neither too smart nor too plain, well fitted for a journey, yet not unfitted for a drawing-room in the morning. This is enough upon that subject, and I will not say another word about it, but as to his face, I must have a word or two more—it was gay and good-humored, and though it might be called somewhat thoughtless in expression, yet somehow—I know not very well from what cause—when one examined it one was convinced that the thoughtless look was more a matter of habit than of nature He was dark in complexion, but with a healthy glow in his cheeks, and though certainly his face was not as perfect as that of the Apollo of Belvidere, yet few would have scrupled to pronounce him a good-looking man. There was also an easy, almost careless swinging, rapid air about him, which generally engages kindly feelings, if it cannot secure much respect; and one could not watch him come cantering over the lea, with his open, smiling face, without judging he would make an entertaining, good-humored companion, with whom anybody might pass a few hours very pleasantly.

Thus he rode along, blithe as a lark, till the sun went down in glory, showing at the distance

of about a couple of miles, the spire of a small church in a small town—or perhaps I had better call it a village, for I am not sure that it had grown up to townhood in those days.

The hint I have given that he could see the spire of the church must have shown the reader, that at the moment of the sun's setting he was on the brow of a hill, for there are no plains in that part of the country, and it was well wooded also. Down from the spot at which he had then arrived, in a line very nearly direct toward the spire, descended the road, crossing first a small patch of common, perhaps not twenty acres in extent, and then entering between deep, shady banks, as it went down the hill, not only arched over with shrubs, but canopied by the branches of tall trees. There was quite sufficient light in the sky to show him the entrance of this green avenue, and he said to himself, as he looked on, "What a pretty approach to the village; how peaceful and quiet everything looks."

He was not aware that he had work to do in that quiet road, nor that it was to be of anything but a peaceful character; but so it is with us *in life*, we never know what is before us at the next step. We may scheme, and we may calculate; we may devise, and we may expect, but, after all, we are but blind men, led we know not whither by a dog, and the dog's name is, Fate.

When he saw that he was so near the village, he slackened his pace, and proceeded at a walk, wishing, like a wise and experienced equestrian, to bring his horse in cool. At the first trees of the road a deeper shade came into the twilight. About half a mile further it became quite dark under the boughs, whatever it might be in the open fields; the darkness did not make him quicken his pace, but the minute after he heard some sounds before him which did. It is not very easy to explain what those sounds were, or by what process it was that, striking upon the tympanum of his ear, the two or three air-waves conveyed to his brain a notion that there were people in danger or distress at no great distance. There was a word spoken in a sudden and imperative tone, and that was the first sound he heard, and then there was a voice of remonstrance and entreaty, a woman's voice, and then something like a shriek, not loud and prolonged, but uttered, as if the person from whose lips it came caught it as it was issuing forth, and strove to stifle it in the birth; some loud swearing and oaths were next heard, mingled with the noise of quick footfalls, as if some one were running fast toward the spot from the side of the village, and the next moment the horseman perceived, at the first indistinctly, and then clearly, a number of objects on the road before him, the largest, if not the most important of which was a carriage. At the head of the horses which had drawn it stood a man with something in his hand which might be a pistol. At the side of the vehicle were two more, with a saddled horse standing by, and they were apparently dragging out of the carriage a lady who seemed very unwilling to come forth, but from the other side was hurrying up, as hard as he could run, another personage of very different appearance from the three other men. By this time he was within ten yards of them, and our horseman, from his elevation on his beast's back, could see the head and shoulders of him who was approaching, and judged at once that he was a gentleman.

I have said that under the trees it was quite dark, and yet that he could see all this, but neither of these is a mistake, whatever the reader may think, for just at that part of the highway where the carriage stood, it was crossed by another road which let in all that remained of the western light, and there the whole scene was before his eyes, as a picture, even while he himself was in comparative darkness. Impulse is an excellent thing, and a great deal more frequently leads us right than reason, which, in cases of emergency, is a very unserviceable commodity. It is only necessary to have a clever impulse, and things go wonderfully well. The horseman stuck his spurs into his horse's sides: previously he had been going at a trot, since the first sounds struck his ear, now it became a canter, and two or three springs brought him up to the carriage. He was making straight for the side, but the man who was at the horses' head seemed to regard his coming as unpleasant, and shouting to him in a thundering voice to keep back, he presented a pistol straight at him with a sharp, disagreeable, clicking sound, which, under various circumstances, is peculiarly ungrateful to the human ear, especially when the muzzle of the instrument is toward us, for there is no knowing what may come out of the mouth at the next minute. But the horseman was quick, active, and not accustomed to be daunted by a little thing like a pistol, and therefore, holding his heavy riding-whip by the wrong end, though in this instance it proved the right one, he struck the personage opposite to him a thundering blow over the arm. That limb instantly dropped powerless by his side, and the pistol went off under the horse's feet, causing the animal to rear a little, but hurting no one. In an instant the horse was turned, and among the party by the carriage; but that party was by this time increased in number, though not fortified by unanimity, for the person who had been seen running up, was by this time engaged in fierce struggle with one of the original possessors of the ground, while the other kept a tight grasp upon the lady who had just been dragged out of the carriage. With the two combatants our horseman thought it best not to meddle in the first instance, though he saw that the object of one of them was to get a pistol at the head of the other, who seemed neither unwilling nor unable to prevent him from accomplishing that object; but they were grappling so closely, that it was difficult to strike one without hitting the other, especially in the twilight; and therefore, before he interfered in their concerns, he bestowed another blow, with the full sweep of his arm, upon the head of the man who was holding the lady, and who seemed to take so deep an interest in what was going on between the other two, as not to perceive that any one was coming up behind him. He instantly staggered back, and would have fallen, had not the wheel of the carriage stopped him, but then turning fiercely round, he stretched out his arm, and a flash and report followed, while a ball whistled past the

horseman's cheek, went through his hair, and grazed his hat.

"Missed, on my life," cried the horseman; "take that for your pains, you clumsy hound." And he again struck him, though on this occasion the person's head was defended by his arm.

"H—l and d——n," cried the other, seizing his horse's bridle and trying to force him back upon his haunches, but another blow, that made him stagger again, showed him that the combat was not likely to end in his favor, and darting past, he exclaimed, "Run, Wolf, run. Harry is off!" And before our friend on the bay horse could strike another blow at him, he had sprung upon the back of the beast that stood near, and without waiting to put his feet into the stirrups, galloped off as hard as he could go. In regard to the other two who were wrestling, as we have said, in deadly strife, the game they were playing had just reached a critical point, for the gentleman who had come up, had contrived to get hold of the barrel of the pistol, and at the very instant the other galloped away, the respectable person he called Wolf received a straightforward blow in the face, which made him stagger back, leaving his weapon in the hand of his opponent. Finding that his only advantage was gone, he instantly darted round the back of the carriage to make his escape up the other road.

"Jump down and stop him, postboy," cried the horseman, pursuing him at the same time without a moment's pause, but the postboy's legs, though cased in leather, seemed to be made of wood, if one might judge by the stiff slowness with which they moved, and before he had got his feet to the ground, and his whip deliberately laid over the horse's back, the fugitive, finding that the horseman had cut him off from the road, caught the stem of a young ash, swung himself up to the top of the bank, and disappeared among the trees.

"Hark, there is a carriage coming," said the horseman, addressing the stranger, who had followed him as fast as two legs could follow four. They both paused for an instant and listened, but to their surprise the sound of rolling wheels, which they both distinctly heard, diminished instead of increasing, and it became evident that some vehicle was driving away from a spot at no great distance.

"That's droll," said the horseman, dismounting; "but we had better see after the ladies, for I dare say they are frightened."

"No doubt they are," replied the other, in a mild and musical voice, leading the way round the carriage again. "Do you know who they are?"

"Not I," answered the horseman, "don't you?"

"No, I am a stranger here," answered the other, approaching the side of the carriage, to which the lady who had been dragged out had now returned.

She was seated with her hands over her eyes, as if either crying with agitation or in deep thought; but the moment the gentleman who had come up on foot addressed her, expressing a hope that she had not been much alarmed, she replied, "Oh, yes, I could not help it, but my mother has fainted. We must go back, I fear."

"It is not far, I think, to the village, madam," said our friend the horseman, "and we will easily bring the lady to herself again; but it is a pity she fainted, too. These things will happen, and if they have not got your money there is no great harm done."

"I am better, Mary," said a voice from the other side of the carriage, faint and low, yet sweet and harmonious. "Are they gone—are you quite sure they are gone?"

"Oh, dear, yes, madam," replied the horseman, while the lady next him laid her hand tenderly upon her mother's. "One of the worthies scampered off on horseback after he had fired at me, and the other was too quick for us all, thanks to your stiff-jointed driver. What became of the other fellow I don't know."

"You are not hurt, sir, I hope," said the younger of the two ladies, gazing timidly at him through the half light.

"Not in the least," he replied. "The man missed me, though it wasn't a bad shot after all, for I felt it go through my hair—but an inch one side or the other makes a wonderful difference—and now, ladies, what will you do?"

A murmured consultation took place between the two tenants of the carriage, while a whispered conference was held by the gentleman who came to their assistance. It is wonderful how often in this world several parties of the good folks of which it is composed, are all thinking, ay, and even talking, of the same thing, without any one group knowing what the other is about.

"I'm doubtful of that postboy," said the gentleman on foot to the gentleman who had been on horseback.

"Ay, and so am I," replied the other. "He's in league with them, depend upon it. All postboys are so. Their conscience is like the inn leather breeches, wide enough to fit anything. I wonder how far these two ladies are going?"

"I cannot tell," answered the other, "but it will be hardly safe for them to go alone."

"Can I speak to you, sir, for a moment," said the voice of the younger lady from the carriage, and the horseman advancing a step, leaned against the doorway, and put his head partly in, bending down his ear, as if he were perfectly certain that he was going to hear a secret.

"My mother thinks, and so do I," continued the younger lady, "that the man who drives us must have been bribed by those people who attacked us, for he drove very slowly as soon as ever he came near this spot. He stopped, too, the moment they called to him."

"Perhaps not bribed, my dear madam," replied the gentleman, "all these postboys, as they are called, favor your honest highwaymen, either in hopes of a part of the booty, or merely out of fellow-feeling. They are every one of them amateurs, and some of them connoisseurs of the arts of the road. You must have some protection, that's certain, and I think it would be better for you to turn back and get some people from the village to accompany the carriage."

"I'm afraid that can hardly be," said the elder lady. "We are already very late, and this has delayed us. My brother may be dead ere we arrive, for I'm going on a sad errand

sir, he having been suddenly seized with gout in the stomach, and sent to call me to him in his last moments; however, it is not very far, and I trust that nothing more will happen."

"No, no, madam, you must not go without protection," replied the gentleman in a good-humored tone. "I will ride with you and see you safe—how far is it?"

"About five miles, I am afraid," answered the lady.

"Oh, that's nothing, that's nothing," cried their companion. "It will but make me an hour later at supper." And turning to the other gentleman, he continued, "I wish, sir, if you pass the inn called the White Hart—"

"I lodge there myself," returned the stranger.

"Then pray tell the people there to have me a chicken ready in an hour. It will be roasting while I am riding, so that will be one way of killing time, and not losing patience."

Thus saying, with a gay laugh, he sprang upon his horse's back, and addressing the postboy, exclaimed, while the other gentleman shut the door, and bade the ladies adieu, "Now, boy, into the saddle, and remember, if these ladies are interrupted again, the first head that is broken shall be yours."

The man made no reply, but got up with more alacrity than he had got down, and was soon trotting along the road at a rapid rate.

The horseman kept close to the carriage all the way, and after a ride of about five-and-thirty minutes, through pleasant lanes and fields, they came to what seemed the gates of a park, but the porter's lodge was dim and unlighted, and the postboy gave the horseman a significant hint that he had better get down and open the gates, as there was nobody there to do it for him. The gentleman, however, managed the feat dextrously without dismounting, and the carriage rolled through and entered a long avenue of magnificent chestnuts. Between the boughs of the trees, every here and there, were to be seen glimpses of soft green slopes, studded with wild hawthorns, and masses of dark wood beyond, and at the end of about three quarters of a mile more, appeared a fine old stone house, with a somewhat flat but imposing-looking face, like that of an old country gentleman, with a great idea of his own importance.

As the horseman looked up to the house, however, which was raised upon a little terrace, and approached by a gentle rise, he could not help thinking, "That does not look very much like the dwelling of a man dying of gout in the stomach; it looks more like that of one getting up a good fit;" for three windows on the ground floor, having very much of a dining-room aspect about them, were thrown up to admit the air, and in addition to a blaze of light, there came forth the sounds of merry laughter, and several persons talking.

The postboy drove up to the great door, however, and the horseman, springing to the ground, rang the bell, after which, returning to the side of the carriage, he leaned against it, saying,

"I trust your relation is better, madam, for the house does not seem to be one of mourning."

The lady did not reply directly to his words, but she said, "I hope if you remain in this part of the country, sir, you will give me an opportunity of thanking you, either here, or at my own house, for the great service you have rendered me. The people of the inn will direct you, for it is only ten miles on the other side of Tarningham."

"I shall certainly have the honor of waiting on you to inquire how you do," replied the horseman, and then adding, "these people do not seem inclined to come," he returned to the bell, and rang it vigorously.

The next moment the door was opened, and a capacious butler appeared, and the stranger, without more ado, assisted the ladies to alight, remarking as he did so, that the younger of the two was a very pretty girl, some nineteen or twenty years of age.

"How is my brother now?" demanded the elder lady, who wore a widow's dress.

"Quite well, ma'am, thank you," answered the butler, in the most commonplace tone possible, and before she had time to make any more inquiries, the stranger who had come to her rescue, wished her and her daughter good night, and mounting his horse, rode down the avenue again.

CHAPTER II.

THE SUPPER AT THE WHITE HART.

The White Hart of Tarningham was a neat little country inn, such as was commonly found in most of the small towns of England at the period of my tale. They are rapidly being brushed off the face of the earth by the great broom of the steam-engine, and very soon the "pleasures of an inn" will be no longer known but by the records of history, while men run through the world at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, finding nothing on their way but stations and "hotels." I hate the very name hotel. It is un-English, uncomfortable, unsatisfactory, a combination, I suppose, of host and hell, the one the recipient of perturbed spirits, and the other their tormentor. But the word inn, how comfortable it is in all its significations. We have only retained the double *n* in it that we may "wear our rue with a difference," and whether we think of being *in* place, or *in* power, or *in* the hearts of those we love, or *in* the house during a storm, how pleasant is the feeling it produces. It has a home-like and British sound, and I do with all my heart wish that my fellow-countrymen would neither change their words nor their manners for worse things of foreign parentage. An inn, in the days I speak of, was a place famous for white linen, broiled ham, and fresh eggs. I cannot say that the beefsteaks were always tender, or the veal cutlets always done to a turn, or the beds always the softest in the world, but then think of the white dimity curtains, and the casements that rattled just enough to let you know that it was blowing hard without, and the rosy apple-faced chambermaid, and the host himself, round as his own butts, ay, and as full of beer. An innkeeper of those days would have been ashamed to show himself under nineteen stone. He was a part of his own sign, the recommendation of his own ale. His very paunch seemed to say "Look

what it has done for me." It entered into his fat, it flowed through his veins, it puffed out his cheeks, it ran out at his eyes, and malt and hops were heard in every accent of his tongue. You had no lean, wizen-faced, black-silk-stockinged innkeepers in those days, and the very aspiring waiters imitated their landlords, and hourly grew fat under the eye, that they might be in a fit condition to marry the widow and take the business when the poor dear gentleman was swallowed up in beer.

Such an inn was the White Hart at Tarningham, and such a host was the landlord, but he was a wise man, and loved not to look upon his successors, for which cause, as well as on account of the trade not being very brisk in that quarter, he maintained no regular waiter; he had a tapster, it is true, but the cloth in the neat little parlor on the left hand was laid by a white-capped, black-eyed, blooming maid-servant, and the landlord himself prepared to carry in the first dish, and then leave his expected guest to the tendance of the same fair damsel.

The room was already occupied by one gentleman, the same who in taking his evening walk had joined with our friend the horseman in the rescue of the two ladies, and to say truth, it was owing to his courtesy that the cloth was laid there at all, for he had prior possession, and on communicating to the landlord the fact that a guest would soon arrive who proposed to sup upon roast chicken, the worthy host had exclaimed in a voice of consternation, "Good gracious me, what shall I do? I must turn those fellows out of the tap-room and serve it there, for there is old Mrs. Grover, the lawyer's widow, in the other parlor, and ne'er a sitting-room else in the house!"

"You can make use of this, landlord," replied the stranger; "this gentleman seems a very good-humored person, and I do not think will be inclined to find fault, although he may not have a whole sitting-room to himself."

"I'd bet a quart," cried the landlord, as if a sudden thought struck him, "I'd bet a quart that it's the gentleman whose portmanteau and a whole bundle of fishing-rods came down this morning. I'll run and see what's the name."

Whatever he felt, the gentleman already in possession expressed no curiosity, but in two minutes the host rolled back again—for to run, as he threatened, was impossible, and informed his guest that the things were addressed to "Edward Hayward, Esq., to be left at the White Hart, Tarningham."

"Very well," said the guest, and without more ado, he took up a book which had been lying on the mantelpiece since the morning, and putting his feet upon another chair, began to read. The landlord bustled about the room, and put the things in order. One of his fat sides knocked his guest's chair, and he begged pardon, but the gentleman read on. He took up the hat, which had been knocked off in the struggle with the chaise, wiped off the red sand which it had gathered, and exclaimed, "Lord bless me, sir, your hat's all beaten about;" but his companion merely gave a nod, and read on.

At length, when the table was laid, and mustard, pepper, salt, vinegar, and bread had been brought in severally, when the maid had rearranged what the landlord had arranged before, smoothed what he had smoothed, and brushed what he had brushed, a horse's feet trotting past the window were heard, and the minute after a voice exclaimed at the door of the inn, "Here, ostler, take my horse, loose the girths, but don't take off the saddle yet, sponge his mouth, and walk him up and down for five minutes. Has his clothing come?"

"Oh, dear, yes, sir, come this morning," answered the landlord. "This way, sir, if you please. Sorry you did not let me know before, for positively there is not a whole sitting-room in the house."

"Well, then, I will do with half of one," answered the stranger. "Why, my friend, if you grow any more you must have the doors widened. You are the man for defending a pass; for, upon my life, in default of harder materials, you would block up Thermopylæ. Ale, ale, ale, it's all ale, landlord, and if you don't mind, it will set you ailing. Have my fishing-rods come down? all safe I hope;" and by the time he had run through these questions and observations, he was in the doorway of the little parlor on the left-hand. He stared for a minute at the previous tenant of the room, who rose to receive him with a smile, and whose face he did not seem to have observed very accurately in the semi-darkness of the road. But the height and general appearance of the stranger soon showed him that they had met before, and with an easy, good-humored, dashing air, he went up and shook him by the hand.

"A strange means of making acquaintance, my dear sir," he said, "but I'm very happy to see you again, and safe and well, too, for I thought at one time you were likely to get knocked on the head, and I scarcely dared to interfere, lest I should do it for you myself in trying to hit the other fellow. I hope you did not get any wounds or bruises in the affray!"

"Oh, no," replied the stranger; "I was nearly strangled, that is certain, and shall not easily forget the grasp of that man's fingers on my throat; but in regard to this way of making an acquaintance, no two men, I should think, could desire a better than to be both engaged, even accidentally, in rescuing two ladies from wrong."

"Quite chivalrous!" exclaimed the horseman, laughing; "but two Don Quixotes would never do in the world, so I'll acknowledge, at once, that I've not the least spark of chivalry in my nature. If I see a strong thing hurting a weak thing, I knock the strong thing down of course. I can't bear to see a big dog worry a little one, and don't much like to see a terrier catch a rat. But it's all impulse, my dear sir, all impulse. Thank heaven I am totally destitute of any sort of enthusiasm. I like everything in the world well enough, but do not wish to like anything too much, except, indeed, a particularly good bottle of claret—there, there, I am afraid I am weak. As to helping two ladies, it is always a very pleasant thing, especially if one of them be a particularly pretty girl, as is the case in this instance, I can tell you—but we really should do something to have these fellows caught, for they might have the decency to wait till it is quite dark, and not begin their lawless avocations before the sun has been down an hour."

"I went immediately to a magistrate," answered the stranger; "but as in very many country places, I did not find the ornament of the bench very highly enlightened. Because I was not the party actually attacked, he demurred to taking any steps whatever, and though I shook his resolution on that point, and he seemed inclined to accede to my demand, yet as soon as he found that I could not even give him the names of the two ladies, he went all the way back again, and would not even take my deposition. Perhaps after supper we had better go to him again together, for I dare say you can supply my deficiency by this time, and tell him the name of your pretty lady and her mother."

"No; 'pon my life I can't," rejoined his companion, "I quite forgot to ask—a very beautiful girl, though, and I wonder I didn't inquire, for I always like to ticket pretty faces. What is the name of your Midas, we'll soon bring him to reason, I doubt not. A country magistrate not take a deposition against a highwayman! By heaven, he will make the people think he goes shares in the booty."

"A highwayman!" exclaimed the landlord, who had been going in and out, and listening to all that was said, whether he had roast chicken, or boiled potatoes, or a jug of fresh drawn beer in his hand. "Why, lord, Mr. Beauchamp, you never told me!"

"No, my good friend," answered the other, "I did not, because to spread such a tale through an inn, is the very best way I know of insuring the highwayman's escape."

"Well, I dare say, my good round friend," exclaimed the horseman, whom we shall hereafter call Hayward, or as almost all who knew him, had it, Ned Hayward, "I dare say you can help us to the names of these two ladies. Who was it one of your postboys drove to-night, out there to the westward, to a house in a park?"

"What, to Sir John Slingsby's?" exclaimed the host; but before he could proceed to answer the more immediate question, Ned Hayward gave himself a knock on the forehead, exclaiming,

"Sir John Slingsby's! why that's the very house I'm going to, and I never thought to ask the name—what a fool I am! Well might they call me, when I was in the 40th, thoughtless Ned Hayward. But come, 'mine host of the Garter'—"

"Of the White Hart, your honor," replied the landlord, with as low a bow as his stomach would permit.

"Ay, of the White Hart be it then," said Ned Hayward, "let us hear who are these beautiful ladies whom your postboy drove so slowly, and stopped with so soon, at the bidding of three gentlemen of the road, with pistols in their hands?"

"Lord a mercy!" cried the host, "and was it Mrs. Clifford and her daughter that they stopped? Well, I shouldn't wonder—but mum's the word—it's no affair of mine, and the least said is soonest mended."

The host's countenance had assumed a mysterious look. His whole aspect had an air of mystery. He laid his finger upon the side of his nose, as men do for a practical exemplification of the process which is taking place in their mind when they are putting "that and that" together. He half closed one eye also, as if to give an indication to the beholders that whatever might be the mental light in his own brain, it should not escape for the illumination of those without. There is a perversity in human nature which makes all men—saving the exceptions that prove the general rule—anxious to discover anything that is hidden, and consequently both Mr. Hayward and Mr. Beauchamp attacked the worthy landlord, *totis viribus*, and attempted to wrench from him his secret. He held it fast, however, with both hands, exclaiming,

"No, no, gentlemen, I'll not say a word—it's no business of mine—I've nothing to do with it—it's all guess work, and a man who beers and horses all the neighborhood, must keep a good tongue in his head. But one thing I will say, just to give you two gentlemen a hint, that perhaps you had better not meddle in this matter, or you may make a mess of it. Sally, is not that chicken ready?" And he called from the door of the room to the bar.

"I certainly shall meddle with it, my good friend," said Ned Hayward, in a determined tone, "and that very soon. I'm not the least afraid of making a mess, as you call it, certain that none of it will fall upon myself. So, as soon as we have got supper, which seems a devilish long time coming, we will set off, Mr. Beauchamp, if you please, for this good magistrate's, and try—"

He was interrupted in the midst of his speech, though it had by this time nearly come to a conclusion, by a voice in the passage, exclaiming, "Groomber, Mr. Groomber," and the host instantly vociferated, "Coming, sir—coming," and rushed out of the room.

The voice was heard to demand, as soon as the landlord appeared blocking up the way, "Have you a person by the name of Beauchamp here?"

"Yes, your worship," replied the host; and after a few more words in a lower tone, the door of the room was thrown open, and Mr. Wittingham was announced, just as Mr. Beauchamp was observing to his new-found friend, Ned Hayward, that the voice was very like that of the worthy magistrate to whom he had applied.

Mr. Wittingham was a tall and very respectable-looking gentleman, somewhat past the middle age, and verging toward that decline of life which is marked by protuberance of the stomach and thinness of the legs. But, nevertheless, Mr. Wittingham carried it off very well, for his height diminished the appearance of that which is usually called a corporation, and his legs were skillfully concealed in his top-boots. He was exceedingly neat in his apparel, tolerably rosy in the gills, and having a certain dogmatical peremptory expression, especially about the thick eyebrows and hook nose, which he found wonderfully efficacious in the decision of cases at petty sessions.

The moment he entered the room, he fixed his eyes somewhat sternly upon Mr. Beauchamp (whom we have forgotten to describe as a very gentlemanlike—even distinguished-looking person of about thirty years of age), and addressing him in a rough, and rather uncivil tone,

said, "Your name, I think you told me, is Beauchamp, sir, and you came to lay an information before me against certain persons for stopping a chaise upon the king's highway."

"I am, as you say, sir, called Beauchamp," replied the other gentleman, "and I waited upon you, as the nearest magistrate, to give information of a crime which had been committed in your neighborhood, which you refused to receive. Do me the honor of taking a seat."

"And pray, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask, who and what are you?" inquired the magistrate, suffering himself to drop heavily into a chair.

"I should conceive that had very little to do with the matter," interposed Ned Hayward, before Mr. Beauchamp could answer. "The simple question is, whether an attempt at highway robbery, or, perhaps, a worse offense, has or has not been made this night upon Mrs. and Miss Clifford, as they were going over to my friend Sir John Slingsby's; and allow me to say that any magistrate who refuses to take a deposition on such a subject, and to employ the best means at his command to apprehend the offenders, grossly neglects his duty."

The host brought in the roast fowl, and stared at the dashing tone of Ned Hayward's speech toward one of the magnates of the neighborhood. Some words in the commencement of that speech had caused Mr. Wittingham's countenance to fall; but the attack upon himself in the conclusion roused him to indignant resistance, so that his reply was an angry demand of "Who the devil are you, sir?"

"I am the devil of nobody, Mr. Wittington," answered Ned Hayward. "I am my own devil, if anybody's, and my name is Edward Hayward, commonly called Captain Hayward, late of the 40th regiment, and now unattached. But as my supper is ready, I will beg leave to eat my chicken hot. Beauchamp, won't you join? Mr. Wittington, shall I give you a wing? Odd name, Wittington. Descendant of the renowned Lord Mayor of London, I presume?"

"No, sir, no," answered the magistrate, while Beauchamp could scarcely refrain from laughing. "What I want to know is, what you have to do with this affair?"

"Everything in the world," answered Ned Hayward, carving the chicken, "as I and my friend Beauchamp here had equal shares in saving the ladies from the clutches of these vagabonds. He came back here to give information, while I rode on with the ladies, to protect them. Bring me a bottle of your best sherry, landlord. Now, I'll tell you what, Mr. Wittington—haven't you got any ham that you could broil? I hate chicken without ham; it's as insipid as a country magistrate. I'll tell you what, Mr. Wittington, this matter shall be investigated to the bottom, whether you like it or not, and I have taken care to leave such marks upon two of the vagabonds that they'll be easily known for the next month to come. One of them is devilish like you, by the way, but younger. I hit him just over the eye, and down about the nose, so that I'll answer for it I have lettered him in black and blue as well as any sheep in your fields, and we'll catch him before we've done, though we must insist upon having the assistance of the justices."

"I think, sir, you intend to insult me," said the magistrate, rising with a very angry air, and a blank and embarrassed countenance.

"Not a whit, my dear sir," answered Ned Hayward. "Pray sit down and take a glass of wine."

"I won't, sir," exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, "and I shall leave the room. If you have anything to say to me, it must come before me in a formal manner, and at a proper hour. To-morrow I shall be at the justice-room till eleven, and I hope you will be then prepared to treat the bench with respect."

"The most profound, sir," said Ned Hayward, rising, and bowing till his face almost touched the table before him; and then, as Mr. Wittingham walked away with an indignant toss of the head, and closed the door behind him, our gay friend turned to his companion, saying, "There's something under this, Beauchamp. We must find out what it is."

CHAPTER III.

THE FATHER AND THE SON.

I WILL have nothing to do with antecedents. The reader must find them out if he can, as the book must explain what precedes the book.

The past is a tomb. There let events, as well as men, sleep in peace. Fate befall him who disturbs them; and, indeed, were there not even a sort of profanation in raking up things done as well as in troubling the ashes of the dead, what does man obtain by breaking into the grave of the past? Nothing but dry bones, denuded of all that made the living act interesting. History is but a great museum of osteology, where the skeletons of great deeds are preserved without the muscles—here a tall fact and there a short one—some sadly dismembered, and all crumbling with age, and covered with dust and cobwebs. Take up a skull, chapfallen as Yorick's. See how it grins at you with its lank jaws and gumless teeth—see how the vacant sockets of the eyes glare meaningless, and the brow, where high intelligence sat throned, commanding veneration, looks little wiser than a dried pumpkin. And thus—even thus, as insignificant of the living deeds that have been, are the dry bones of history, needing the inductive imagination of a Cuvier to clothe them again with the forms that once they wore.

No, no, I will have nothing to do with antecedents. They were past before the tale began, and let them rest.

Nevertheless, it is always well worth while, in order to avoid any long journeys back, to keep every part of the story going at once, and manfully to resist both our own inclination and the reader's, to follow any particular character, or class of characters, or series of events. Rather let us, going from scene to scene, and person to person, as often as it may be necessary, bring them up from the rear. It is likewise well worth while to pursue the career of such new character that may be introduced, till those who are newly made acquainted with him

have discovered a sufficient portion of his peculiarities.

I shall, therefore, beg leave to follow Mr. Wittingham on his way homeward; but first I will ask the reader to remark him as he pauses for a moment at the inn door, with worthy Mr. Groomber a step behind. See how the excellent magistrate rubs the little vacant spot between the ear and the wig with the forefinger of the right-hand, as if he were a man amazingly puzzled, and then turns his head over his shoulder to inquire of the landlord if he knows who the two guests are, without obtaining any further information than that one of them had been for some weeks in the house—which Mr. Wittingham well knew before, he having the organ of Observation strongly developed—and that the other had just arrived, a fact which was also within the worthy magistrate's previous cognizance.

Mr. Wittingham rubs the organ above the ear again, gets the finger up to Ideality, and rubs that, then round to Cautiousness, and having slightly excited it with the extreme point of the index of the right-hand, pauses there, as if afraid of stimulating it too strongly, and unmanning his greater purposes; but it is a ticklish organ, soon called into action in some men, and see how easily Mr. Wittingham has brought its functions into operation. He buttons his coat up to the chin as if it were winter, and yet it is as mild an evening as one could wish to take a walk in by the side of a clear stream, with the fair moon for a companion, or something fairer still. It is evident that Cautiousness is at work at a terrible rate, otherwise he would never think of buttoning up his coat on such a night as that; and now, without another word to the landlord, he crosses the street and bends his steps homeward with a slow, thoughtful, vacillating step, murmuring to himself two or three words which our friend Ned Hayward had pronounced, as if they contained some spell which forced his tongue to their repetition.

"Very like me," he said, "very like me! Hang the fellow! Very like me! Why, what the devil—he can't mean to accuse me of robbing the carriage. Very like me! Then, as the mischief must have it, that it should be Mrs. Clifford, too! I shall have roystering Sir John upon my back—'pon my life, I do not know what to do. Perhaps it would be better to be civil to these two young fellows, and ask them to dinner, though I do not half like that Beauchamp—I always thought there was something suspicious about him, with his grave look and his long solitary walks—nobody knowing him, and he knowing nobody. Yet this Captain Hayward seems a great friend of his, and he is a friend of Sir John's, so he must be somebody—I wonder who the devil he is? Beauchamp—Beauchamp! I shouldn't wonder if he were some man rusticated from Oxford. I'll write and ask Henry. He can, most likely, tell."

The distance which Mr. Wittingham had to go was by no means great, for the little town contained only three streets—one long one, and two others leading out of it. In one of the latter, or, rather, at the end of one of the latter, for it verged upon the open country beyond the town, was a large house, his own particular dwelling, built upon the rise of the hill, with large gardens and pleasure-grounds surrounding it, a new, well-constructed, neatly-pointed brick wall, two green gates, and sundry conservatories. It had altogether an air of freshness and comfort about it which was certainly pleasant to look upon; but it had nothing venerable. It spoke of fortunes lately made, and riches fully enjoyed, because they had not always been possessed. It was too neat to be picturesque, too smart to be in good taste. It was a bit of Clapham or Tooting transported a hundred or two miles into the country—very suburban indeed!

And yet it is possible that Mr. Wittingham had never seen Clapham in his life, or Tooting either; for he had been born in the town where he now lived, had accumulated wealth, as a merchant on a small scale, in a seaport town about fifty miles distant; had improved considerably, by perseverance, a very limited stock of abilities; and, having done all this in a short time, had returned at the age of fifty to enact the country gentleman in his native place. With the ordinary ambition of low minds, however, he wished much that his origin and the means of his rise should be forgotten by those who knew them, concealed from those who did not; and, therefore, he dressed like a country gentleman, spoke like a country gentleman, hunted with the fox-hounds, and added "J. P." to his "Esquire."

Nevertheless, do what he would, there was something of his former calling that still remained about him. It is a dirty world this we live in, and everything has its stain. A door is never painted five minutes but some indelible finger-mark is printed on it; a table is never polished half an hour, but some drop of water falls and spots it. Give either precisely the same color again if you can! Each trade, each profession, from the shopkeeper to the prime minister, marks its man more or less for life, and I am not quite sure that the stamp of one is much fouler than that of another. There is great vulgarity in all pride, and most of all in official pride; and the difference between that vulgarity and the vulgarity of inferior education is not in favor of the former, for it affects the mind, while the other principally affects the manner.

Heaven and earth, what a rambler I have taken! But I will go back again gently by a path across the fields. Something of the merchant, the small merchant, still hung about Mr. Wittingham. It was not alone that he kept all his books by double entry, and even in his magisterial capacity, when dealing with rogues and vagabonds, had a sort of debtor and creditor account with them, very curious in its items; neither was it altogether that he had a vast idea of the importance of wealth, and looked upon a good banker's book, with heavy balance in favor, as the chief of the cardinal virtues; but there were various peculiarities of manner and small traits of character, which displayed the habit of mind to inquiring eyes very remarkably. His figures of speech, whenever he forgot himself for a moment, were all of the counting-house: when on the bench he did not know what to do with his legs for want of a high stool; but the trait with which we have most to do was a certain propensity to inquire

into the solidity and monetary respectability of all men, whether they came into relationship with himself or not. He looked upon them all as "firms," with whom at some time he might have to transact business; and I much doubt whether he did not mentally put "and Co." to the name of every one of his acquaintances. Now Beauchamp and Co. puzzled him; he doubted that the house was firm; he could make nothing out of their affairs; he had not, since Mr. Beauchamp first appeared in the place, been able even to get a glimpse of their transactions; and though it was but a short distance, as I have said, from the inn to his own dwelling, before he had reached the latter he had asked himself, at least twenty times, "Who and what Mr. Beauchamp could be?"

"I should like to look at his ledger," said Mr. Wittingham to himself at length, as he opened his gate and went in; but there was a book open for Mr. Wittingham in his own house, which was not likely to show a very favorable account.

Although the door of Mr. Wittingham's house, which was a glass door, stood confidingly unlocked as long as the sun was above the horizon, yet Mr. Wittingham had always a pass-key in his pocket, and when the first marble step leading from the gravel-walk up to the entrance was found, the worthy magistrate's hand was always applied to an aperture in his upper garment, just upon the haunch, from which the key was sure to issue forth, whether the door was open or not.

The door, however, was now shut, and the pass-key proved serviceable; but no sooner did Mr. Wittingham stand in the passage of his own mansion than he stopped short in breathless and powerless astonishment; for there before him stood two figures in close confabulation, which he certainly did not expect to see in that place, at that time, in such near proximity.

The one was that of a woman, perhaps fifty-five years of age, but who looked still older from the fact of being dressed in the mode of thirty years before. Her garments might be those of an upper servant, and indeed they were so; for the personage was neither more nor less than the housekeeper; but to all appearance she was a resuscitated housekeeper of a former age; for the gown padded in a long roll just under the blade-bones, the straight cut bodice, the tall but flat-crowned and wide-spreading cap, were not of the day in which she lived, and her face too was as dry as the outer shell of a cocoa-nut. The other figure had the back turned to the door, and was evidently speaking earnestly to Mrs. Billiter; but it was that of a man, tall, and though stiffly made, yet sinewy and strong.

Mr. Wittingham's breath came thick and short, but the noise of his suddenly opening the door, and his step in the hall, made the housekeeper utter a low cry of surprise, and her male companion turn quickly round. Then Mr. Wittingham's worst apprehensions were realized, for the face he saw before him was that of his own son, though somewhat disfigured by an eye swollen and discolored, and a deep long cut just over it on the brow.

The young man seemed surprised and confounded by the unexpected apparition of his father, but it was too late to shirk the encounter, though he well knew it would not be a pleasant one. He was accustomed, too, to scenes of altercation with his parent, for Mr. Wittingham had not proceeded wisely with his son, who was a mere boy when he himself retired from business. He had not only alternately indulged him and thwarted him; encouraged him to spend money largely, and to dazzle the eyes of the neighbors by expense, at the same time limiting his means and exacting a rigid account of his payments; but as the young man had grown up he had continued sometimes to treat him as a boy, sometimes as a man; and while he more than connived at his emulating the great in those pleasures which approach vices, he denied him the sums by which such a course could alone be carried out.

Thus a disposition, naturally vehement and passionate, had been rendered irritable and reckless, and a character self-willed and perverse had become obstinate and disobedient. Dispute after dispute arose between father and son after the spoilt boy became the daring and violent youth, till at length Mr. Wittingham, for the threefold purpose of putting him under some sort of discipline, of removing him from bad associates, and giving him the tone of a gentleman, had sent him to Oxford. One year had passed over well enough, but at the commencement of the second year, Mr. Wittingham found that his notions of proper economy were very different from his son's, and that Oxford was not likely to reconcile the difference. He heard of him horse-racing, driving stage-coaches, betting on pugilists, gambling, drinking, getting deeper and deeper in debt; and his letters of remonstrance were either not answered at all, or answered with contempt.

A time had come, however, when the absolute necessity of recruiting his finances from his father's purse had reduced the youth to promises of amendment and a feigned repentance; and just at the time our tale opens, the worthy magistrate was rocking himself in the cradle of delusive expectations, and laying out many a plan for the future life of his reformed son, when suddenly, as we have seen, he found him standing talking to the housekeeper in his own hall, with the marks of a recent scuffle very visible on his face.

The consternation of Mr. Wittingham was terrible; for though by no means a man of ready combinations in any other matter than pounds, shillings, and pence, his fancy was not so slow a beast as to fail in joining together the description which Ned Hayward had given of the marks he had set upon one of the worthy gentlemen who had been found attacking Mrs. Clifford's carriage, and the cuts and bruises upon the fair face of his gentle offspring. He had also various private reasons of his own for supposing that such an enterprise as that which had been interrupted in Tarningham-lane, as the place was called, might very well come within the sphere of his son's energies, and for a moment he gave himself up to a sort of apathetic despair, seeing all his fond hopes of rustic rule and provincial importance dashed to the ground by the conduct of his own child.

It was reserved for that child to rouse him

from his stupor, however; for, though undoubtedly the apparition of his father was anything but pleasant to Henry Wittingham, at that particular moment, when he was arranging with the housekeeper (who had aided to spoil him with all her energies) that he was to have secret board and lodging in the house for a couple of days without his parent's knowledge, yet his was a bold spirit, not easily cowed, and much accustomed to outface circumstances however disagreeable they might be. Marching straight up to his father, then, without a blush, as soon as he had recovered from the first surprise, he said, "So, you see I have come back, sir, for a day or two, to worship my household gods, as we say at Oxford, and to get a little more money; for you did not send me enough. However, it may be as well, for various reasons, not to let people know that I am here. Our old dons do not like us to be absent without leave, and may think that I ought to have notified to them my intention of giving you such an agreeable surprise."

Such overpowering impudence was too much for Mr. Wittingham's patience, the stock of which was somewhat restricted; and he first swore a loud and very unmagisterial oath; then, however, recollecting himself, without abating one particle of his wrath, he said in a stern tone, and with a frowning brow, "Be so good as to walk into that room for five minutes, sir."

"Lord, sir, don't be angry," exclaimed the housekeeper, who did not at all like the look of her master's face, "it is only a frolic, sir."

"Hold your tongue, Billiter! you are a fool," thundered Mr. Wittingham. "Walk in there, sir, and you shall soon hear my mind as to your frolics."

"Oh, certainly, I will walk in," replied his son, not appearing in the least alarmed, though there was something in the expression of his father's countenance that did frighten him a little, because he had never seen that something before—something difficult to describe—a struggle as it were with himself, which showed the anger he felt to be more profound than he thought it right to show all at once. "I certainly will walk in and take a cup of tea, if you will give me one," and as he spoke he passed the door into the library.

"You will neither eat nor drink in this house more, till your conduct is wholly changed, sir," said Mr. Wittingham, shutting the door behind him, "the books are closed, sir,—there is a large balance against you, and that must be liquidated before they can be opened again. What brought you here?"

"What I have said," answered the young man, beginning to feel that his situation was not a very good one, but still keeping up his affected composure, "the yearnings of filial affection and a lack of pocket-money."

"So you can lie too, to your father," said Mr. Wittingham, bitterly. "You will find that I can tell the truth however, and to begin, I will inform you of what brought you hither—but no, it would take too much time to do that; for the sooner you are gone the better for yourself and all concerned—you must go, sir, I tell you—you must go directly."

A hesitation had come upon Mr. Wittingham while he spoke; his voice shook, his lip quivered, his tall frame was terribly agitated; and his son attributed all these external signs of emotion to a very different cause from the real one. He thought he saw in them the symptoms of a relenting parent, or at least of an irresolute one, and he prepared to act accordingly; while his father thought of nothing but the danger of having him found in his house, after the commission of such an outrage as that which he had perpetrated that night; but the very thought made him tremble in every limb—not so much for his son indeed, as for himself.

"I beg pardon, my dear sir," replied the young man, recovering all his own impudence at the sight of his father's agitation; "but it would not be quite convenient for me to go to-night. It is late, I am tired; my purse is very empty."

"Pray how did you get that cut upon your head?" demanded the magistrate, abruptly.

"Oh, a little accident," replied his son; "it is a mere scratch—nothing at all."

"It looks very much like a blow from the butt-end of a heavy horsewhip," said his father, sternly, "just such as a man who had stopped two ladies in a carriage might receive from a strong arm come to their rescue. You do not propose to go then? Well, if that be the case, I must send for the constable and give you into his hands, for there is an information laid against you for felony, and witnesses ready to swear to your person. Shall I ring the bell, or do you go?"

The young man's face had turned deadly pale, and he crushed the two sides of his hat together between his hands. He uttered but one word, however, and that was—"Money."

"Not a penny," answered Mr. Wittingham, turning his shoulder, "not one penny, you have had too much already—you would make me bankrupt and yourself too." The next moment, however, he continued, "Stay; on one condition, I will give you twenty pounds."

"What is it?" asked the son, eagerly, but somewhat fiercely too, for he suspected that the condition would be hard.

"It is that you instantly go back to Oxford, and swear by all you hold sacred—if you hold anything sacred at all—not to quit it for twelve months, or till Mary Clifford is married."

"You ask what I cannot do," said the son, in a tone of deep and bitter despondency, contrasting strangely with that which he had previously used; "I cannot go back to Oxford. You must know all in time, and may as well know it now—I am expelled from Oxford; and you had your share in it, for had you sent me what I asked, I should not have been driven to do what I have done. I cannot go back; and as to abandoning my pursuit of Mary Clifford, I will not do that either. I love her, and she shall be mine, sooner or later, let who will say no."

"Expelled from Oxford!" cried Mr. Wittingham, with his eyes almost starting from their sockets. "Get out of my sight, and out of my house; go where you will—do what you will—you are no son of mine any more. Away with you, or I will myself give you into custody, and sign the warrant for your committal. Not a word more, sir, begone; you may take your clothes, if you will, but let me see no more of you. I cast you off; begone, I say."

"I go," answered his son, "but one day you will repent of this, and wish me back, when perhaps you will not be able to find me."

"No fear of that," answered Mr. Wittingham; "if you do not return till I seek you, the house will be long free from your presence. Away with you at once, and no more words."

Without reply, Henry Wittingham quitted the room, and hurried up to the bedchamber which he inhabited when he was at home, opened several drawers, and took out various articles of dress, and some valuable trinkets—a gold chain, a diamond brooch, two or three jeweled pins and rings. He lingered a little, perhaps fancying that his father might relent, perhaps calculating what his own conduct should be when he was summoned back to the library. But when he had been about five minutes in his chamber, there was a tap at the door; and the housekeeper came in.

"It is no use, Billiter," said the young man, "I am going. My father has treated me shamefully."

"It is no use indeed, Master Harry," replied the good woman, "he is as hard as a stone. I have said everything he would let me say, but he drove me out of the room like a wild beast. But don't give it up, Master Harry. Go away for a day or two to Burton's inn, by Chandleigh—he'll come round in time, and you can very well spend a week or so there, and be very comfortable."

"But money, Billiter, money!" exclaimed the young man, whose heart had sunk again to find that all his expectations of his father's resolution giving way were vain. "What shall I do for money?"

"Stay a bit, stay a bit," said the good woman; "what I have got you may have, Master Harry, as welcome as the flowers in May. I've ten pounds here in this little purse;" and she dived into one of the large pockets that hung outside of her capacious petticoat, producing a very dirty, old knitted purse with a steel clasp, and adding, as she put it in her young master's hand, "It is a pity now that Mr. Wittingham wheedled me into putting all the rest of my earnings into the Tarningham bank, where he has a share—but that will do for the present, if you are careful, Master Harry—but don't go to drink claret and such expensive nasty stuff, there's a good boy."

"That I won't, Billiter," answered Henry Wittingham, pocketing the money without remorse of conscience, "and I will repay you when I can—some day or another. I shall certainly be able, for the houses at Exmouth are settled upon me;" and packing up all that he thought fit to take in a large silk-handkerchief, he opened the door again, and began to descend the stairs. A chilly sensation crept over him ere he reached the bottom, as memory brought back happy days, and he thought that he was going forth from the home of his youth, perhaps forever, that he was an exile from his father's dwelling, from his love, an outcast, a wanderer, with nothing but his own wayward spirit for his guide—nought but his own pride for his support. He was not yet sufficiently hardened to bear the shadow of his exile lightly, to look upon it as a relief from restraint, a mere joyous adventure which would have its interest during its progress, and would soon be over. But, nevertheless, his pride was strong, and as yet unchecked; and when the thought of going back to his father, asking his forgiveness, and promising all that he required, crossed his mind, he cast it from him with disdain, saying, "Never, never! he shall ask me humbly first." And, with this very lowly determination, he walked out of the house.

"I shall be able to hear of you at Burton's, by Chandleigh," said the housekeeper, as he stood on the top step.

"Yes, yes, you will hear of me there," he replied, and descending the steps, he was soon wandering in darkness among parterres, every step of the way being as familiar to him as his father's library.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POSTBOY AND THE POTBOY.

After a few words of common observation upon Mr. Wittingham and his proceedings when that excellent gentleman had left the room at the little inn of Tarningham, Ned Hayward fell into a very unusual fit of thought.

I do not mean in the least to say that it was unusual for Ned Hayward to think, for probably he thought as much as other men, but there are various ways of thinking. There are pondering, meditating, brown studying, day dreaming, revolving, considering, contemplating, and though many of these terms may at first sight seem synonymous, yet upon close examination it will be found that there are shades of difference between the meanings. Beside these ways or modes of thinking, there are various other mental processes, such as investigating, examining, disentangling, inquiring, but with these I will not meddle, as my business is merely with the various operations of the mind which require various degrees of rapidity. Now though Ned Hayward, as I have said, probably thought as much as other men, his sort of thought was generally of a very quick and active habit. He was not fond of meditating, his mind's slowest pace was a canter, and when he found an obstacle of any kind, hedge, gate, fence, or stone wall, he took up his stirrups and went over it. Now, however, for once in his life, he paused and pondered for full five minutes, and then thinking perhaps it might seem a little rude if he treated his new-found friend to nothing but meditation, he began to talk of other things, still meditating over the former subject of his contemplations all the while.

It must not be supposed, however, that he did not think of what he was saying. Such a supposition might indeed be founded upon the old axiom that men cannot do two things at once. But the axiom is false: there never was a falser. We are always doing many things at once. There would be very little use of our having hands and feet, tongues and eyes, ears and nose, unless each of our organs with a little practice could go on quite quietly in its little workshop, without disturbing the others. Indeed it is very serviceable sometimes to give our more volatile members something light to do, when we are employing others upon more serious business, just to keep them out of the way, as we do with

noisy children. So also is it with the mind and its faculties, and it is not only quite possible, depend upon it, dear reader, to think of two subjects at once, but very common also.

Totally unacquainted with Mr. Beauchamp's habits and character, or what topics he could converse upon; and what not, Ned Hayward naturally chose one which seemed perfectly indifferent and perfectly easy; but it led them soon to deeper considerations, as a very small key will often open a very large door. It led to some political discussions too; but let it be remarked, this is not a political novel, that most wearisome and useless of all the illegitimate offspring of literature, and therefore if I give a few sentences of their conversation, it is not to insinuate sneakingly my own opinions, but merely to display my characters more fully.

"This seems a pretty little town," said Ned Hayward, choosing the first free subject at hand; "quite rural, and with all the tranquillity of the country about it."

"It is indeed," answered Mr. Beauchamp; "but I should almost have supposed that a gayer place would have pleased you more. Were you never here before?"

"Never in my life," replied his companion; "but you are quite mistaken about my tastes. London, indeed, is a very pleasant place for three months or so; but one soon gets tired of it. It gets slow, devilish slow, after a while. One cannot go to the theatre every night. There is little use of going to balls and parties, and risking falling in love, if one has not got money enough to marry. One gets weary of the faces and the houses in St. James's street. Morning visits are the greatest bores in the world. Epsom and Ascot are good enough things in their way, but they are soon over for one who does not bet and runs no horses. The newspapers tire me to death—romances I abominate; and though a good opera comes in twice a week to lighten the load a little, it gets desperate heavy on one's shoulders before the first of July. Antiquarians, connoisseurs, lawyers, physicians, fiddlers, and portrait-painters, with merchants, and all the bees of the hive, may find London a very pleasant and profitable place. I am nothing but a drone, and so I fly away in the country. Of all towns after the second month, I hate London the most—except a manufacturing town indeed, and that is always horrible, even to change horses in."

"And yet perhaps," answered Beauchamp, "a manufacturing town offers subjects of deeper interest than any other spot of the earth—especially at the present moment."

"Not in themselves, surely," said Ned Hayward; "the abstract idea of broadcloth is to me very flat, cotton-spinning not particularly exciting, iron ware is far too hard for me to handle, and as for the production of soda and pearlash, I have no genius that way. But I suppose," he continued, "you mean that the manufacturing towns are interesting from their bearing upon the prosperity of the country; but in that case it is your speculations regarding them that interest you, not the places themselves."

"So it is with everything," answered Mr. Beauchamp; "no single image or impression gives us great pleasure. It is in their combination that our engagement dwells. Single ideas are but straight lines, blank plains, monotonous patches of color. Associate them with other shapes and hues, and you produce beauty and pleasure. Thus with the manufacturing towns: if I only went to see a steam-engine work, a shuttle play, or a spindle turn, I should soon be tired enough; but when in all that I see there, I perceive a new development of man's mind, a fresh course opened for his energies when old ones are exhausted, when I behold the commencement of a great social change, which shall convert the pursuits of tribes and nations from agricultural to manufacturing—we rather shall throw the great mass of human industry, for which its former sphere was too small, into another and almost interminable channel, I feel that I am a spectator of a great social phenomenon, as awful and as grand as the lightning that rends the pine, or the earthquake that overthrows the mountain. It is magnificent, yet terrible; beautiful, but still sad."

"Why sad?" demanded Ned Hayward. "I have considered the matter in the same light a little, and have talked with various grave manufacturers about it; but they all seem to see nothing in it but what is very fine and pleasant. They have no apprehension for the result, or doubts about its doing a great deal of good to everybody in the end."

"The end!" said Beauchamp, "where is the end? What will the end be? They see nothing but good; they augur nothing but good, because they are actively employed in that one particular course, and buoyed up with those sanguine expectations which active exertion always produces. Neither do I doubt that the end will be good; but still, ere that end be reached, how much misery, how much strife, how much evil, must be encountered. One needs but to set one's foot in a factory, ay, or in a manufacturing town, to see that the evil not only will be, but is; that we are wading into a dark stream which we must pass over, and are already knee-deep. I speak not of the evils inseparable from the working of any great change in the relations of society or in its objects. As we can never climb a hill without some fatigue, so we can never reach a higher point in social advance without some suffering, but that inevitable evil I look upon as light, compared with many other things before us. I doubt not that in God's good providence new resources will be ever opened before mankind for the employment of human industry; but when I see a temporary superfluity of labor, I tremble to think of what vast power of grinding and oppressing that very circumstance places in the hands of the employer. Combine that power with the state of men's minds at present, and all the tendencies of the age; remember that to accumulate wealth, to rival others in luxury and display, to acquire at any price and by any means, is a part not of the manufacturer's spirit, but of the spirit of the age, and especially of this country, and then see to what purposes must and will be applied that vast authority or command, which the existing superabundance of labor brought about by mechanical inventions and the natural increase of population intrusts to those who have already the power of wealth. Were it not for this spirit acting through this power, should we

see in our manufactories such squalid misery, such enfeebled frames, such overtasked exertions, such want of moral and religious culture, such recklessness, such vice, such infamy, such famine!"

"Perhaps not," answered Ned Hayward, "but yet something is to be said for the manufacturers too. You see, my good sir, they have to compete with all Europe. They are, as it were, running a race, and they must win it, even if they break their horses' wind."

"If they do that, they will lose it," replied Beauchamp; "but yet I do not blame them. I allow for the spirit of the times we live in. They only share it with other men; many of them are humane, kind, generous, just, who do as much good and as little evil as the iron band of circumstances will permit; and were all to strive in the same manner, and to the same degree, that iron band would be broken, and all would be wiser, happier, better — ay, even wealthier than they are; but, alas! the example of the good has little influence on the rest on the same level with themselves, and the example of the bad, immense influence on every grade beneath them. The cupidity of the great mill-owner is imitated and exceeded by those below him. He robs the poor artisan of his labor, by allowing him as little out of the wealth his exertions earn as the superfluity of industry compels the artisan to take, and justifies himself with the cold axiom, that he is not bound to pay more than other men; those below him rob the same defenceless being of a great part of those poor wages themselves by a more direct kind of plunder, and have their axiom too. One of the great problems of the day is this: what proportion of the profits accruing from the joint operation of capital and labor is to be assigned to each of those two elements? And the day will come ere long, depend upon it, when that great problem must be solved—I trust not in bloody characters. At present, there is no check to secure a fair division; and so long as there is none, wealth will always take advantage of poverty, and the competition for mere food will induce necessity to submit to avarice, till the burden becomes intolerable—and then—"

"What then?" asked Ned Hayward.

"Nay, God forbid," answered Beauchamp, "that the fears which will sometimes arise should ever be verified. A thousand unforeseen events may occur to waft away the dangers that seem to menace us; but I cannot help thinking, that in the mean time there are many duties neglected by those who have the power to interfere; for surely, if any foresight be wisdom, any human providence a virtue, they are the foresight that perceives the future magnitude of evils yet in the bud, and the providence that applies a remedy in time."

"Very true," answered Ned Hayward; "things do look rather badly; but I dare say all will get right at last. I have not thought of such things very deeply—not half so deeply as you have done, I know; but still I have been sorry to see, in many of our great towns, the people so wretched-looking; and sometimes I have thought that if better care were taken of them —I mean both in mind and body—our judges at the assizes would not have so much to do. Just as fevers spread through whole countries from a great congregation of sickly people, so crime extend through a land from great congregations of vicious people. For my part, if, like our good friend Abon Hassan, I could but be caliph for a short time, I'd open out all the narrow streets, and drain all the foul lands, and cultivate all ignorant minds, and try to purify all the corrupt hearts by the only thing that can purify them. But I am not caliph, and if I were, the task is above me, I fancy; but still, if it could be accomplished, even in part, I am quite sure that jurymen would dine earlier, lawyers have less to do, courts would rise at three o'clock, and the lord mayor and sheriffs eat their turtle more in peace. But talking of that, do you know I have been thinking all this while now we could get some insight into this affair of the highway robbery; for I am determined I will not let the matter sleep. Highway robberies are going quite out of fashion. I have not heard of one for these four months. Hounslow Heath is almost as safe as Berkeley-square, and Bagshot no more to be feared than Windsor Castle. It is a pity to let such things revive; and there is something about that old fellow Wittingham which strikes me as odd. Another thing too was funny enough. Why should they pull the young lady out of the chaise? She could just as well have handed her purse and her trinkets out of the window!"

"That seemed strange to me also," answered Beauchamp. "But how do you propose to proceed?"

"Why, I think the best way will be to frighten the post-boy," replied Ned Hayward. "He's in league with the rogues, whoever they are, depend upon it; and if he thinks his neck's in a noose, he'll 'peach."

"That is not improbable," said his companion; "but we had better proceed cautiously, for if we frighten him into denying all knowledge of the parties, he will adhere to his story for mere consistency's sake."

"Oh, I'll manage him, I will manage him," answered Ned Hayward, who had carried so many points in his life by his dashing straightforwardness, that he had very little doubt of his own powers. "Come along, and we will see. Let us saunter out into the yard, in a quiet careless way, as if we were sentimental and loved moonlight. We shall find him somewhere rubbing down his horses, or drinking a pint on the bench."

The two gentlemen accordingly took their hats and issued forth, Ned Hayward leading the way first out into the street through a glass door, and then round into the yard by an archway. This manœuvre was intended to elude the vigilant eyes of Mr. Groomber, and was so far successful that the landlord, being one of that small class of men who can take a hint, did not come out after them to offer his services, though he saw the whole proceeding, and while he was uncorking sherry, or portioning out tea, or making up a bill, kept one eye—generally the right—turned toward a window that looked in the direction of the stables. Before those stables the bright moon was laying out her silver carpeting, though, truth to say, she might have found a cleaner floor to spread it on; and there too paraded up and down our friends, Ned Hayward and Mr. Beauchamp,

looking for the post-boy who had driven Mrs. Clifford and her daughter, but not perceiving him in any direction, Ned Hayward began to suspect he had reckoned without his host. The man was not rubbing down his horses, he was not drinking a pint on the bench, he was not smoking a pipe at the inn door.

"Well," he said at length, "I will look into all the stables to see after my horse. It is but right I should attend to his supper now I have had my own, and perhaps we may find what we are looking for on the road. Let us wait awhile, however, till that one-eyed ostler is passed, or he will tell us where the horse is, and spoil our manœuvre." And, walking on, he pointed out to Beauchamp a peculiar spot upon the moon's surface, and commented upon it with face upturned till the inconvenient ostler had gone by.

At that moment, however, another figure appeared in the yard, which at once brought light into Ned Hayward's mind. It was not a pretty figure, nor had it a pretty face belonging to it. The back was bowed and contorted in such a manner as to puzzle the tailor exceedingly to fit it with a fustian jacket when it required a new one, which luckily was not often; the legs were thin, and more like a bird's than a human being's, and though the skull was large and not badly shaped, the features that appeared below the tall forehead seemed all to be squeezed together, so as to acquire a rat-like expression, not uncommon in the deformed. The head, which was bare, was thatched with thin yellow hair, but the eyes were black and clear, and the teeth large and white, the garments which this poor creature wore were those of an inferior servant of an inn; and his peculiar function seemed to be denoted by a tankard of beer, which he carried in his hand from the door of the tap toward the stables.

"He is carrying our friend his drink," said Ned Hayward, in a whisper to Beauchamp, "let us watch where the little pot-boy goes in, and I'll take seven to one we find the man we want."

The pot-boy gave a shrewd glance at the two gentlemen as he passed them, but hurried on toward one of the doors far down the yard, which when it was opened displayed a light within; and as soon as he had deposited his tankard and returned, those who had watched him followed his course and threw back the same door without ceremony. There before them, seated on a bench at a deal-table, was the post-boy of whom they were in search. They had both marked him well by the evening light, and there could be no doubt of his identity, though by this time he had got his hat and jacket off, and was sitting with a manecomb on one hand and a currycomb on the other, and the tankard of beer between them. He was a dull, unpleasant, black-bearded sort of fellow of fifty-five or six, with a peculiarly cunning gray eye, and a peculiarly resolute slow mouth, and as soon as Ned Hayward beheld the expression by the light of a tallow-candle in a high state of perspiration, he muttered, "We shall not make much of this specimen."

Nevertheless, he went on in his usual careless tone addressing the lord of the posting-saddle, and saying, "Good night, my man; I want you to tell me where I can find a gentleman I wish to see hereabout."

The post-boy had risen, and pulled the lock of short black and white hair upon his forehead, but without looking a bit more communicative than at first, and he merely answered, "If I knows where he lives, sir. What's his name?"

"Why, that's another matter," replied Ned Hayward; "perhaps he may not much like his name mentioned; but I can tell you what people call him sometimes. He goes by the name of Wolf occasionally."

The slightest possible twinkle of intelligence came into the man's eyes for a moment, and then went out again, just as when clouds are driving over the sky at night we sometimes see something sparkle for an instant, and then disappear from the heavens, so faint while it is present, and so soon gone, that we cannot tell whether it be a star or not.

"Can't say I ever heard of such a gemman here, sir," replied the post-boy. "There's Jimmy Lamb, sir, the mutton-pieman, but that's the nearest name to Wolf we have in these parts."

"Why, my good friend, you saw him this very night," said Mr. Beauchamp, "when the chaise was stopped that you were driving. He was one of the principals in that affair."

"Likely, sir," answered the other, "but they were all strangers to me—never set eyes on one on 'em afore. But if you knows 'em, you'll soon catch 'em; and that will be a good job, for it is very unpleasant to be kept a waiting so. It's as bad as a 'pike."

"I've a notion," said Ned Hayward, "that you can find out my man for me if you like; and if you do, you may earn a crown; but if you do not you may get into trouble, for concealing felons renders you what is called an accessory, and that is a capital crime. You know the law, sir," he continued, turning to Beauchamp, and speaking in an authoritative tone, "and if I am not mistaken, this comes under the statute of limitations as a clear case of misprision, which under the old law was merely burning in the hand and transportation for life, but is now hanging matter. You had better think over the business, my man, and let me have an immediate answer with due deliberation, for you are not a person I should think to put your head in a halter, and if you were, I should not advise you to do so in this case."

"Thank you, sir," said the post-boy, "I won't; but I don't know the gemmen as showed themselves such rum customers, nor him either as you are a axing arter."

"It is in vain, I fear," said Beauchamp to his companion in a very low voice, as their respondent made this very definite answer, "the magistrates may perhaps obtain some further information from him when he finds that the matter is serious, but we shall not."

The post-boy caught a few of the words apparently, and perhaps it was intended that he should do so, but they were without effect; and when at length they walked away baffled, he twisted the eyelids into a sort of wreath round his left eye, observing with his tongue in his cheek, "Ay, ay, my covies, go go!"

Ned Hayward opened the door somewhat suddenly, and as he went out, he almost tumbled over the little humpbacked pot-boy. Now whether the young gentleman—his years might be nineteen or twenty, though his stature was that of a child of eight—came thither to replenish the tankard he had previously brought, or whether he affected the moonlight, or was fond of conversation in which he did not take a part, Ned Hayward could not at the moment divine; but before he and Beauchamp had taken a dozen steps up the yard, Hayward felt a gentle pull at his coat-tail.

"What is it, my lad?" he said, looking down upon the pot-boy, and at the same time stooping his head as if with a full impression that his ears at their actual height could hear nothing that proceeded from a point so much below as the deformed youth's mouth.

Instantly a small high-pitched but very musical voice replied, "I'll come for your boots early to-morrow, sir, and tell you all about it."

"Can't you tell me now?" asked the young gentleman; "I am going into the stable to see my horse, and you can say your say there, my man."

"I daren't," answered the pot-boy, "there's Tim the ostler, and Jack Millman's groom, and Long Billy, the Taunton post-boy, all about. I'll come to-morrow and fetch your boots."

At the same moment the landlord's voice exclaiming in sharp tones, "Dicky! Dicky Lamb!—what the devil are you so long about?" was heard, and the pot-boy ran off as fast as his long thin legs would carry him.

"Well, this affair promises some amusement," said Ned Hayward, when they had again reached the little parlor, which in his good-humored easy way he now looked upon as common to them both. "Upon my word I am obliged to these highwaymen, or whatever the scoundrels may be, for giving me something fresh to think of. Although at good Sir John Slingsby's I shall have fishing enough, I dare say, yet one cannot fish all day and every day, and sometimes one gets desperately bored in an old country-house, unless fate strikes out something not quite in the common way to occupy one."

"Did you ever try falling in love?" asked Beauchamp, with a quiet smile, as he glanced his eyes over the fine form and handsome features of his companion; "it is an excellent pastime, I am told."

"No!" answered Ned Hayward quickly and straightforwardly; "I never did, and never shall. I am too poor, Mr. Beauchamp, to marry in my own class of society, and maintain my wife in the state which that class implies. I am too honest to make love without intending to marry; too wise I trust to fall in love where nothing could be the result but unhappiness to myself, if not to another also." He spoke these few sentences very seriously; but then, resuming at once his gay rattling manner, he went on: "Oh, I have drilled myself capitally, I assure you. At twenty I was like a raw recruit, bungling at every step; I found myself saying all manner of sweet things to every pretty face I met; felt my heart beating whenever, under the pretty face, I thought I discovered something that would last longer. But I saw so much of love in a cottage and its results, that, after calculating well what a woman brought up in good society would have to sacrifice who married a man with 600*l.* a year, I voted it unfair to ask her, and made up my mind to my conduct. As soon as I find that I wish to dance with any dear girl twice in a night, and fall into reveries when I think of her, and feel a sort of warm blood at my fingers' ends when my hand touches hers, I am off like a hair trigger, for if a man is bound to act with honor to other men, who can make him if he does not willingly, he is ten times more strongly bound to do so toward women, who can neither defend nor avenge themselves."

With a sudden impulse Beauchamp held out his hand to him, and shook his heartily, and that grasp seemed to say, "I know you now to the heart. We are friends."

Ned Hayward was a little surprised at this enthusiastic burst of Mr. Beauchamp, for he had set him down for what is generally called a very gentlemanlike person, which means, in the common parlance of the world, a man who has either used up everything like warm feeling, or has never possessed it, and who, not being troubled with any emotions, suffers polite manners and conventional habits to rule him in and out. With his usual rapid way of jumping at conclusions, which he often found very convenient, though to say the truth he sometimes jumped over the right ones—he said to himself at once, "Well, this is really a good fellow, I do believe, and a man of some heart and soul."

But though Beauchamp's warm shake of the hand had led him to this conviction, and he thought he began to understand him, yet Ned Hayward was a little curious as to a question which his new friend had asked him once before. He had answered it, it is true, by telling him that he took care not to fall in love; but he fancied that Mr. Beauchamp had inquired in a peculiar tone, and that he must have had some meaning more than the words implied, taken in their simple and straightforward application.

"Come now, tell me, Beauchamp," he said, after just five seconds' consideration, "what made you ask if I had ever tried falling in love by way of amusement! Did you ever hear any story of my being guilty of such practices! If you have it was no true one—at least for six or seven years past."

"Oh, no," replied Beauchamp laughing, "I have had no means of learning your secret history. I only inquired because, if you have never tried that pleasant amusement, you will soon have a capital opportunity. Sir John Slingsby's daughter is one of the loveliest girls I ever saw."

"What, old Jack with a daughter!" exclaimed Ned Hayward; then added after a moment's thought, "by the way, so he had. I remember her coming to see him when we were at Winchester. He was separated from her mother, who was a saint, I recollect. Nobody could accuse old Jack of that himself, and his daughter used to come and see him at times. A pretty little girl she was; I think five or six years old. Let me see, she must be about sixteen or seventeen now; for that is just ten years ago, when I was an ensign."

"She is more than that," answered Beau-

champ, "by two or three years; and either it must be longer since you saw her, or—"

"Oh, no, it is just ten years ago," cried Mr. Hayward: "ten years next month, for I was then seventeen myself."

"Well, then, she must have been older than you thought," replied his companion.

"Very likely," said Mr. Hayward. "I never could tell girls' ages, especially when they are children. But there is no fear of my falling in love with her, if she is what you tell me. I never fell in love with a beautiful woman in my life—I don't like them; they are always either pert, or conceited, or vain, or haughty, or foolish. Sooner or later they are sure to find some ass to tell them how beautiful they are, and then they think that is quite sufficient for all the purposes of life."

"Perhaps, because they are first impressed with a wrong notion of the purposes of life," answered Beauchamp; "but yet, I never heard of a man before who objected to a woman because she was pretty."

"No, no," answered Ned Hayward, "that is a very different thing. I did not say pretty. I am very fond of what is pretty. Oh, the very word is delightful. It gives one such a nice, good-humored, comfortable idea; it is full of health, and youth, and good spirits, and light-heartedness — the word seems to smile and speak content; and when it is the expression that is spoken of, and not the mere features, it is very charming indeed. But a beautiful woman is a very different thing. I would as soon marry the Venus de Medicis, pedestal and all, as what is usually called a beautiful woman. But now let us talk of this other affair. I wonder what will come of my mysterious post-boy."

"Why, I doubt not you will obtain some information regarding the gentleman calling himself Wolf," replied Beauchamp; "but if you do, how do you intend to proceed?"

"Hunt him down as I would a wolf," answered Ned Hayward.

"Then, pray let me share the sport," rejoined Beauchamp.

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said Ned Hayward; "I'll give the view halloo as soon as I have found him; and so now, good night, for I am somewhat sleepy."

"Good night, good night!" answered Beauchamp; and Ned Hayward rang for a bed-candle, a boot-jack, a pair of slippers, and sundry other things that he wanted, which were brought instantly and with great good-will. Had he asked for a night-cap it would have been provided with the same alacrity; for those were days in which night-caps were furnished by every host to every guest; though now (alas! for the good old times) no landlord ever thinks that a guest will stay long enough at his house to make it worth while to attend to his head-gear. But Ned Hayward needed no night-cap, for he never wore one, and therefore his demands did not at all overtax his host's stock.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD MILL.

It was just in the gray of the morning, and the silver light of dawn was stealing through the deep glens of the wood, brightening the dewy filaments that busy insects had spun across and across the grass, and shining in long, glistening lines, upon the broad, clear stream. It was a lovely stream as ever the eye of meditation rested on, or thoughtful angler walked beside and from about two miles beyond Slingsby Park to within half a mile of the small town of Tarningham, it presented an endless variety of quiet English scenery, such as does the heart of man good to look upon. In one part it was surrounded by high hills, not unbroken by jagged rocks and lofty banks, and went on tumbling in miniature cascades and tiny rapids. At another place it flowed on in greater tranquillity through green meadows, flanked on either hand by tall, stately trees, at the distance of eighty or ninety yards from the banks; not in trim rows, all ranged like rank and file upon parades, but straggling out as chance or taste had decided, sometimes grouping into masses, sometimes protruding far toward the stream, sometimes receding coyly into the opening of a little dell. Then again the river dashed on at a more hurried rate through a low copse, brawling as it went over innumerable shelves of rock and masses of stone, or banks of gravel, which attempted to obstruct its course; and nearer still to the town it flowed through turfy banks, slowly and quietly, every now and then diversified by a dashing ripple over a shallow, and a tumble into a deep pool.

It was in the gray of the morning, then, that a man in a velveteen jacket was seen walking slowly along by the margin at a spot where the river was in a sort of middle state, neither so fierce and restive as it seemed among the hills, nor so tranquil and sluggish as in the neighborhood of the little town. There were green fields around; and numerous trees and copses approaching sometimes very close to the water, but sometimes breaking away to a considerable distance, and generally far enough off for the angler to throw a fly without hooking the branches around. Among some elms, and walnuts, and Huntingdon poplars on the right bank, was an old square tower of very rough stone, gray and cold-looking, with some ivy up one side, clustering round the glassless window. It might have been mistaken for the ruin of some ancient castle of no great extent, had it not been for the axle-tree and some of the spokes and fellies of a dilapidated water-wheel projecting over the river, and at once announcing for what purposes the building had been formerly used, and that they had long ceased. There was still a little causeway and small stone bridge of a single arch spanning a rivulet that here joined the stream, and from a doorway near the wheel still stretched a frail plank to the other side of the dam, which, being principally constructed of rude layers of rock, remained entire, and kept up the water so as to form an artificial cascade. Early as was the hour, some matutinal trout, who, having risen by times and perhaps taken a long swim before breakfast, felt hungry and sharp-set, were attempting to satisfy their voracious maws by snapping at a number of fawn-colored moths which imprudently trusted themselves too near the surface of the water. The reli-

birds were singing their sweet hymns all around, and a large goatsucker whirled by on its long wings, depriving the trout of many a delicate fly before it came within the reach of the greedy jaws that were waiting for it below the ripple.

But what was the man doing while fish, flies, and birds were thus engaged Marry, he was engaged in a very curious and mysterious occupation. With a slow step and a careful eye fixed upon the glassy surface beneath him, he walked along the course of the current down toward the park paling that you see there upon the left. Was he admiring the speckled tenants of the river? Was he admiring his own reflected image on the shining mirror of the stream? He might be doing either, or both; but, nevertheless, he often put his finger and thumb into the pocket of a striped waistcoat; pulled out some small round balls, about the size of a pea or a little larger, marvelously like one of those boluses which doctors are sometimes fain to prescribe, and chemists right willing to furnish, but which patients find it somewhat difficult to swallow. These he dropped one by one into the water, wherever he found a quiet place, and thus proceeded till he had come within about three hundred yards of the park wall. There he stopped the administration of these pills; and then, walking a little farther, sat down by the side of the river, in the very midst of a tall clump of rushes.

In a minute or two something white, about the length of eighteen inches, floated down; and instantly stretching forth a long hooked stick, our friend drew dextrously in to the shore a fine large trout of a pound and a half in weight. The poor fellow was quite dead, or at least so insensible that he did not seem at all surprised or annoyed to find himself suddenly out of his element, and into another gentleman's pocket, though the transition was somewhat marvelous, from the fresh clear stream to a piece of glazed buckram. Most people would have disliked the change, but Mister Trout was in that sort of state that he did not care about anything. Hardly was he thus deposited when one of his finny companions—perhaps his own brother, or some other near relation—was seen coming down the stream with his stomach upward, a sort of position which, to a trout, is the same as standing on the head would be to a human being. This one was nearer the bank, and first he hit his nose against a stump of tree, then, whirling quietly round, he tried the current tail foremost; but it was all of no avail, he found his way likewise into the pocket, and two more were easily consigned to the same receptacle, all of them showing the same placid equanimity. At length one very fine fish, which seemed to weigh two pounds and a half, at the least, followed; advice, and took a middle course. He was out of reach of the stick; the water was too deep at that spot to wade, and what was our friend of the pocket to do? He watched the fish carried slowly down the stream toward the place where the river passed under an archway into Sir John Slingsby's park. It was fat and fair, and its fins were rosy as if the morning sun had tinged them. Its belly was of a glossy white, with a kindly look about its half-expanded gills, that quite won our friend's affection. Yet he hesitated; and being a natural philosopher, he knew that by displacing the atoms of water the floating body might be brought nearer to the shore. He therefore tried a stone: but whether he threw it too far, or not far enough, I cannot tell; certain it is, the trout was driven farther away than before, and to his inexpressible disappointment, he saw it carried through the arch. He was resolved, however, that it should not thus escape him. Difficult circumstances try, if they do not make, great men; and taking a little run, he vaulted over the park paling and into the park.

He was just in the act of getting over again, perhaps feeling if he stayed too long it might be considered an intrusion, and had the fish in his hand, so that his movements were somewhat embarrassed, when a little incident occurred which considerably affected his plans and purposes for the day.

I have mentioned an old mill, and sundry trees and bushes at different distances from the bank, breaking the soft green meadow turf in a very picturesk manner. In the present instance, these various objects proved not only ornamental but useful—at least to a personage who had been upon the spot nearly as long as our friend in the velveteen jacket. That personage had been tempted into the mill either by its curious and ancient aspect, or by the open door, or by surprise, or by some other circumstance or motive; and once in he thought he might as well look out of the window. When he did look out of the window, the first thing his eyes fell upon, was the first-mentioned gentleman dropping his pills into the water; and there being something curious and interesting in the whole proceeding, the man in the mill watched the man by the river for some minutes. He then quietly slipped out, and as the door was on the opposite side from that on which the operations I have described were going on, he did so unperceived. It would seem that the watcher became much affected by what he saw; for the next minute he glided softly over the turf behind a bush and thence to a clump of trees, and then to a single old oak with a good wide trunk—rather hollow and somewhat shattered about the branches, but still with two or three of the lower boughs left, having a fair show of leaves, like a fringe of curly hair round the poll of some bald Anacreon. From that he went to another, and so on; in fact, dodging our first friend all the way down, till the four first trout were pocketed, and the fifth took its course into the park. When the betrayer of these tender innocents, however, vaulted over the paling in pursuit, the dodger came out and got behind some bushes — brambles, and other similar shrubs that have occasionally other uses than bearing blackberries; and no sooner did he see the successful chaser of the trout, with his goodly fish in his hand and one leg over the paling, about to return to the open country, than taking two steps forward, he laid his hand upon his collar, and courteously helped him over somewhat faster than he would have come without such assistance.

The man of fishes had his back to his new companion at the moment when he received such unexpected support; but as soon as his feet touched the ground on the other side, he struggled most unreasonably to free his collar from the grasp that still retained it. He did not succeed in this effort, far from it; for he well-nigh strangled himself in the attempt to get out of that iron clutch; but, nevertheless, he contrived, at the risk of suffocation, to bring himself face to face with his tenacious friend, and beheld, certainly what he did not expect to see. No form of grim and grisly gamekeeper was before him; no shooting-jacket and leathern leggings; but a person in the garb of a gentleman of good station, furnished with arms, legs, and chest of dimensions and materials which seemed to show that a combat would be neither a very safe nor pleasant affair.

"Who the devil are you?" asked the lover of trout, in the same terms which Mr. Wittingham had used the night before to the very same personage.

"Ha, ha, my friend!" exclaimed Ned Hayward; "so you have been hocusing the trout, have you?" And there they stood for a few minutes without any answers to either question.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH NED HAYWARD PLAYS THE PART OF THIEF-TAKER.

Of all the turnings and windings in this crooked life, one of the most disagreeable is turning back; and yet it is one we are all doomed to from childhood to old age. We are turned back with the smaller and the greater lessons of life, and have, alas, but too often, in our obstinacy or our stupidity, to learn them over and over again. I with the rest of my herd must also turn back from time to time; but on the present occasion it shall not be long, as I am not in a sportive mood this morning, and could find no pleasure in playing a trout or a salmon, and should be disgusted at the very sight of a cat with a mouse.

We have seen our good friend, Ned Hayward, lay his hand stoutly on the collar of a gentleman who had been taking some unwarrantable liberties with the finny fair ones of the stream; but the question is, how happened Ned Hayward to be there at that particular hour of the morning? Was he so exceedingly matutinal in his habits as to be usually up, dressed, and out and walking by a piece of water at a period of the day when most things except birds, fish, and poachers are in their beds? Had he been roused at that hour by heartache, or headache, or any other ache? Was he gouty and could not sleep—in love, and not inclined to sleep? No, reader, no. He was an early man in his habits, it is true, for he was in high health and spirits, and with a busy and active mind which looked upon slumber as time thrown away; but then though he rose early he was always careful as to his dress. He had a stiff beard which required a good deal of shaving, his hair took him a long time, for he liked it to be exceedingly clean and glossy. Smooth he could not make it, for that the curls prevented, curls being obstinate things and resolved to have their own way. Thus with one thing or another, sometimes reading scraps of a book that lay upon his dressing table, sometimes looking out of window, and thinking more poetically than he had any notion of, sometimes cleaning his teeth till they looked as white and as straight as the keys of a new pianoforte, sometimes playing a tune with his fingers on the top of the table, and musing philosophically the while, it was generally at least one hour and a half from the time he arose before he issued forth into the world.

This was not always the case indeed, for on May mornings, when the trout rise, in August, if he were near the moors, on the first of September, wherever he might be, for he was never at that season in London, he usually abridged his toilet, and might be seen in the green fields, duly equipped for the sport of the season, very shortly after daybreak.

On the present occasion, and the morning of which I have just spoken, there cannot be the slightest doubt that he would have lain in bed somewhat longer than usual, for he had had a long ride the day before, some excitement, a good supper, and had sat up late; but there was one little circumstance which roused him and sent him forth. At about a quarter before five he heard his door open, and a noise made among the boots and shoes. He was in that sleepy state in which the events of even five or six hours before are vague and indefinite, if recollected at all, and although he had some confused notion of having ordered himself to be called early, yet he knew not the why or the wherefore, and internally concluded that it was one of the servants of the inn come to take his clothes away for the purpose of brushing them; he thought, as that was a process with which he had nothing to do, he might as well turn on his other side and sleep it out. Still, however, there was a noise in the room, which in the end disturbed him, and he gave over all the boots, physical or metaphysical, to the devil. Then raising himself upon his elbow, he looked about, and by the dim light which was streaming through the dimity curtains—for the window was unfurnished with shutters—he saw a figure somewhat like that of a large goose wandering about amid the fragments of his apparel.

"What in the mischief's name are you about?" asked Ned Hayward, impatiently. "Can't you take the things and get along?"

"It's me, sir," said the low sweet-toned voice of the humpbacked pot-boy, who had not a perfect certainty in his own mind that neuter verbs are followed by a nominative case, "you were wishing to know last night about—"

"Ah, hang it, so I was," exclaimed Ned Hayward, "but I had forgotten all about it—well, my man, what can you tell me about this fellow, this Wolf? Where does he live, how can you get at him? None of the people here will own they know anything about him, but I believe they are lying, and I am very sure of it. The name's a remarkable one, and not to be mistaken."

"Ay, sir," answered the pot-boy, "they knew well enough whom you want, though you did not mention the name they chose to

w him by. If you had asked for Ste Gimlet, ney'd have been obliged to answer, for they can't deny having heard of him. Wolf's a cant name, you see, which he got on account of his walking about so much at night, as they say wolves do, though I never saw one."

"Well, where is he to be found?" asked Ned Hayward, in his usual rapid manner, and he then added, to smooth down all difficulties, "I don't want to do the man any harm if I can help it, for I have a notion, somehow, that he is but a tool in the business; and therefore, although I could doubtless, with the information you have given me of his real name, find him out, and deal with him as I think fit, yet I would rather have his address privately, that I may go and talk to him alone."

"Ah, sir, he may be a tool," answered the pot-boy, "but he's an awkward tool to work with; and I should think you had better have two or three stout hands with you."

"Well, I will think of that, my man," answered the young gentleman; "but at all events I should like to know where to find him."

"That's not quite so easy, sir," replied the hunchback, "for he wanders about a good deal; but he has got a place where he says he lives on Yaldon Moor, behind the park, and that he's there some time in every day is certain. I should think the morning as good a time as any, and you may catch him on the lookout if you go round by the back of the park, and then up the river by the old mill. There's an overgo a little higher up, and I shouldn't wonder if he were dabbling about in the water; for it isn't the time for partridges or hares, and he must be doing something."

"But what sort of place has he on the moor?" asked Ned Hayward, beginning to get more and more interested in the pursuit of his inquiries; "how can I find it, my man?"

"It's not easy," answered his companion, "for it's built down in the pit. However, when you have crossed by the overgo, you will find a little path just before you, and if you go along that straight, without either turning to the right or the left, it will lead you right up to the moor. Then I'm sure I don't know how to direct you, for the roads go turning about in all manner of ways."

"Is it east, west, north, or south?" asked Captain Hayward, impatiently.

"Why, east," answered the boy; "and I dare say if you go soon you will find the sun just peeping out over the moor in that direction. It's a pretty sight, and I've looked at it often to see the sunshine come streaming through the morning mist, and making all the green things that grow about there look like gold and purple, and very often, too, I've seen the blue smoke coming up out of the pit from Ste's cottage-chimney. Perhaps it may be so when you go, and then you'll easily find it."

"And whose park is it that you speak of, boy?" said Ned Hayward. "There may be half-a-dozen about here."

"Why, Sir John Slingsby's," answered the boy, "that's the only one we call the park about here."

"Oh, then I know it," rejoined the gentleman, stretching out his hand at the same time, and taking his purse from a chair that stood by his bedside; "there's a crown for you; and now carry off the boots and clothes, and get them brushed as fast as possible."

The boy did as he was told, took the crown with many thanks, gathering together the various articles of apparel which lay scattered about, and retired from the room. Ned Hayward, however, without waiting for his return, jumped out of bed, drew forth from one of his portmanteaus another complete suit of clothes, plunged his head, hands, and neck in cold water, and then mentally saying, "I will shave when I come back," he dressed himself in haste, and looked out for a moment into the yard, to see whether many of the members of the household were astir. There was a man at the very farther end of the yard cleaning a horse, and just under the window, the little deformed pot-boy, whistling a plaintive air with the most exquisite taste, while he was brushing a coat and waistcoat. The finest and most beautiful player on the flageolet never equaled the tones that were issuing from his little pale lips, and Ned Hayward could not refrain from pausing a moment to listen, but then putting on his hat, he hurried down stairs, and beckoned the boy toward him.

"Do not say that I am out, my man, unless any questions are asked," he said; "and when you have brushed the clothes, put them on a chair at the door."

The boy nodded significantly, and our friend, Ned Hayward, took his way out of the town in the direction that the boy had indicated. Of all the various bumps in the human head, the bump of locality is the foremost. This best the reader is well aware is merely a phrenological essay in a new form. So the bump of locality is the most capricious, whimsical, irrational, unaccountable, perverse, and unmanageable of all bumps. To some men it affords a faculty of finding their way about houses—I wish to heaven it did so with me, for I am always getting into wrong rooms and places where I have no business—others it enables to go through all sorts of tortuous paths and ways almost by intuition; with others it is strong regarding government offices, and the places connected therewith; but in Ned Hayward it was powerful in the country, and it would have been a very vigorous *ignis fatuus* indeed that would lead him astray either on horseback or on foot. Three words of direction generally sufficed if they were clear, and he was as sure of his journey as if he knew every step of the way. There might be a little calculation in the thing—a sort of latent argumentation—for no one knew better that if a place lay due north, the best way to arrive at it was not to go due south, or was more clearly aware that in ordinary circumstances the way into a valley was not to climb the hill; but Ned Hayward was rarely disposed to analyze any process in his own mind. He had always hated dissecting puzzles even in his boyhood; and as his mind was a very good mind, he generally let it take its own way, without troubling it with questions. Thus he walked straight on out of the little town along the bank of the river, and finding himself interrupted, after about three miles, by the park-wall, he took a path through the fields to the left, then struck back again to the right,

and soon after had a glimpse of the river again above its passage through Sir John Slingsby's park.

All this time Ned Hayward's mind was not unoccupied. He saw everything that was passing about him and meditated upon it without knowing that he was meditating. The sky was still quite gray when he set out, but presently the morning began to hang out her banners of purple and gold to welcome the monarch of day, and Ned Hayward said to himself, "How wonderfully beautiful all this is, and what a fine ordination is it that every change in nature should produce some variety of beauty." Then he remarked upon the trees, and the birds, and the meadows, and the reflections of the sky in a clear, smooth part of the river, and with somewhat of a painter's mind, perceived the beautiful harmony that is produced by the effect that one color has upon another by its side. And then he passed a little village church, with the steeple shrouded in ivy, and it filled his mind full of quiet and peaceful images, and simple rural life (with a moral to it all), and his thoughts ran on to a thousand scenes of honest happiness, till he had the game at skittles and the maypole on the green up before him as plain as if it were all real; and the ivy and two old yews carried him away to early times when that ancient church was new. Heaven knows how far his fancy went galloping!—through the whole history of England at least. But all these reveries went out of his head almost as soon as the objects that excited them, and then, as he went through some neat hedge-rows and pleasant corn-fields, which promised well in their green freshness for an abundant harvest, he began to think of partridges and an occasional pheasant lying under a holly-bush, and pointing dogs and tumbling birds, a full game-bag, and a capital dinner, with a drowsy evening afterward. Good heaven! what a thing it is to be young, and in high health, and in high spirits; how easy the load of life sits upon one; how insignificant are its cares to its enjoyments; every moment has its flitting dream; every hour its becoming enjoyment, if we choose to seek it; every flower, be it bitter or be it sweet, be it inodorous or be it perfumed, has its nectarial fall of honeyed drops, ripe for the lip that will vouchsafe to press it. But years, years, they bring on the autumn of the heart, when the bright and blooming petals have passed away, when the dreams have vanished with the light slumbers of early years, and everything is in the seed for generations to come; we feel ourselves the husks of the earth, and find that it is time to fall away, and give place to the bloom and blossom of another epoch.

Our friend, however, if not in the budding time of life, had nothing of the sere and yellow leaf about him; he was one of those men who was calculated to carry on the day-dream of boyhood, even beyond its legitimate limit; nothing fretted him, nothing wore him, few things grieved him. It required the diamond point to make a deep impression, and though he reflected the lights that fell upon him from other objects, it was but the more powerful rays that penetrated into the depth, and that not very frequently. Thus on he went upon his way, and what he had got to after partridges and field-swamps, and matters of such kind, heaven only knows. He might be up in the moon for aught I can tell, or in the Indies, or riding astride upon a comet, or in any other position the least likely for a man to place himself in, except when aided by the wings of imagination; and yet, strange to say, Ned Hayward had not the slightest idea that he had any imagination at all. He believed himself to be the most simple jog-trot, matter-of-fact creature in all the world: but to return, he was indulging in all sorts of fantasies, just when a little path between two high hedges opened out upon a narrow meadow, by the side of the river at a spot just opposite the old mill, and not more than forty or fifty yards distant from the door thereof. He saw the old mill and the stream, but saw nothing else upon my word, and thinking to himself, "What a picturesque ruin that is, it looks like some feudal castle built beside the water, parting two hostile baron's domains. What the deuce can it have been?"

Doubt with him always led to examination, so without more ado, he crossed over the open space with his usual quick step, entered the mill, looked about him, satisfied himself in a minute as to what had been its destination, and then gazed out of the windows, first up the stream, and next down. Up the stream he saw some swallows skimming over the water, the first that summer had brought to our shores; and, moreover, a sedate heron, with its blue back appearing over some reeds, one leg in the water, and one raised to its breast. When he looked down, however, he perceived the gentleman I have described, dropping some pellets into the water, and he thought "That's a curious operation, what can he be about?"

The next minute, however, the legitimate wooer of the fishes turned his face partly toward the mill, and Ned Hayward murmured, "Ah, ha, Master Wolf, *alias* Ste Gimlet, I have you now, I think." And issuing forth, he dogged him down the bank as I have before described, till at length, choosing his moment dextrously, he grasped him by the collar, in such a manner, that if he had had the strength of Hercules, he would have found it a more difficult matter to escape, than to kill forty Hydras, or clean fifty Augean stables.

"Hocusing the fish!" said the prisoner, in answer to one of Captain Hayward's first intimations of what he thought of his proceedings. "I don't know what you mean by hocusing the fish—I've got a few dead 'uns out of the river, that's all; and no great harm, I should think, just to make a fry."

"Ay, my good friend," replied Ned Hayward, "dead enough, I dare say they were when you got them; but I'm afraid we must have a coroner's inquest upon them, and I do not think the verdict will be 'Found drowned.' What I mean, my man, is that you have poisoned them—a cunning trick, but one that I know as well as your name or my own."

"And what the devil is your name?" asked the captive, trying to twist himself round, so as at least to get a blow or a kick at his captor.

"Be quiet—be quiet!" answered Ned Hayward, half strangling him in his collar. "My name is my own property, and I certainly will not give it to you; but your own you shall have,

if you like. You are called Ste Gimlet, or I am mistaken, but better known at night by the name of Wolf."

The man muttered an angry curse, and Ned Hayward continued—

"You see I know all about you; and, to tell you the truth, I was looking for you."

"Ah, so he's had some 'un down from London," said Wolf, entirely mistaking the nature of Captain Hayward's rank and avocation. "Well, so help me ——, if I ever did this on his ground afore, sir."

"Well, Master Gimlet," answered Ned Hayward, perfectly understanding what was passing in the man's mind, and willing to encourage the mistake, "I have been asked down certainly, and I suppose I must take you before Sir John Slingsby at once—unless, indeed, you like to make the matter up one way or another."

"I haven't got a single crown in the world," answered the poacher; "if you know all, you'd know that I am poor enough."

"Ay, but there are more ways than one of making matters up," rejoined Ned Hayward, in a menacing tone. "You know a little bit of business you were about last night."

The man's face turned as white as a sheet, and his limbs trembled as if he had been in the cold fit of an ague. All his strength was gone in a moment, and he was as powerless as a baby.

"Why," faltered he at length, "you could not be sent for that affair, for there's not been time."

"No, certainly," replied the young gentleman; "but having been asked down here on other matters, I have just taken that up, and may go through with it or not, just as it suits me. Now you see, Ste," he continued, endeavoring to assume, as well as he could, somewhat of the Bow-street-officer tone, and doing so quite sufficiently to effect his object with a country delinquent, "a nod is quite as good as a wink to a blind horse."

"Ay, ay, I understand, sir," answered Mr. Gimlet.

"Well then," continued Ned Hayward, "I understand, too; and being quite sure that you are not what we call the principal in this business, but only an accessory, I am willing to give you a chance."

"Thank'ee, sir," replied Wolf, in a meditative tone, but he said no more; and his captor, who wished him to speak voluntarily, was somewhat disappointed.

"You are mighty dull, Master Wolf," said Ned Hayward, "and therefore I must ask you just as plain a question as the judge does when he has got the black cap in his hand ready to put on. Have you anything to say why I should not take you at once before Sir John Slingsby?"

"Why, what the devil should I say?" rejoined the man, impatiently. "If you know me, I dare say you know the others, and if you're so cunning, you must guess very well that it was not the money that we were after; so that it can't be no felony after all."

"If it is not a felony, it is not worth my while to meddle with it," answered Ned Hayward, "but there may be different opinions upon *that subject*; and if you like to tell me all about it, I shall be able to judge. I guessed it was not for money; but there is many a thing as bad as that. I don't ask you to speak, but you may if you like. If you don't, come along."

"Well, I'll speak all I know," answered Wolf, "that's to say, if you'll just let me get breath, for, hang me, if your grip does not half strangle me. I'll not mention names though, for I won't peach; but just to show you that there was nothing so very wrong, I'll tell you what it was all about—that's to say, if you'll let me off about these devils of fish."

"Agreed as to the fish," replied Ned Hayward, "if you tell the truth. I don't want to throttle you either, my good friend; but mark me well, if I let go my hold, and you attempt to bolt, I will knock you down, and have you before a magistrate in five minutes. Sit down there on the bank then." And without loosening his grasp, he forced his prisoner to bend his knees and take up a position before him, from which it would not have been possible to rise without encountering a blow from a very powerful fist. When this was accomplished he let the man's collar go, and standing directly opposite, bade him proceed.

This seemed not so easy a task as might have been imagined, at least to our friend Mr. Gimlet, who, not being a practiced orator, wanted the art of saying as much as possible upon everything unimportant, and as little as possible upon everything important. He scratched his head heartily, however, and that stimulus at length enabled him to produce the following sentence:

"Well, you see, sir, it was nothing at all but a bit of love-making."

"It did not look like it," answered Ned Hayward.

"Well, it was, though," said Mr. Gimlet, in a decided tone. "The young gentleman, whom I'm talking of, wanted to get the young lady away; for you see her mother looks very sharp after her, and so he had a chaise ready, and me another to help him, and if those two fellows had not come up just as we were about it, he'd have had her half way to Scotland by this time."

"And where is the young gentleman, as you call him, now?" asked Ned Hayward, in that sort of quiet, easy tone, in which people sometimes put questions, which, if considered seriously, would be the least likely to receive an answer, just as if a straightforward reply were a matter of course.

But his companion was upon his guard. "That's neither here nor there," he replied.

"It is, I can assure you, my good friend Wolf," said the young gentleman; "for whatever you may think, this was just as much a felony as if you had taken a purse or cut a throat. Two pistols were fired, I think—the young lady is an heiress; and forcibly carrying away an heiress is as bad as a robbery; it is a sort of picking her pocket of herself. So, if you have a mind to escape a noose, you'll instantly tell me where he is."

The man thrust his hands into his pockets, and gazed at his interrogator with a sullen face, in which fear might be seen struggling with dogged resolution; but Ned Hayward the moment after, added as a sort of rider to his bill,

"I dare say he is some low fellow who did it for her money."

"No, that he's not, by ——!" cried the other. "He's a gentleman's son, and a devilish rich un's too."

"Ah ha! Mr. Wittingham's!" cried Ned Hayward, "now I understand you;" and he laughed with his peculiar, clear, merry laugh, which made Mr. Gimlet at first angry, and then inclined to join him. "And now, my good friend," continued Ned Hayward, laying his hand upon his companion's shoulder, "you may get up and be off. You've made a great blunder, and mistaken me for a very respectable sort of functionary, upon whose peculiar province I have no inclination to trespass any further—I mean a thief-taker. If you will take my advice, however, neither you nor Mr. Wittingham will play such tricks again, for if you do you may fare worse; and you may as well leave off hocusing trout, snaring pheasants and hares, and shooting partridges on the sly, and take to some more legitimate occupation. You would make a very good gamekeeper, I dare say, upon the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, and some of these days I will come up to your place upon the moor, and have a chat with you about it; I doubt not you could show me some sport with otters, or badgers, or things of that kind."

"Upon my soul and body you're a cool hand," cried Ste Gimlet, rising and looking at Captain Hayward, as if he did not well know whether to knock him down or not.

"I am," answered our friend Ned, with a calm smile, "quite cool, and always cool, as you'll find when you know me better. As to what has passed to-day I shall take no notice of this fish affair, and in regard to Mr. Wittingham's proceedings last night, I shall deliberate a little before I act. You'd better tell him so when you next see him, just to keep him on his good behavior, and so good morning to you, my friend."

Thus saying, Ned Hayward turned away, and walked toward the town, without once looking back to see whether his late prisoner was or was not about to hit him a blow on the head. Perhaps had he known what was passing in worthy Mr. Gimlet's mind, he might have taken some precaution; for certainly that gentleman was considerably moved; but if the good and the bad spirit had a struggle together in his breast, the good got the better at length, and he exclaimed, "No, hang it, I won't," and with a slow and thoughtful step he walked up the stream again, toward the path which led to the moor.

Upon that path I shall leave him, and begging the reader to get upon any favorite horse he may have in the stable—hobby or not hobby—canter gayly back again to take up some friends that we have left far behind.

CHAPTER VII.

INTRODUCES MISS SLINGSBY TO THE READER.

The reader may remember that we left a lady and daughter, whom Ned Hayward afterward discovered to be a Mrs. and Miss Clifford, standing at the door of Sir John Slingsby's house, in the heart of what was called Tarningham Park. All that Ned Hayward (or the reader either) knew of their history at the moment that he quitted them, after having assisted them to alight from their carriage, was as follows: that the elder lady had been sent for to see her elder brother in his last moments, he having been accused of having gout in the stomach, and that she and her daughter had been stopped on the king's highway by three personages, two of whom, at least, had pistols with them, that they had been rescued by Captain Hayward himself, and another gentleman, that on arriving at Tarningham House it did not look at all like the dwelling of a dying man, and that the answer of the butler to Mrs. Clifford's inquiries regarding her brother's health was, "Quite well, thank you, ma'am," delivered in the most commonplace tone in the world.

At the precise point of time when this reply was made, Ned Hayward took his leave, remounted his horse, and rode back to Tarningham, and after he was gone Mrs. Clifford remained for at least thirty seconds somewhat bewildered with what seemed to her a very strange announcement. When she had done being bewildered, and seemed to have got a slight glimpse of the case, she turned an anxious glance to her daughter, to which Miss Clifford, who fully understood what it meant, replied at once, without requiring to have it put into words, "You had better go in, dear mamma," she said, "it will grieve poor Isabella if you do not, and beside, it might be risking a great deal to go back at night with nobody to protect us."

Mrs. Clifford still hesitated a little, but in the mean time some by-play had been going on which decided the question. The butler had called a footman, the footman had taken a portmanteau and some smaller packages from the boot of the carriage. The name of Mrs. Clifford had been mentioned once or twice, a lady's-maid crossing the hall had seen the two ladies' faces by the light of a great lamp, and in a moment after, from a door on the opposite side of the vestibule, came forth a fair and graceful figure, looking like Hebe dressed for dinner.

"Oh, my dear aunt!" she exclaimed, running across to Mrs. Clifford and kissing her, "and you, too, my dear Mary! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure; but come in, come into the drawing-room; they will bring in all the things—there is no one there," she continued, seeing her aunt hesitated a little, "I am quite alone, and shall be for the next two hours, I dare say."

Mrs. Clifford suffered herself to be led on into a fine large old-fashioned drawing-room, and then began the explanations.

"And so, Isabella, you did not expect me to night," said the elder lady, addressing Hebe. "Either for jest or for mischief some one has played us a trick. Have you got the letter, Mary?"

It was in Miss Clifford's writing-desk, however, as letters always are in some place where they cannot be found when they are wanted; but the fact was soon explained that Mrs. Clifford that very day about four o'clock had received a letter purporting to come from the housekeeper at Tarningham House, informing her that her brother, Sir John Slingsby, had been suddenly seized with gout in the stomach, and

was not expected to live from hour to hour; that Miss Slingsby was too much agitated to write, but that Sir John expressed an eager desire to see his sister before he died.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the fair Isabella, "who could have done such a thing as that?" and then she laughed quietly, adding, "well, at all events I am very much obliged to them; but it was a shameful trick, notwithstanding."

"You haven't heard the whole yet, Isabella," replied Mrs. Clifford, "for we have been stopped between this and Tarningham, and should have been robbed—perhaps murdered—if two gentlemen had not come up to our rescue—good heaven, it makes me feel quite faint to think of it." And she sat down in one of the large arm-chairs, and put her hand to her head, while her cheek turned somewhat pale.

"Take a little wine, my dear aunt," cried Isabella, and before Mrs. Clifford could stop her she had darted out of the room.

As soon as she was alone with her daughter, the widow lady gazed round the chamber in which she sat with a thoughtful and melancholy look. She was in the house where her early days of girlhood had passed—she was in the very room where she had gone in all the agitation of happy love as a bride to the altar. She peopled the place with forms that could no longer be seen, she called up the loved and the dead, the parents who had cherished and instructed her, the fair sister who had bloomed and withered by her side. How many happy, how many a painful scene rose to the eye of memory on that stage where they had been enacted. All the material objects were the same, the pictures, the furniture, the old oak paneling with its carved wreaths; but where were they who moved so lately beside her in that chamber—where was all that had there been done? The grave and the past—man's tomb, and the tomb of man's actions, had received them, and in the short space of twenty years all had gone, fading away and dissolving into air like a smoke rising up unto heaven, and spreading out thinner and thinner, till naught remains. Herself and a brother, from whom many circumstances had detached her, were all that were left of the crowd of happy faces that remembrance called back as she sat there and gazed around. Some tears rose to her eyes, and Mary, who had been standing by gazing at her face, and reading in it with the quick appreciation of affection all the emotions which brought such shadows over the loved mother's brow, knelt down beside her, and taking her hand in hers said earnestly, "Mamma, dear mamma, I know this is painful, but pray for my sake and Isabella's let the shameful deceit that has been played upon us produce a good and happy result. You are here in my uncle's house; be reconciled to him fully, I beseech you. You know that he is good-humored notwithstanding all his faults, and I cannot but think that if those who might have led him to better things had not withdrawn from him so completely, he might now have been a different man."

Mrs. Clifford shook her head mournfully.

"My dear child," she said, "you know that it is not resentment; it was your good father who did not feel it consistent with his character and station to countenance all that takes place here."

"But for Isabella's sake," said Miss Clifford, earnestly, and before her mother could answer, the young lady of whom she spoke reëntered the room with a servant carrying some refreshments.

"Oh dear aunt," she said, while the wine and water and biscuits were placed upon a small table at Mrs. Clifford's elbow, "it makes me so glad to see you, and I have ordered the blue room at the south side to be got ready for you directly, and then there is the corner one for Mary, because it has a window both ways, and when she is in a gay mood she can look out over the meadows and the stream, and when she is in her high pensiveness she can gaze over the deep woods and hills. Then she is next to me too, so that she may have merry nonsense on one side, and grave sense on the other; for I am sure you will stay a long while with us now you are here, and papa will be so glad."

"I fear it cannot be very long, my love," replied Mrs. Clifford. "In the first place I have come it seems uninvited, and in the next place you know, Isabella, that I am sometimes out of spirits, and perhaps fastidious, so that all guests do not at all times please me. Who have you here now? There seemed a large party in the dining-room."

"Oh, there are several very foolish men," answered Sir John Slingsby's daughter, laughing, "and one wise one. There is Mr. Dabbleworth, who was trying to prove to me all dinner-time that I am an electrical machine; and in the end I told him that I could easily believe he was one, for he certainly gave me a shock, and Sir James Vestage, who joined in and insisted that instead of electrical machines men were merely improved monkeys. I told him that I perfectly agreed with him, and that I saw fresh proofs of it every day. Then up by papa was sitting old Mr. Harrington, the fox-hunter; what he was saying I do not know, for I never listen to anything he says, as it is sure either to be stupid or offensive. Then there was Charles Harrington, who lisped a good deal, and thought himself exceedingly pretty, and Mr. Wharton, the lawyer, who thought deeply and drank deeply, and said nothing but once."

"But who was your wise man, dear Isabella?" asked Mary, very willing to encourage her fair cousin in her light cheerfulness, hoping that it might win Mrs. Clifford gently from sadder thoughts.

"Oh, who but good Dr. Miles," answered Miss Slingsby, "who grumbled sadly at everybody, and even papa did not escape, I can assure you. But all these people will be gone in an hour or two, and in the mean time I shall have you all alone."

"Then there is no one staying in the house, Isabella?" said Mrs. Clifford. "I heard at Tarningham that your father expected some people from London."

"Only one, I believe," answered the fair daughter of the house, "but he has not arrived yet, and perhaps may not. He is a Captain Hayward, who was ensign in papa's regiment long ago. I never saw him, but people say

'he's the best fellow in the world.' You know what that means, Mary: a man that will drink, or hunt, or shoot, or fish with anybody or everybody, and when none of these are to be done, will go to sleep upon the sofa. Pray, pray, do stay, dear aunt, till he is gone, for I know not what I should do with him in the house by myself. I positively must get papa to ask somebody else, or get the good doctor to come up and flirt with him to my heart's content, just as a diversion from the pleasures of this Captain Hayward's society."

"A very disagreeable person, I dare say," replied Mary Clifford; "it is very odd how names are perverted, so that 'a good creature' means a fool in the world's parlance; 'a very respectable man' is sure to be a very dull one; and 'the best fellow in the world' is invariably—"

But her moralizing fit was suddenly brought to an end by the door of the drawing-room being thrown open, and Sir John Slingsby rushing in.

Stay a moment, reader, and observe him before he advances. Honest Jack Slingsby! Roystering Sir John! Jolly old Jack! Glorious Johnny! By all these names was he known, or had been known by persons in different degrees of acquaintanceship with him. That round and portly form, now extending the white waistcoat and black-silk breeches, had once been slim and graceful; that face, glowing with the grape in all its different hues, from the *œil de perdrix* upon the temples and forehead to the deep purple of old port in the nose, had once been smooth and fair. That nose itself, raising itself now into mighty dominion over the rest of the face, and spreading out, heaven knows where, over the map of his countenance, like the kingdom of Russia in the share of Europe, was once fine and chiseled like Apollo's own. That thin white hair, flaring up into a cockatoo on the top of his head to cover the well-confirmed baldness, was once a mass of dark curls that would not have disgraced the brow of Jove. You may see the remains of former dandyism in the smart shoe, the tight silk-stocking, the well cut blue coat; and you may imagine how much activity those limbs once possessed by the quick and buoyant step with which the capacious stomach is carried into the room. There is a jauntiness, too, in the step which would seem to imply that the portion of youthful vigor and activity, which is undoubtedly gone, has been parted from with regret, and that he would fain persuade himself and others that he still retains it in his full elasticity; but yet there is nothing affected about it either, and perhaps after all it is merely an effort of the mind to overcome the approach of corporeal infirmity, and to carry on the war as well as may be. Look at the good-humored smile, too, the buoyant, boisterous, overflowing satisfaction that is radiating from every point of that rosy countenance. Who on earth could be angry with him? One might be provoked, but angry one couldn't be. It is evidently the face of one who takes the world lightly—who esteems nothing as very heavy—retains no impressions very long—enjoys the hour and its pleasures to the very utmost, and has no great consciousness of sin or shame in anything that he does. He is, in fact, a fat butterfly, who, though he may have some difficulty in fluttering from flower to flower, does his best to sip the sweets of all he finds, and not very unsuccessfully.

With that same jaunty light step, with that same good-humored, well-satisfied smile, Sir John Slingsby advanced straight to his sister, took her in his arms, gave her a hearty kiss, and shook both her hands, exclaiming in a round, full, juicy voice, almost as fat as himself,

"Well, my dear Harriet, I'm very happy to see you; this *is* kind, this is very kind indeed; I could hardly believe my ears when the servants told me you were here, but I left the fellows immediately to fuddle their noses at leisure, and came to assure myself that it was a fact. And my dear Mary, too, my little saint, how are you, my dear girl?"

"We were brought here, John," replied Mrs. Clifford, "by a very shameful trick." And she proceeded to explain to him the trick which had been practiced upon her.

"Gout!" exclaimed Sir John, "gout in the stomach! It would be a devilish large gout to take up his abode in my stomach, or else he'd find the house too big for him;" and he laid his hand upon his large paunch with an air of pride and satisfaction. "Gout! that does not look like gout, I think," and he stuck out his neat foot, and trim well-shaped ankle; "never had but one threatening of a fit in my life, and then I cured it in an afternoon—with three bottles of champagne and a glass of brandy," he added, in a sort of loud aside to Mary, as if she would enter into the joke better than her mother. "And so really, Harriet, you would not have come if you had not thought me dying. Come, come now, forget and forgive; let bygones be bygones; I know I'm a d——d fool, and do a great many very silly things; but 'pon my soul I'm very sorry for it, I am indeed; you can't think how I abominate myself sometimes, and wonder what the devil possesses me. I'll repent and reform, upon my life I will, Harriet, if you'll just stay and help me—it's being left all alone to struggle with temptation that makes me fail so often, but every ten minutes I'm saying to myself, 'What an old fool you are, Jack Slingsby!' so now you'll stay like a dear good girl, as you always were, and help to make my house a little respectable. Forget and forgive, forget and forgive."

"My dear John, I have nothing to forgive," answered Mrs. Clifford. "You know very well that I would do anything in the world to promote your welfare, and always wished it, but—"

"Ay, ay, it was your husband," answered Sir John, bringing an instant cloud over his sister's face. "Well, he was a good man—an excellent man—ay, and a kind man too, and he was devilish right after all; I can't help saying it, though I suffer. In his station, what could he do? An archdeacon and then a dean, it was not to be expected that he should countenance rioting, and roaring, and drinking, and all that, as we used to do here; but 'pon my life, Harriet, I'll put an end to it. Now you shall see, I won't drink another glass to-night, and I'll send all those fellows away within half an hour, by Jove! I'll just go back and order coffee in the dining-room, and that'll be a broad hint, you know. Bella will take care of you in the mean time, and I'll be back in half an hour

—high time I should reform indeed—even that monkey begins to lecture me. I've got a capital fellow coming down to stay with me—the best fellow in the world—as gay as a lark, and as active as a squirrel; yet somehow or other he always kept himself right, and never played at cards, the dog, nor got drunk either, that I ever saw; yet he must have got drunk too, every man must sometimes, but he kept it devilish snug if he did—by the by, make yourselves comfortable." And without waiting to hear his sister's further adventures on the road, Sir John Slingsby tripped out of the room again, and notwithstanding all his good resolutions, finished two-thirds of a bottle of claret while the servants were bringing in the coffee.

"Rather a more favorable account of your expected guest, Isabella, than might have been supposed," said Mrs. Clifford, as soon as Sir John Slingsby was gone. "A young man who did not drink or play in your father's regiment, must have been a rare exception; for I am sorry to say that it had a bad name in those respects long before he got it, and I believe that it did him a great deal of harm."

"Papa is so good-humored," replied Miss Slingsby, "that he lets people do just what they like with him. I am sure he wishes to do all that is right."

Mrs. Clifford was silent for a moment or two, and then turned the conversation; but in the house of her brother she was rather like a traveler who, riding through a country, finds himself suddenly and unexpectedly in the midst of what they call in Scotland a shaking moss; whichever path she took, the ground seemed to be giving way under her. She spoke of the old park and the fine trees, and to her dismay, she heard that Sir John had ordered three hundred magnificent oaks to be cut down and sold. She spoke of a sort of model farm which had been her father's pride, and after a moment or two of silence, Isabella thought it better, to prevent her coming upon the same subject with her father, by telling her that Sir John, not being fond of farming, had disposed of it some three months before to Mr. Wharton, the solicitor.

"He could not find a tenant easily for it," she continued, "and it annoyed him to have it unoccupied, so he was persuaded to sell it, intending to invest the money in land adjoining the rest of the property."

"I hope Mr. Wharton gave him a fair price for it?" said Mrs. Clifford.

"I really don't know," answered her niece · "I dislike that man very much."

"And so do I," said Mary Clifford.

"And so do I," added her mother, thoughtfully.

Mr. Wharton had evidently not established himself in the favor of the ladies, and as ladies are always right, he must have been a very bad man indeed.

To vary the pleasures of such a conversation, Miss Slingsby soon after ordered tea, trusting that her father would return before it was over. Sir John Slingsby's half-hour, however, extended itself to an hour and a half, but then an immense deal of loud laughing and talking, moving feet, seeking for hats and coats, and ultimately rolling of wheels, and trotting of horses, was heard in the drawing-room, and the baronet himself again appeared, as full of fun and good-humor as ever. He tried, indeed, somewhat to lower the tone of his gayety, to suit his sister's more rigid notions; but although he was not in the least tipsy—and indeed it was a question which might have puzzled Babbage's calculating machine to resolve what quantity of any given kind of wine would have affected his brain to the point of inebriety—yet the potations in which he had indulged had certainly spread a genial warmth through his bosom, which kept his spirits at a pitch considerably higher than harmonized very well with Mrs. Clifford's feelings.

After about half an hour's conversation, then, she complained of fatigue, and retired to bed, and was followed by her niece and her daughter, after the former, at her father's desire, had sung him a song to make him sleep comfortably. Sir John then stretched his legs upon a chair to meditate for a minute or two over the unexpected event of his sister's arrival. But the process of meditation was not one that he was at all accustomed to, and consequently he did not perform it with great ease and dexterity. After he had tried it for about thirty seconds, his head nodded, and then looking up, he said, "Ah!" and then attempted it again. Fifteen seconds were enough this time; but his head, finding that it had disturbed itself by its rapid declension on the former occasion, now sank gradually on his shoulder, and thence found its way slowly round to his breast. Deep breathing succeeded for about a quarter of an hour, and then an awful snore, loud enough to rouse the worthy baronet by his own trumpet. Up he started, and getting unsteadily upon his legs, rubbed his eyes, and muttered to himself, "Time to go to bed." Such was the conclusion of his meditation, and the logical result of the process in which he had been engaged.

The next morning, however, at the hour of half-past nine, found Sir John in the breakfast-room, as fresh, as rosy, and as gay as ever. If wine had no effect upon his intellect at night, it had none upon his health and comfort in the morning; the blushing banner that he bore in his countenance was the only indication of the deeds that he achieved; and kissing the ladies all round, he sat down to the breakfast-table and spent an hour with them in very agreeable chat. He was by no means ill-informed, not without natural taste, a very fair theoretical judgment, which was lamentably seldom brought into practice, and he could discourse of many things, when he liked it, in as gentlemanlike and reasonable a manner as any man living; while his cheerful good-humor shed a sunshine around that, in its sparkling warmth, made men forget his faults and over-estimate his good qualities. He had a particular tact, too, of palliating errors that he had committed, sometimes by acknowledging them frankly, and lamenting the infatuation that produced them, sometimes by finding out excellent good reasons for doing things which had a great deal better been left undone. Mary and Isabella had been walking in the park before breakfast, talking of all those things which young ladies find to converse about when they have not met for some time; and Sir John, at once aware that his niece's eye must have marked the destruction going on among the old

rees, asked her in the most deliberate tone in he world, if she had seen the improvements ie was making.

Mary Clifford replied "No," and looked at ier cousin as if for explanation, and then Sir ohn exclaimed,

"God bless my soul, did you not see the illey I am cutting! It will make the most eautiful vista in the world. First you will go ound from the house by the back of the wood, lowly mounting the hill, by what we call the Broad Walk, and then when you have reached he top, you will have a clear view down through a sort of glade, with the old trees on your right and left hand, over the clumps of young firs in the bottom, catching the stream here and there, and having the park-wall quite concealed, till the eye, passing over the meadows, just rests upon Tarningham church, and then running on, gets a view of your own place, Steenham, looking like a white speck on the side of the hill, and the prospect is closed by the high grounds beyond. My dear Mary, it is the greatest improvement that ever was made —we will go and see it."

Now the real truth was, that Sir John Slingsby, some four or five months before, had very much wanted three thousand pounds, and he had determined to convert a certain number of his trees into bank-notes; but being a man of very good taste, as I have said, he had arranged the cutting so as to damage his park scenery as little as possible. Nevertheless, in all he said to Mary Clifford, strange as the assertion may seem, he was perfectly sincere; for he was one of those men who always begin by deceiving themselves, and having done that, can hardly be said to deceive others. It is a sort of infectious disease they have, that is all, and they communicate it, after having got it themselves. Before he had cut a single tree, he had perfectly persuaded himself that to do so would effect the greatest improvement in the world, and he was quite proud of having beautified his park, and at the same time obtained three thousand pounds of ready money.

Doubtless, had the conversation turned that way, he would have found as good an excuse, as valid a reason, as legitimate a motive, for selling the model farm; but that not being the case, they went on talking of different subjects, till suddenly the door opened, the butler, who was nearly as fat as his master, advanced three steps in a solemn manner, and announced, "Captain Hayward."

Sir John instantly started up, and the three ladies raised their eyes simultaneously, partly with that peculiar sort of curiosity which people feel when they look into the den of some rare wild beast, and partly with that degree of interest which we all take in the outward form and configuration of one of our own species, upon whom depends a certain portion of the pleasure or pain, amusement or dullness, of the next few hours. The next moment our friend Ned Hayward was in the room. He was well-dressed and well-looking, as I have already described him in his riding costume. Gentleman was in every line and every movement, and his frank, pleasant smile, his clear, open countenance, were very engaging even at the first sight. Sir John shook him warmly by the hand, and although the baronet's countenance was so burgeoned and blossomed since he last saw him, that the young gentleman had some difficulty in recognizing him, his former colonel, yet Ned Hayward returned his grasp with equal cordiality, and then looked round, as his host led him up toward Miss Slingsby, and introduced them to each other. Great was the surprise of both the baronet and his daughter, to see Mrs. Clifford rise, and with a warm smile extend her hand to their new guest, and even Mary Clifford follow her mother's example, and welcome, as if he were an old friend, the very person with whose name they had seemed unacquainted the night before.

"Ah, ha, Ned!" cried Sir John; "how is this, boy? Have you been poaching upon my preserves without my knowing it? 'Pon my life, Harriet, you have kept your acquaintance with my little ensign quite snug and secret."

"It is an acquaintance of a very short date, John," replied Mrs. Clifford; "but one which has been of inestimable service to me already."

And she proceeded in a very few words to explain to her brother the debt of gratitude she owed to Captain Hayward for his interference the night before, and for the courtesy he had shown in escorting and protecting her to the doors of that very house.

Sir John immediately seized his guest by the two lappels of the coat, exclaiming,

"And why the devil didn't you come in, you dog? What, Ned Hayward at my gates, an expected guest, and not come in! I can tell you we should have given you a warm reception, fined you a couple of bottles for being late at dinner, and sent you to bed roaring drunk."

Ned Hayward gave a gay glance round at the ladies, as if inquiring whether they thought these were great inducements; he answered, however,

"Strange to say, I did not know it was your house, Sir John."

And now having placed our friend Ned Hayward comfortably between two excessively pretty girls of very different styles of beauty, and very different kinds of mind, I shall leave Fate to settle his destiny, and turn to another scene which had preceded his arrival at Tarningham House.

CHAPTER VIII.

NED HAYWARD AND BEAUCHAMP PAY A VISIT TO MR. WITTINGHAM.

Man never sees above half of anything, never knows above half of anything, never understands above half of anything; and upon this half-sight, half-knowledge, and half-understanding, he acts, supplying the deficiency of his information by a guess at the rest, in which there is more than an equal chance that he is wrong instead of right. That is the moral of this chapter.

After Ned Hayward's interview with Stephen Gimlet, *alias* Wolf, our friend turned his steps back toward Tarningham, and arrived at the White Hart by eight o'clock. About three quarters of an hour had shaved him, dressed him, and brushed his hair, and down he went to the little parlor in which he had passed the

preceding evening, just in time to find Mr. Beauchamp beginning his breakfast. Although the latter gentleman shook his companion cordially by the hand, and seemed to look upon his presence in the parlor as a matter of course, Ned Hayward thought fit to apologize for his intrusion, adding, "I shall not maroon myself upon you very long, for soon after breakfast I shall decamp to Sir John Slingsby's."

"I am sorry, I assure you, to lose the pleasure of your society so soon," replied Beauchamp; and then added, addressing the maid, who had just brought in some broiled ham, "you had better bring some more cups and saucers, my good girl."

"And some more ham, and also a cold fowl," added Ned Hayward. "I have the appetite of an ogre, and if you do not make haste, I must have a bit out of your rosy cheek, my dear, just to stay my stomach."

"La, sir!" cried the maid, with a coquetish little titter; but she ran away to get what was wanted, as if she were really afraid of the consequences of Ned Hayward's appetite, and as soon as she was gone, he said,

"I have got news for you, Beauchamp; but I will wait till the room is clear before I give it. I have been up and out, over the hills and far away, this morning; so I have well earned my breakfast."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion with a look of surprise, "really you are an active general, but you should have given your fellow-soldiers information of your movements, and we might have combined operations."

"There was no time to be lost," answered Hayward.

But at that moment the maid returned with the cold fowl; the ham was still in the rear, and it was not till breakfast was half over that the young officer could tell his tale. When he had got as far with it as the first explanations of Mr. Gimlet, Beauchamp exclaimed eagerly, "And what did it turn out to be?"

"Nothing after all but a love affair," answered Ned. "Now, my dear Beauchamp, I have as much compassion for all lovers as an old match-making dowager, and therefore I think it will be better to let this matter drop quietly."

"Oh, certainly," answered his new friend. "I am quite as tender-hearted in such matters as yourself; but are you quite sure of the fact? for this seems to me to have been a very odd way of making love."

"It was so assuredly," replied Hayward, "but nevertheless the tale is true. The fact is the young lady is an heiress, the mother strict—most likely the latter looks for some high match for her daughter, and will not hear of the youth's addresses. He falls into despair, and with a Roman courage resolves to carry off a bride. Unfortunately for his purpose, we come up, and the rape of the Sabines is prevented; but 'pon my honor, I admire the fellow for his spirit. There is something chivalrous, nay more, feudal about it. He must fancy himself some old baron who had a right prescriptive to run away with every man's daughter that suited him; and, on my life, my dear Beauchamp, I can go on no further in attempting to punish him for a deed whose hot and proof spirit shames this milk-and-water age. Oh, the times of carrying off heiresses, of robbing in cocked hats, and full-bottomed wigs, of pinking one's adversary under the fifth rib in Leicester Fields, with gentlemen in high shoes and gold lace for seconds, and chairmen for spectators, when will they come again? Gone, gone forever, my dear Beauchamp, into the same box as our grandmother's brocade-gown, and with them the last spark of the spirit of chivalry has expired."

"Very true," answered Beauchamp, smiling at his companion's tirade, "there was certainly an adventurous turn about those days which saved them from dullness; but yet there was a primness about them which was curious, a formality mingling with their wildest excesses, a prudery with their licentiousness, which can only be attributed to the cut of their clothes. There is some mysterious link between them, depend upon it, Hayward, and whether it be that the clothes affect the man, or the man the clothes, it is not for me to say; but the grand internal harmony of nature will not be violated, and the spirit of the age is represented in the coats, waistcoats, and breeches of the people of the period much better than in all the stupid books written from time to time to display it."

This was the first sentence that Ned Hayward had ever heard his companion speak in a jocular tone, but Beauchamp immediately went on in a graver manner to say, "Yet after all, I do not see how we can drop this matter entirely. Far be it from me, of all men on earth, to persecute another, but yet, having already given information of this attempt at robbery, as it seemed to us, and tendered our evidence on oath, we cannot well draw back. A gross offense has indubitably been committed, not only in the attack upon these two ladies, but also in the very violent and murderous resistance which was made when we arrived to their rescue; and this young gentleman should have a warning at least."

"To be sure, to be sure," answered Ned Hayward, "I have got the pistol ball singing in my ear now, and I am quite willing to give him a fright, and old Wittingham too. The latter I will, please heaven, torment out of the remnant of seven senses that he has left, for a more pompous, vulgar old blockhead I never saw; and therefore I should propose at once—that is to say, as soon as I have done this cup of coffee—you have finished, I see—to go to good Mr. Wittingham's and belabor him with our small wits till he is nearly like the man who was scourged to death with rushes."

"Nay, nothing quite so sanguinary as that, I trust," said Beauchamp, "but I will accompany you willingly, and see fair play between you and the magistrate."

According to this arrangement, as soon as breakfast was over, and Ned Hayward had given some directions with regard to preparing his horse, his baggage, and a conveyance for the latter, the two gentlemen sallied forth to the magistrate's room in the town, where they found Mr. Wittingham seated with a clerk, the inferior attorney of the place. The latter was a man well fitted to prompt an ignorant and self-conceited magistrate in a matter of difficulty, if its importance were not very great, and he knew all

he particulars. He was a little fat compact man, in form, feature, and expression like a Chinese pig. His nose had the peculiar turn-up of the snout of that animal, his small eyes the same sagacious twinkle, his retreating under-jaw the same voracious and ever-ready look, and when at all puzzled he would lift his head and give a peculiar snort, so exceedingly porcine in its tone, that one could scarcely divest one's self of the idea that he was one of the mudoving herd.

On the present occasion, indeed, he was ignorant of the facts of the case about to be brought before Mr. Wittingham. The latter gentleman had considered with great solicitude whether he should make him acquainted with all that had occurred and seek his advice and coöperation. But Mr. Wittingham was cautious, exceedingly cautious, as I have already shown, when no strong passion caused him to act in a decided manner upon the spur of the moment. His natural impulse might indeed be vehement, and he frequently had to repeat to himself that sage adage, "The least said soonest mended," before he could get himself to refrain from saying a word to the clerk, Mr. Bacon, except that two men had come to him the night before with a cock-and-a-bull story about a highway robbery, of which he did not believe a word, and they were to come again that morning, when he should sift them thoroughly.

Now it is wonderful how the very least bits of art will frequently betray the artist. Mr. Wittingham merely said "Two men," which led his clerk, Mr. Bacon, to suppose that he had never seen either of the two men before; but when Mr. Beauchamp appeared in company with Ned Hayward, and the clerk recollected that the magistrate had very frequently wondered in his presence, who Mr. Beauchamp could be, and had directed him to make every sort of inquiry, he naturally said to himself, "Ha, ha, Wittingham has got something that he wishes to conceal; if not, why didn't he say at once that Beauchamp was one of the two. There's a screw loose somewhere, that's clear."

On Ned Hayward the clerk's small eyes fixed with a keen, inquisitive, and marveling glance, as with his gay, dashing air, half-military, half-sporting, firm and yet light, measured and yet easy, he advanced into the room and approached the table. It was a sort of animal that Mr. Bacon had never seen in his life before, and he looked just like a young pig when it sees a stage-coach dash by, standing firm for a minute, but ready in an instant to toss up its snout and curl up its tail, and caper off with a squeak as fast as it can go.

"Well, Mr. Witherington," said Ned Hayward, perfectly aware that nothing so much provokes a pompous man as mistaking his name, "here we are according to appointment, and doubtless you are ready to take our depositions, Mr. Withe..gton."

"Wittingham, sir," said the magistrate, impressively, laying strong emphasis on each syllable; "I beg you'll give me my own name and nobody else's.'

"Ay, ay, Whittington," said Ned Hayward, with the utmost composure, "I forgot; I knew it was some absurd name in an old ballad or story, and confounded you somehow or other with the man in 'Chevy Chase,' who

> 'When his legs were smitten off,
> He fought upon his stumps.'

But I remember now, you're the son of the Lord Mayor of London, the cat-man."

"No, sir, no," exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, whose face had turned purple with rage, "I am not his son, and you must be a fool to think so, for he died two hundred years ago."

"Oh, I know nothing of his history," said Ned Hayward, laughing, "and beside, I dare say it's all a fable."

"This gentleman's name is Wittingham, sir," said the clerk, "W-I-T wit, T-I-N-G ting, H-A-M ham, Wittingham."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, sir," said the young gentleman, "I shan't forget it now, '*Littera scripta manet*,' Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name is Bacon, sir," said the clerk, with a grunt.

"Ah, very well, very well," replied Ned Hayward, "now to business. Wittingham, Bacon, and Co., I shan't forget that; an excellent good firm, especially when the junior partner is cut into rashers and well roasted. We are here, sir, to tender information upon oath, when it can no longer be of any avail, which we tendered last night, when it might have been of avail, in regard to an attempt at highway robbery committed yesterday evening upon the persons of two ladies in this neighborhood, namely, Mrs. Clifford and her daughter."

"Tendered last night, sir," exclaimed the clerk in spite of a tremendous nudge from Mr. Wittingham, "pray whom did you tender it to?"

"To the right reverend gentleman on the bench," said Ned Hayward with a profound bow to the worthy magistrate; and then looking at him full in the face with a significant smile, the young gentleman added, "he refused to take our depositions on secret motives, or information of his own, which, as it was kept in the profound depth of his mind, I will not pretend to penetrate."

Mr. Wittingham was in a state of most distressing perplexity. His fears were a powder magazine, Ned Hayward's smile was a spark, and there was a terrible explosion in his chest, which had nearly blown the window out.

"I—I—you see, Bacon," he whispered to the clerk. "I thought it was all nonsense, I was sure it was all nonsense—you may see by the fellow's manner that it is so—Who'd attend to such stuff!"

"I don't know, sir," said the clerk, "magistrates are bound to take informations of felonies tendered on oath; but we shall soon see who he is; we'll swear him," and taking up a paper from the table he began to write, lifting up his head after a moment and inquiring, "What is your name and profession?"

"My name is Edward Hayward," answered our friend, "late captain in his majesty's 40th regiment, now unattached."

Mr. Wittingham's face grew blanker and blanker. Yamen's own could not have looked a more russety brown. He did not know how to interfere with the clerk, or how to proceed himself; but at length, after sundry hems and haws, he said, "I think we had better hear the whole story first, and then take down the

deposition if we should find it necessary. If Mrs. Clifford was robbed, or attempted to be robbed, why the devil doesn't Mrs. Clifford come to give me information herself? I see no reason why we should suffer such accounts to be gone into by deputy. The offense was against Mrs. Clifford, and we shall always be ready to balance."

"The offense was against the law of the land, sir," said Mr. Beauchamp, stepping forward, "and we, who witnessed the offense, and prevented it from being carried further, now come forward to demand that interference of justice which cannot be refused without great danger to those who deny it."

"Well, well," said Mr. Wittingham, "I am not going to deny it; let us hear your story, and as you are one of the informers, be so good as to favor us with your name, profession, etc."

"My name, sir, is Beauchamp," replied the gentleman he addressed, "profession, I am sorry to say, I have none."

"Ah," said the magistrate dryly, but the clerk whispered sharply in his ear: "He has two thousand pounds in the bank, paid in the day before yesterday. Jenkins told me last night at the Free and Easy, so it's all a mistake about his being—you know what."

The clerk had a reverence for gentlemen who had two thousand pounds at one time in a country bank—much greater reverence than for captains of infantry, unattached; and consequently he proceeded to take Mr. Beauchamp's deposition first, with all due respect, notwithstanding everything Mr. Wittingham could do to embarrass his course of operations. Then came Ned Hayward's turn, but our good friend thought fit to be more serious when an oath had been administered, and delivered his evidence with gravity and propriety. As soon, however, as Mr. Wittingham began to meddle with the matter again, and to treat the affair as one of little consequence, and not deserving much consideration, the spirit of malicious fun seized upon Ned once more, and he said with a mysterious air, "Sir, I beg you will give this your most serious attention, for you cannot yet tell what parties may be implicated. In giving our testimony of course we speak to facts alone. I have strictly confined myself to what I saw, and have not even mentioned one circumstance of which I have even a shade of doubt; but without interfering with your business, Mr. Skittington—for I never take another man's trade upon me—yet I shall certainly feel myself called upon to investigate quietly, and by all lawful means, the whole particulars of this business. That a felony has been committed there can be no doubt; two pistols were fired at me with intent to take my life, or do me some grievous bodily harm; one ball went through my hair, and the matter is a grave one, which may probably bring some respectable persons into a noose under a gallows. Look to it, look to it, Mr. Whittington, for I shall certainly look to it myself."

"Well, sir, well, do anything you please," said the magistrate, "I will do my duty without being tutored by you. I consider your conduct very disrespectful and—"

But ere he could finish the sentence the door of the justice-room opened, and a young man entered, dressed in the garb of a gentleman. Mr. Wittingham's face turned as pale as death, and Ned Hayward fixed his eyes for an instant—a single instant—upon the countenance of the new comer. It was by no means a prepossessing one, and the expression was not improved by a black handkerchief being tied over one eye, and hiding part of the nose and cheek. The young officer instantly withdrew his eyes, and fixed them sternly on the ground. "This is too impudent," he thought, and there was a momentary hesitation in his mind as to whether he should at once point out the intruder as the chief offender in the acts lately under discussion. Good-nature, however, prevailed, and while Henry Wittingham advanced straight to his father's side, and with a look of bold fierceness whispered a word in his ear, Ned Hayward turned to the door, saying, "Come, Beauchamp, our business here is over, and I must go up to Sir John Slingsby's."

Beauchamp followed him, after giving a sharp glance at Henry Wittingham, and at the door of the house they saw a horse standing which seemed to have been ridden hard.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH A VERY YOUNG ACTOR MAKES AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE ON THE SCENE.

Mr. Beauchamp was sitting alone in the little room of the inn about five hours after Ned Hayward had left him. The day had been very warm for the season of the year, and though he had taken his walk as usual in the most shady and pensive places he could discover, he had found it oppressive, and had returned sooner than he ordinarily did. Mr. Groomber, worthy Mr. Groomber, the landlord of the White Hart, had perceived his return through the glass-doors of the bar, and had rolled in to tell him as a piece of news, that the postboy who had driven Mrs. and Miss Clifford had been, as he termed it, "had up" before Mr. Wittingham and examined, but had been speedily dismissed, he having sworn most valorously that he could not identify any of the persons concerned in stopping the chaise on the preceding night.

Mr. Beauchamp merely replied, "I thought so," and taking up a book, gave quiet intimation that he wished to be alone. As soon as the host had retired, however, he suffered the open volume to drop upon his knee, and gave himself up to thought, apparently of not the most cheerful kind, for the broad open brow became somewhat contracted, the fine dark eyes fixed upon one particular spot on the floor, the lip assumed a melancholy, even a cynical expression, and without moving limb or feature, he remained for at least a quarter of an hour in meditation most profound.

For my own part I do not see what business men have to think at all. If it be of the past, can they recall it? If it be of the future, can they govern it? No, no, and the present is for action, not for meditation. It was very foolish of Mr. Beauchamp to think, but yet he did so, and profoundly. But of what were his thoughts? I cannot tell. Some I know, some *I* do not know; or rather, like an intercepted letter, the actual course of his meditation was plain

enough, written in clear and forcible lines, but the wide world of circumstances to which it referred, its relations with his fate, with his past history, with his present condition, with his future prospects, were all in darkness.

"It is in vain," he said to himself, "all in vain! Peace, happiness, tranquillity—where do they dwell? Are they the mere phantasms of man's ever-building imaginations? creations of fancy to satisfy the craving need of the soul? And yet some men can obtain them. This very Captain Hayward, he seems at least as well contented, as well satisfied with himself, the world, and all the world gives, as it is possible to conceive. But it is not so—it cannot be so. There is a black spot somewhere, I am sure — some bitter memory, some disappointed hope, some aspiration ever desired. He owned he dared not venture to love—is not that to be in a continued chain, to bear a fetter about one? and yet he seemed contented with such a fate. It is the regulation of our desires that makes us happy, the bounding them to our means—ay, with those who have no already existing cause for sorrow, but the cup of our fate is ever open for each passing hand to drop a poison into it, and once there, it pervades the whole—the whole! by every drop down to the very dregs, turning the sweetness and the spirit of the wine of life to bitterness and death. What is it that I want that can make existence pleasant? Wealth, health, a mind carefully trained and furnished with the keys to every door of mental enjoyment—with love for my fellow-creatures, good-will to all men, I have all—surely all; but, alas! I have memory too, and like the pillar of the cloud, it sometimes follows me, darkening the past, sometimes goes before me, obscuring the future. Yet this is very weak. An effort of the mind —the mind I have vainly thought so strong—should surely suffice to cast off the load. I have tried occupation, calm enjoyments, fair scenes, tranquil pleasures, peaceful amusements. Perhaps in a more fiery and eager course, in active, energetic pursuits, in passions that absorb all the feelings, and wrap the soul in their own mantle, I may find forgetfulness. In all that I have hitherto done—there have been long intervals—open gates for bitter memory to enter, and the very nature of my chosen objects has invited her. Oh, yes, there must be such a thing as happiness: that girl's fair joyous face, her smile teeming with radiance, told me so. But I will not think of her. She is too bright, and fair, and happy to be made a partner in so hazardous a speculation as mine. I will go away from this place: it has given my mind some little repose, and I could have made a friend of that light, good-humored Hayward if he would have let me; but he has left me too—all things leave me, I think. Well, he is gone, and I will go too—'tis not worth while lingering longer."

At this point of his meditations some horses passed the window, and shadows darkened the room; but Beauchamp took no notice, till he heard a voice which had become somewhat familiar to him during the last eighteen hours, exclaiming, "Ostler, ostler!" and in a moment after, Ned Hayward was in the room again, but not alone. He was followed by the portly figure of Sir John Slingsby, dressed in riding costume, and though somewhat dusty, and certainly very round and heavy, yet bearing that undefinable and almost ineffaceable look of a gentleman which not even oddities and excesses had been able to wipe out.

Ned Hayward's words were few and soon spoken: "Mr. Beauchamp, Sir John Slingsby; Sir John, Mr. Beauchamp," were all he said, but the old baronet soon took up the conversation, shaking his new acquaintance warmly by the hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Beauchamp, very glad to see you. I find my family are under a great obligation to you—that is to say, my sister Harriet, Mrs. Clifford. Devilish impudent thing, by Jove, for those fellows to attack a carriage at that time of the evening, and very lucky you happened to be there, for my friend Ned Hayward here—though he has a notion of tactics, haven't you, Ned?—and is a stout fellow — could hardly have managed three of them."

"I look upon myself as very fortunate, Sir John," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "in having taken my evening walk in that direction; but at the same time, it is but fair to acknowledge that my share in the rescue of your sister and her daughter was but small. I only kept one man in play, while Captain Hayward had to contend with two."

"All the same! all the same, my dear sir," said the baronet; "the reserve shares all the glory of a battle even if it does not pull a trigger. The ladies, however, are exceedingly obliged to you—very good girls, both of them—not that they have commissioned me to express their thanks, far from it, for they are particularly anxious to do so themselves if you will give them the opportunity; and therefore they have begged me to ask if you would favor us by your company at dinner to-day, and to say that they will be devilish sorry if any previous engagement should prevent you, though they calculate upon to-morrow, if not to-day."

"I am quite an anchorite here, Sir John," answered Mr. Beauchamp, with a grave smile; but before he could finish his sentence, the old baronet, thinking it was the commencement of an excuse, hastened to stop it, saying,

"Quite a quiet dinner, I assure you—all as grave and proper as possible; no drinking, no laughing, no fun—all upon our good behavior. There will be nobody but you, Ned Hayward, I, and the doctor there; Harriet, Mary, and my girl—who, by the way, says she knows you —has seen you twice at the good doctor's—Doctor Miles's."

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Slingsby," said Beauchamp. "I was only about to answer you just now, Sir John, that I am quite an anchorite here, and therefore not likely to have many invitations to dinner. As I have not much cultivated the people of the place, they have not much cultivated me; and I believe they look upon me as a somewhat suspicious character, especially our friend Mr. Wittingham, who I find has been very curious in his inquiries as to whether I pay my bills, and where I go to when I walk out."

"Wittingham's an old fool!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "and like all other old fools, he

thinks himself the wisest man in the world. I wonder what the lord lieutenant could be dreaming of when he put him in the commission of the peace—a man no more fit for it than my horsewhip. I'll pay him for it all—I'll pay him—ask him to dinner—make him beastly drunk, and lodge him for the night in a horse-trough."

"I hope not this evening, Sir John," said Beauchamp, with a smile.

"Oh dear no," replied the baronet, with a look of rueful fear, "all very prim to-night—all as grave as judges—quite proper and discreet while my sister Harriet is with us—an archdeacon's widow, you know—a dean's, after all—though he was only dean for a couple of months—a very good man indeed, but exceedingly proper, terribly proper: the very sound of a cork frightened him out of his wits. I do believe he fancied that port and madeira are sent over in decanters, and claret in jugs with handles. However, you'll come, that's settled: half-past five, old-fashioned hours, gives plenty of time after dinner. But now that's no use," added the baronet, with a sigh, "we might as well dine at seven now—no use of a long evening. However, the girls will give us a song, or music of some kind, and perhaps we can make up a rubber at long whist, which will make us sleep as sound as dormice. No sin in that—no, Ned."

"None in the world, Sir John," answered Ned Hayward, "but a great deal of dullness. I never could make out in my life how men, with their wits about them, could spend hours throwing bits of painted pasteboard in a particular order for shillings and sixpences."

"Just as reasonable as standing up for hours to be showed for shillings and sixpences," answered Sir John Slingsby, "and both you and I have played at that, you dog. Everything is folly if you take it in the abstract—love, war, wine, ambition; and depend upon it, Ned, the lightest follies are the best—isn't it so, Mr. Beauchamp?"

"There is indeed some truth in what you say, Sir John," replied Beauchamp, with a thoughtful smile; "and I believe amusing follies are better than serious ones—at least I begin to think so now."

"To be sure, to be sure," answered Sir John Slingsby; "man was made for fun and not for sadness. It's a very nice world if people would let it be so. Oh, we'll show you some sport, Mr. Beauchamp, before we have done with you; but to-day you know we'll all be very proper—very good boys indeed—and then when the cat's away the mice will play. Ha! ha! ha! At half-past five, you know, and in the mean time, Ned and I will ride off and abuse old Wittingham. I'll give him a pretty lecture."

Good Sir John was disappointed however; his horses, his groom, and his bulky person had all been seen from the windows of Mr. Wittingham's house as he rode into the town with Ned Hayward, and as a matter of course, Mr. Wittingham was over the hills and far away before the visit to Mr. Beauchamp was concluded.

When Sir John and Ned Hayward left him, Beauchamp remained for some minutes with a smile upon his countenance—a meditative—nay, a melancholy smile.

"So fleet our resolutions," he said to himself, "so fade away our schemes and purposes. Who can say in this life what he will do, and what he will not do the next day—nay, the next minute? Which is the happiest after all, the man who struggles with fate and circumstance, and strives to perform the impracticable task of ruling them, or he who, like a light thing upon the waters, suffers himself to be carried easily down the current, whirling round with every eddy, resting quietly in the still pool, or dashing gayly down the rapids! Heaven knows, but at all events, fate has shown herself so resolute to take my affairs into her own hands, that I will not try to resist her. I will indulge every whim, and leave fortune to settle the result. I may as well purchase that property: it is as good an investment as any other, I dare say, and if not, it does not much signify. I will write to my agent to transmit the money to-day."

With this resolution he sat down, and had soon dispatched a few lines, which he carried to the post himself; then strolled out of the town for an hour, and then returned to dress, ordering a post-chaise for Tarningham House.

How different are the sensations with which one goes out to dinner at different times—ay, even when it is to the house of a new acquaintance, where we have little means of judging previously whether our day will be pleasant or unpleasant, joyous or sad. As there must be more than one party to each compact, and as the age and its object act and react upon each other, so the qualities of each have their share in the effect upon either, and the mood of the visitor has at least as much to do with the impression that he receives as the mood of the host. Wonderfully trite, is it not, reader? It has been said a thousand times before, but it will not do you the least harm to have it repeated, especially as I wish you clearly to understand the mood in which Mr. Beauchamp went, for the first time, to the house of Sir John Slingsby. It was then in that of an indifferent mood of which I have shown some indications, by describing what was passing in his mind after the baronet and Ned Hayward left him. There are, however, various sorts of indifferent moods; there is the gay indifferent, which is very commonly called, devil-me-carishness; then there is the impertinent indifference, with a dash of persiflage in it, just to take off the chill—as men put brandy into soda-water—which very empty and conceited men assume to give them an air of that superiority to which they are entitled by no mental quality. Then there is the indifference of despair, and the indifference of satiety. But none of these was the exact sort of indifference which Mr. Beauchamp felt, or thought he felt. It was a grave indifference, springing from a sort of morbid conviction that the happiness or unhappiness of man is not at all in his own hands, or that if it be at all so, it is only at his outset in life, and that the very first step so affects the whole course of after events, as to place the control over them totally beyond his own power. It is a bad philosophy, a very unsafe, untrue, unwise philosophy, and

a great author has made it the philosophy of the devil:

"Thus we
In our first choice are ever free;
Choose, and the right of choice is o'er,
We who were free, are free no more."

So says Göethe, according to Anster's beautiful translation, and I think it much better to give that translation which everybody can understand, than the original which one half of my readers cannot, and which would not be a bit better if they could.

Now Mr. Beauchamp was not the devil, nor anything the least like it, but yet this philosophy had been driven into him by his own previous history, and though he often resisted its influence, and strove to struggle with it, and by new acts to shape a new fate, yet he had been so often disappointed in the attempt, he had found every course, indeed, so constantly lead to the same result, that the philosophy returned as soon as the effort was over, and he looked upon almost every event with indifference, as destined to end in one manner, and that not a pleasant one.

Nevertheless, he could enjoy for the time: there was no man by nature better fitted for enjoyment. He had a fondness for everything that was great and beautiful; for everything that was good and noble; he loved flowers, and birds, and music, and the fair face of nature. His breast was full of harmonies, but unfortunately the tones were never prolonged; to borrow a simile from the musical instrument, there was a damper that fell almost as soon as the chord was struck, and the sound, sweet as it might be, ceased before the music was complete.

In driving along, however, the post-boy went somewhat slowly, and with a peculiarly irritating jog in the saddle, which would have sadly disturbed a person of a less indifferent mind—there was plenty of room for pleasant observation if not reflection. The road ran through wooded groves, and often turned along the bank of the stream. At times it mounted over a hill-side, and showed beyond a rich and leafy foreground, the wide extended landscape, undulating away toward the horizon, with the lines of wood and slope beautifully marked in the aerial perspective, and filling the mind with vague imaginations of things that the eye could not define. It dipped down into a valley too, and passed through a quiet, peaceful little village, with a group of tall silver poplars before the church, and a congregation of fine old beech-trees around the rectory. The whole aspect of the place was home tranquillity; that of a purely English village under the most favorable circumstances. Cleanliness, neatness, rustic ornament, an air of comfort, a cheerful openness, a look of healthfulness. How different from the villages one sometimes sees, alas! in every country—but less in England than anywhere else in the wide world—the abodes of fever, dirt, penury, wretchedness.

As he passed the rectory, with its smooth, well-mown lawn, and green gate, Beauchamp put his head to the carriage-window and looked out. He expected to see, perhaps, a neat one-horse chaise at the door, and a sleek, well-fed beast to draw it; but there was nothing of the kind there, and he remarked the traces of a pair of wheels from the gates on the road before him. Half a mile farther were the gates of Sir John Slingsby's park. It cannot be said that they were in very good order, the iron-work wanted painting sadly, one or two of the bars had got a sad twist, the columns of stone-work to which they were fixed needed pointing, if not more solid repairs. The lodge had all the shutters up, and the post-boy had to get down and open the gates.

Beauchamp sighed, not because he took any great interest in the place or the people it contained, but because the aspect of desolation—of the decay of man's works—especially from neglect, is well worth a sigh. The drive through the park, however, was delightful. Old trees were all around, glorious old trees, those ever-growing monuments of the past, those silent leafy chroniclers of ages gone. Who planted them, who nourished, who protected them? what times have they seen, what deeds have they witnessed, what storms have passed over them, what sunshine have they drunk, what sorrows, and what joys have visited the generations of man, since first they sprang up from the small seed till now, when they stretch out their giant arms to shelter the remote posterity of those whom they have seen flourish and pass away? Who can wander among old trees, and not ask such questions, ay, and a thousand more?

The sight was pleasant to Mr. Beauchamp, it had a serious yet pleasing effect upon his mind, and when the chaise drew up at the door of Tarningham House, he felt more disposed than before to enjoy the society within, whatever it might be.

The outer door was open, the fat butler threw open pompously the two glass doors within, a couple of round footmen, whose lineaments were full of ale, flanked the hall on either side, and thus Mr. Beauchamp was marshaled to the drawing-room, which he entered with his calm and dignified air, not in the slightest degree agitated, although he was well aware that two very pretty faces were most likely looking for his arrival.

Sir John Slingsby, in the blue coat, the white waistcoat, the black breeches and stockings, with the rubicund countenance and white hair, advanced at once to receive him, and presented him to Mrs. Clifford and her daughter.

"This young lady you already know, Mr. Beauchamp," he said, pointing to his daughter, "so I shan't introduce you here."

But that gentleman shook hands with Miss Slingsby first, proving that their acquaintance, however short, had made some steps toward friendship.

Isabella was a little fluttered in her manner, why, she scarcely knew herself, and the color grew a little deeper in her cheek, and her smile wavered, as if she would fain have seemed not too well pleased. All this, however, did not at all take from her beauty, for as a fair scene is never lovelier than when the shadows of drifting clouds are passing over it, so a pretty face is never prettier than under the influence of slight emotions.

Miss Slingsby and Mary Clifford were standing both together, so that Beauchamp had both

those sweet faces before him at once. Isabella was as fair as a lily, with eyes of a deep blue, and warm brown hair, neither light nor dark, clustering richly round her brow and cheek in willful curls that would have their own way. Mary Clifford was darker in complexion, with the hair braided on her brow, there was deep but gentle thought in her dark eyes, and though the short chiseled upper lip could at times bear a joyous smile enough, yet the general expression was grave, though not melancholy.

Beauchamp was a serious man, of a calm, quiet temper, somewhat saddened by various events which had befallen him, but which of those two faces, reader, think you he admired the most? The gay one, to be sure, the one the least like himself. So it is wisely ordained by nature, and it is the force of circumstances alone that ever makes us choose a being precisely similar to ourselves to be our companion through existence. Two tones, exactly the same, even upon different instruments, produce unison, not harmony, and so it is throughout all nature.

After a few words to Isabella, Mr. Beauchamp turned again to Mrs. Clifford, who at once spoke of their adventure of the night before, and thanked him for his kind assistance. Beauchamp said all that courtesy required, and said it gracefully and well. He expressed the pleasure that he felt to see that neither of the ladies had suffered from the fear or agitation they had undergone, and expressed great satisfaction at having been near the spot at the moment the attack was made.

While they were speaking, Sir John Slingsby had twice taken out his watch—it was a large one, hanging by a thick gold chain, and Mr. Beauchamp, thinking that he divined the cause of his disquiet, observed with a smile,

"Dr. Miles must be here, I think, for judging by small signs, such as the traces of wheels and an open gate, I imagine that he had left home before I passed."

"Oh yes, he is here," answered Sir John Slingsby, "he has been here ten minutes; but the old boy, who is as neat in his person as in his ideas, had got a little dust upon his black coat, and is gone to brush it off and wash his hands. That open chaise of his costs him more time in washing and brushing, than writing his sermons; but I can't think what has become of that fellow, Ned Hayward. The dog went out two hours ago for a walk through the park up to the moor, and I suppose 'thoughtless Ned,' as we used to call him, has forgotten that we dine at half-past five. Well, we won't wait for him; as soon as the doctor comes we will order dinner, and fine him a bumper for being late."

While he was speaking, Dr. Miles, the clergyman of the village through which Beauchamp had passed, entered the room, and shook him warmly by the hand. He was a tall, spare man, with a look of florid health in his countenance, and snow-white hair; his face was certainly not handsome, and there was a grave and somewhat stern expression in it, but yet it was pleasing, especially when he smiled, which, to say the truth, was not often. It may seem a contradiction in terms to say that he laughed oftener than he smiled, yet so it was, for his laugh was not always good-humored, especially in the house of Sir John Slingsby. There was, from time to time, something bitter and cynical in it, and generally found vent when anything was said, the folly of which he thought exceeded the wickedness. He was one of the few men of perfect respectability who was a constant visitor at Tarnigham House; but the truth was, that he was the rector of Sir John Slingsby's parish. Now no consideration of tithes, perquisites, good dinners, comforts, and conveniences, would have induced Dr. Miles to do anything that he thought wrong, but he argued in this manner:—

"Sir John Slingsby is an old fool, and one who is likely to get worse instead of better, if nobody of more rational views, higher feelings, and more reasonable pursuits takes any notice of him. Now I, from my position, am bound to do the best I can to bring him to a better state of mind. I may effect something in this way, by seeing him frequently, at all events, I can do much to prevent his becoming worse; my presence is some check upon these people, and even if it does little good to the father, there is that sweet, dear, amiable girl, who needs some support and comfort in her unpleasant situation."

Such were some of the considerations upon which Dr. Miles acted. There were many more, indeed, but these are enough for my purpose. He shook Beauchamp warmly by the hand, as we have seen, and seemed to be more intimate with him than anybody in the room, taking him aside, and speaking to him for a moment or two in private, while Sir John Slingsby rang the bell, and ordered dinner without waiting for Captain Hayward.

"William Slack, Sir John, has seen him," said the butler, "coming down the long avenue with something in his arms—he thinks it's a fawn."

"Well, then, he'll be here soon," said the master of the mansion, "serve dinner, serve dinner, by Jove, I won't wait. Devil take the fellow, the ensign shouldn't keep his colonel waiting. It's not respectful. I'll fine him two bumpers if the soup's off before he makes his appearance."

In the mean time the first words of Dr. Miles to Mr. Beauchamp were, "I have made the inquiries, my dear sir, according to your request, and it is well worth the money. It will return they say four per cent. clear, which in these times is well enough."

"I have already determined upon it," said Beauchamp, "and have written to London about it."

"Ay, ay," said the worthy doctor, "just like all the rest of the world, my young friend—asking for advice, and acting without it."

"Not exactly," answered Beauchamp, "you told me before what you thought upon the subject, and I knew you were not one to express an opinion except upon good grounds. The only question is now what lawyer I can employ here to arrange minor matters. The more important must, of course, be referred to my solicitors in London."

"We have no great choice," replied Dr Miles, "there are but two in Tarnigham, thank God. The one is a Mr. Wharton, the other a

Mr. Bacon, neither of them particularly excellent specimens of humanity; but in the one the body is better than the mind, in the other the mind better than the body."

"Probably I should like the latter best," answered Beauchamp; "but pray, my dear doctor, give me a somewhat clearer knowledge of these two gentlemen for my guidance."

"Well then, though I do not love in general to say aught in disparagement of my neighbors behind their backs," Dr. Miles replied, "I must, I suppose, be more definite. Mr. Wharton is a quiet, silent man, gentlemanlike in appearance, and in manners, cautious, plausible, and affecting friendship for his clients. I have never known him set the poor by the ears for the sake of small gains, or promote dissensions among farmers in order to make a lawsuit. On the contrary, I have heard him dissuade from legal proceedings, and say that quarrels are very foolish things."

"A good sort of person," said Beauchamp.

"Hear the other side, my dear sir," rejoined the doctor, "such game as I have been speaking of is too small for him. He was once poor; he is now very rich. I have rarely heard of his having a client who somehow did not ruin himself; and although I do not by any means intend to say that I have been able to trace Mr. Wharton's hand in their destruction, certain it is that the bulk of the property—at least a large share of what they squandered or lost, has found its way into his possession. I have seen him always ready to smooth men's way to destruction, to lend money, to encourage extravagance, to lull apprehension, to embarrass efforts at retrenchment, and then, when the beast was in the toils, to dispatch it and take his share. No mercy then, when ruin is inevitable; the lawyer must be paid, and must be paid first."

"And now for Mr. Bacon!" said Beauchamp.

"Why, he is simply a vulgar little man," answered the clergyman, "coarse in manners and in person: cunning and stolid, but with a competent knowledge of law; keen at finding out faults and flaws. His practice is in an inferior line to the other's, but he is, at all events, safer, and, I believe, more honest."

"How do you mean, cunning and stolid!" asked Beauchamp; "those two qualities would seem to be incompatible."

"Oh dear, no," replied Dr. Miles; but before he could explain, the butler announced dinner, and as Sir John gave his arm to Mrs. Clifford, Beauchamp advanced toward Isabella. The doors were thrown wide open, and the party were issuing forth to cross the vestibule to the dining-room, when suddenly Sir John and his sister halted, encountered by an apparition which certainly was unexpected in the form that it assumed. In fact they had not taken two steps out of the drawing-room ere the glass doors were flung open, and Ned Hayward stood before them as unlike the Ned Hayward I first presented to the reader as possible. His coat was covered with a dull whitish gray powder, his linen soiled, and apparently singed, his hands and face as black as soot, his glossy brown hair rugged and burnt, no hat upon his head, and in his arms a very pretty boy of about two years old, or a little more, perhaps, on whose face were evident marks of recent tears, though he seemed now pacified, and was staring about with large eyes at the various objects in the large house to which he was just introduced.

"Why Ned, Ned, Ned, what in the mischief's name has happened to you?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "have you all at once become a poor young man with a small family of young children?"

"No, my dear sir," answered Ned Hayward, in a hurried tone, "but, if you have any women in the house, I will give this little fellow into their care, and tell you all about it in a few minutes. Hush, my little man, hush. We are all friends: we will take care of you. Now don't cry again: no harm shall happen."

"Women! to be sure!" cried Sir John, "call the housekeeper, one of you rascals. Women! Hang it, Ned, do you think I could live in a house without women? A bottle of claret is not more necessary to my existence than the sight of a cap and a petticoat flying about the house—in the distance, Ned, in the distance! No brooms and dust-pans too near me; but in a discreet position, far enough off, yet visible: woman is the sunshine of a house."

"Give him to me, Captain Hayward," said Miss Clifford, holding out her arms for the boy. "He will be quiet with me, I am sure. Won't you, my poor little fellow?"

The child gazed at her strangely as she took him, letting go Dr. Miles's arm to do so; but meeting the sweet smile that lighted up her beautiful face, he put his little arms round her neck the next moment, and hid his large blue eyes upon her shoulder. She held him kindly there, speaking a few gentle words to him, while Ned Hayward, looking round the party, addressed himself to the worthy clergyman, inquiring, "You are the rector of this parish, sir, I think?"

Dr. Miles made a stiff bow, not prepossessed in favor of any of Sir John Slingsby's old friends, and answered as briefly as possible, "I am, sir."

"Then can you tell me," asked the young gentleman, eagerly, "if there was any woman up at the cottage on the moor?"

Dr. Miles started, and replied, with a look of much greater interest, "No, sir, no. What has happened? Why do you ask? What cottage do you mean?— there are three."

"I mean the cottage of a man called Gimlet," answered Ned Hayward. "I saw some women's clothes—gowns and things; and I thought there might be a woman there, that's all. There was none, then?"

"There was one six months ago," replied the clergyman, in a very grave tone, "as lovely a creature as ever was seen, but she lies in my church-yard, poor thing. She is at peace."

"Thank God," said Ned Hayward, in a tone of relief. "Ah, here comes somebody for the child. My good lady, will you have the kindness to take good care of this little fellow. See that he is not burnt or hurt, and let him have some bread-and-milk, or things that children eat—I don't know very well what they are, but I dare say you do."

"Oh, by Jove, that she does!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "she feeds half the children in the parish. You take good care of him, Mrs. Hope—and now, Ned," he continued, turning

from the housekeeper to his guest, "what the devil's the meaning of all this?"

"I will tell you by and by, Sir John," answered Captain Hayward. "Pray go to dinner, and I will be down directly. Many apologies for being late; but it was not to be helped. I will not be ten minutes; but do not let me detain you—"

"But what is it all about? What has happened? Who the deuce is the child?" exclaimed Sir John. "Do you think either men or women can eat soup or digest fish with their stomachs full of curiosity?"

"By and by, Sir John, by and by," said Ned Hayward, making toward the stairs. "You shall have the whole story for dessert. At present I am dirty, and the dinner's waiting. It will get cold, and your curiosity keep hot."

Thus saying, he left them, and the rest of the party proceeded to dinner.

CHAPTER X.

THE POACHER'S COTTAGE.

If you quit the high-road from Tarningham on the right-hand side by that little sandy path, just a hundred yards on the other side of the stone-pump, equidistant from it and the milestone which marks, on the hither-side, five miles and a half from Tarningham, and walk straight on, it leads you over the moor, and through the midst of scenery very common in England; not much loved by ordinary ramblers, but which for me and a few others has a peculiar and almost indescribable charm. The ground is broken, undulated, full of deep sand-pits and holes frequently covered with gorge and heath, spotted occasionally with self-sown shrubs, a stunted hawthorn here and there, two or three melancholy firs, gathered together on the top of a mound, like a party of weary watchers trying to console each other by close companionship, while from time to time a few light birches, with their quivering leaves, and thin, graceful arms, and ragged coats of silver and brown, are seen hanging over the edge of a bank, or decorating the side of a hollow. If you dip down into one of the low dells, a sensation of hermit-like solitude comes upon you. You believe that there at least you may be,

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot;"

and you feel an irresistible desire to sit down at the foot of this shrub, or that, where the roots, like a well-governed state, serve to keep together, in close union, the light and incoherent materials that sustain them, and there to commune with your own thoughts in the silent presence of Nature. If you mount one of the little hills, the scene and the sensation is very different. The solitude is as deep as striking; no living thing is to be seen, unless it be a wild curlew, with its thin arched wings, whirling away with a shrill cry in the enjoyment of its own lonelipess; but there is an expansion, a grandeur, a strange sublimity in the extent of waste, with the long lines waving off in different hues like the billows of the ocean, first yellow sand, and green short turf, then a brown mass, where the sight loses its distinctness, then perhaps a gleam of water, then a blue line, deep as indigo, where the azure air and the black shade mingle together under some threatening cloud; then long undulations of purple, fainter and fainter, till who shall say where earth ends and sky begins. The bleakness, the stillness, the solitariness, the varied coloring, the vast extent, the very monotony of the forms mingle together in a whole that has not less grandeur in it than the highest mountain that ever raised its proud brow above its brother giants.

I have said you would have to go straight on, but what I said was quite untrue, and it is wonderful how many little falsehoods slip out of the innocent and unconscious pen, either in the haste of writing—which is very pardonable—or for the sake of a little graceful turn, a neat expression, or a pretty figure, which is not so small a fault. I do not believe there were ever ten sentences written by poet, historian, or romance-writer, in ancient or modern times, that had not some lie in them, direct or implied. I stand self-convicted. It is not true that you would have to go straightforward, for if you did you would walk into a pond, and moreover, might never chance to get out again; for what between rushes and reeds, and weeds and water-lilies, to say nothing of sundry deep holes at the bottom, there is every risk that you would get your feet entangled, and plunge headforemost into a place where you could neither swim nor disengage yourself. No, the path does not go straightforward. Of all man's circuitous ways, and every one who knows the human heart is well aware that it is too fond of crooked paths ever to pursue a straightforward course in anything—of all man's circuitous ways, I say, there never was one more serpentine or meandering than that which leads from the high-road upon the moor. First it turns round that pond I have mentioned, then it glides about the base of a little hill, then it forces its way in a slanting direction, through a bank of sand, then it turns aside from a deep pit, then it respectfully passes at a little distance from a tumulus, where sleep the ashes of the forgotten brave; and even when it gets upon the flat green turf, it twists about like a great snake, giving sad indications of man's vagabond fancies that lead him hither and thither, without rhyme or reason, wherever he may be going, and whatever may be the object before him.

But after all, why should he not be thus led? why should he not follow these fancies? Life's but a walk over a moor, and the wild-flowers that grow upon our path are too few not to gather them when they come within sight, even though it cost us a step or two aside. It's all in the day's journey, and we shall get home at last.

Yet it is curious to consider all these various bends and turnings in any little foot-way such as that we are now following. There is very often a reason for that which seems to us to be the effects of mere caprice. Now why did the fellow who first beat this road with his wandering foot, turn away here to the right, when it is as evident as the sun at noonday (that's to say in fine weather), that his object was to pass straight between those two little hillocks before us? Oh, I see, the grass is very green there; there is either some little spring, or else the

ground is soft and marshy in wet weather, and so he went round to avoid it. But if he did so, why did he not keep to the right of the hillock, that one with the hawthorn upon it, that is now in flower, scenting the solitary air with a perfume that no art could ever extract? Could it be to take a look at that wide view over the tall, magnificent trees of the park, with the wide-spread country beyond, and the little tower of Tarningham church, rising up between those tall silver poplars? Perhaps it might be so; for there is an inherent sense of the picturesque in the breast of most men, which, unlike any acquired taste, grows and refines, and becomes stronger and more overpowering the more it is indulged, and the more opportunities of indulgence that it has. It is perhaps the only thing of which it can be truly said that "increase of appetite grows by that it feeds on." And it is a beautiful scene, too, which might well temper a little out of the way. As to the rest it is clear enough, that when he had got there—the first wanderer over the moor, I mean—he was obliged to turn away to the right, in order to come into the proper direction again, so here are four of his deviations completely accounted for, and indeed, dear reader, I cannot help thinking, that if we were once or twice in life to examine curiously the motives of our own actions, or even of others, taking care to be impartial in both cases, we should find cause to cast away our critical spirit, and to believe that there are very often good and rational reasons for a turn to the right or a turn to the left, which we have been inclined to blame, simply because we did not perceive what those reasons were. Oh, charity, charity, rightly understood in thy largest and holiest sense, what a beautiful thing thou art; and did men but practice thee, how often should we be spared the crime and folly of condemning unwisely and unjustly.

But to return to my path: upon my life, after having regained the direction, the fellow has followed it straight on for more than a quarter of a mile. It is wonderful, it is marvelous! I never saw such a thing before! But nevertheless, it is true that there was nothing either to attract or drive him to one side or the other; and then, as if to make up for lost time, what zigzags he takes afterward! Round that clump of firs, under that bank, through between the birch-trees, here and there over the wildest part of the moor, till he passes close by the edge of that deep sand-pit, which must have rested a long time since it contributed any of its crumbling particles to strew the floor of the public-house, or sprinkle the passage of the cottage; for the bushes are growing thick down the slope, and there seems as if there had been a little kitchen-garden in the bottom, and a human habitation.

In the reign of that King George, under whose paternal sceptre flourished the English nation in the times whereof I am writing, there was a cottage in that sand-pit, a small lonely house, built of timber, laths, and mud, and containing two or three rooms. The materials, as I have shown, were poor, ease and comfort seemed far from it, yet there was something altogether not unpleasant in the idea of dwelling in that sheltered nook, with the dry sand and green bushes round, and feeling, that, let the wind rave as it would over the hill, let it bend down the birch-trees, and make the pines rustle and crack, and strike their branches against each other, the fury of the tempest could not reach one there—that, let the rain pour down in ever such heavy torrents, as if the windows of heaven were open, the thirsty ground would drink up the streams as they fell, as if its draught were insatiable. There were signs of taste, too, about the building, of a humble and natural kind. Over the door had been formed with some labor a little sort of trellised portico, of rough wood-work, like an arbor, and over this had been trained several plants of the wild-hop and wild-clematis, with one solitary creeping garden-rose. Sticks had been placed across the house, too, to afford a stay for these shrubs to spread themselves over the face of the cottage, if they had any strength to spare, when they had covered the little portico, and two or three wandering shoots, like truant children, were already sporting along the fragile path thus afforded them.

The interior of the house was less prepossessing than the outside; the mud floor, hard beaten down and very equally flattened, was dry enough, for the sand below it carried off all moisture; but in the walls of the rooms there was, alas! many a flaw through which sun or moon might shine, or the night-wind enter, and to say the truth, the inhabitants of the cottage were as much indebted to the banks of the pit for protection against such a cold visitant, as to the construction of their dwelling. The furniture was scanty and rude, seeming to have been made by a hand not altogether unaccustomed to the use of a carpenter's tools, but hastily and carelessly, so that in gazing round the sleeping-chamber, one was inclined to imagine that the common tent-bed that stood in one corner was the only article that had ever tenanted a shop. The great chest, the table, the two or three chairs, all spoke plainly the same artificer, and had that been all the room contained, it would have looked very miserable indeed; but hanging from nails driven into the wall, were a number of very peculiar ornaments. There was a fox's head and a fox's brush, dried, and in good preservation; there was the gray skin of a badger, and the brown skin of an otter; birds of prey of various sizes and descriptions, the butcher-bird, the sparrow-hawk, and the buzzard, as well as several owls. Beside these zoological specimens, were hung up in the same manner a number of curious implements, the properties and applications of some of which were easy to divine, while others remained mysterious. There were two or three muzzles for dogs, which could be distinguished at once, but then by their side was a curious-looking contrivance, which appeared to be a Lilliputian wire-mousetrap, sown on to some straps of leather. Then came a large coil of wire, a dog's collar, and a pair of greyhound-slips. Next appeared something difficult to describe, having two saw-like jaws of iron like a rat-trap, supported on semi-circular bars which were fixed into a wooden handle, having a spring on the outside, and a revolving plate within. It was evident that the jaws could be opened and kept open in case of need, and had I been a hare, a rabbit, or any other delicate-footed animal, I should not have liked to trust

my ankle within their gripe. I could describe several other instruments both of leather and iron, which were similarly suspended from the wall; but as I really cannot tell the reader what was the use of any one of them, it would be but labor thrown away. However, there were other things, the intent and purport of which were quite self-evident. Two or three small cages, a landing-net, fishing-rods, a gun, powder-flasks, shot-belts, a casting-net, a clap-net, and by the side of a window hung four small cages, containing singing-birds.

But who was he in the midst of all this strange assortment? Was he the owner of this wild, lonely dwelling? Oh no, it was a young man dressed as none could be dressed who frequented not very different scenes from those that lay around him. His clothes were not only those of a gentleman, but those of a gentleman who thought much of his own personal appearance—too much indeed to be perfectly gentlemanly. All that the tailor, the boot-maker, the hat-maker could do had been done to render the costume correct according to the fashion of the day; but there was a certain something which may be called a too-smartness about it all; the colors were too bright, the cut too decidedly fashionable, to be quite in good taste. Neither was the arrangement of the hues altogether harmonious. There are the same colors in a China-aster and a rose, but yet what a difference in the appearance of the two flowers; and the same sort of difference, though not to the same extent, existed between the dress of the person before us, and that of the truly well-dressed man even of his own time. In most other respects, his appearance was good; he was tall, rather slightly formed than otherwise, and had none of that stiffness and rigidity which might have been anticipated from his apparel. Demeanor is almost always tinged more or less by character, and a wild, rash, vehement disposition will as in his case give a freedom to the movements which no drilling can altogether do away with. His features in themselves were not bad. There was a good high forehead, somewhat narrow indeed, a rather fine pair of eyes (if one could have seen them both), a little close together, a well-formed nose, and a mouth and chin not badly cut, though there was a good deal of animal in the one, and the other was somewhat too prominent. The whole countenance, however, was disfigured by a black silk shade which covered the right eye, and a fresh scar all the way down the same side of the nose, while from underneath the shade, which was not large enough for its purpose, peeped out sundry rainbow rings of blue and yellow, invading both the cheek and the temple.

By these marks the reader has already perceived that this gentleman has been presented to him before, but in a very different garb, which he had thought fit to assume for his own particular purposes on the preceding night, and now he sat in the cottage of Stephen Gimlet the poacher, judging it expedient to keep himself at a distance from the peopled haunts of man, during the bright and bustling day at least. At night he proposed to betake himself to the inn which had been mentioned in his conversation with the housekeeper; but after his pleasant and hopeful conversation with his father, he had ridden straight to the dwelling of his companion, Wolf, where on the preceding day his portmantles had been left after they had arranged their plans; and having stabled his horse in a shed at the back of the building, had passed the heavy hours of darkness partly in bitter meditations, and partly in conversation with his comrade. Sleep could hardly be said to have visited his eyelids, for though after he cast himself down to rest he had dozed from time to time, yet agitating thoughts continually returned and deprived him of all real repose.

At an early hour of the morning, and while it was still dark, Ste Gimlet had gone out, as was his wont, and rising with the first rays of the sun, Henry Wittingham employed himself in dressing with scrupulous care, and then filled up about half an hour more in making a black patch to hide his disfigured eye, out of an old silk handkerchief. When this was accomplished, wanting something or another to tie this covering in its right place, he looked round the room, but in vain. Leather straps, dog-collars, rat-traps, brass-wire, would none of them do, and although near the nets there was lying a ball of whipcord, he thought that such a decoration as a string made with that material would but ill accord with the rest of his habiliments. He therefore walked across the little passage to the next room, and lifted the coarse wooden latch of the door. He found the door locked however, and muttering to himself, "D—n the fellow, did he think I would steal anything!" he was turning away, when a small sweet voice from within exclaimed, "I'm ready, daddy, I've got my stockings on."

"Oh, he's locked the child in, that's it," said Henry Wittingham to himself, and then raising his voice, he said, "Your daddy's not come back, Charley, so lie still and be quiet."

Then returning to the next room, the brilliant thought struck him of cutting off the hem of the old silk handkerchief to make a string for the black patch, which task being accomplished, and all complete, he sat down and thought.

Oh, how many sorts of misery there are in the world! In giving to man his fine organization, in raising him above the brute by delicate structure, by intellect, by imagination, and by infinitely extended hope and long-persisting memory, nature, indeed, did afford him infinite sources of enjoyment, but at the same time laid him open on every side to the attack of evils. In perfect innocence, indeed, man and his whole race might find nearly perfect happiness. The Garden of Eden is but a type of the moral paradise of a perfectly virtuous state; but the moment that sin entered, the thorns and briers grew up to tear all feet; and the very capabilities of refined happiness became the defenceless points for pain and wretchedness to assail us. Infinite, indeed, are their attacks, and innumerable the forms that they assume; but of all the shapes of misery, what is to be more dreaded, what is more terrible than thought to a vicious mind? And there he sat in thought, with the morning sunshine streaming around him, calm, and pure, and tranquil. The light that gave deeper depth to the shadows of his own heart. What did he think of? Where did his meditations rest? On the happiness that was passed

away, on the gay hours of childhood, on the sports of his boyish days, on the times when the world was young for him, and everything was full of freshness and enjoyment? Or did he think of the blessing cast away, of wealth, and comfort, and ease, with no reasonable wish ungratified, no virtuous pleasure denied? Or did he look forward to the future with fear and anguish, and to the past with remorse and grief? Heaven only knows, but there he sat, with his head bent forward, his brow contracted, his teeth tight shut, his right arm fallen listlessly by his side, his left hand contracting and expanding involuntarily upon some fragments of silk on the table. He gazed forward through the window, from under his bent brows. He saw not the sunshine, but he felt it and loved it not; and ever and anon the dark shadows of strong emotion crossed his countenance like misty clouds swept over the face of the mountain. He sat long, and was at heart impatient for his companion's return; but so strong was the hold that thought had got upon him, he knew not how time went. He heard not even the child cry in the neighboring room, when, wearied with waiting, it got terrified at the unusual length of his father's absence.

At length, however, the stout form of the poacher was seen descending the small steep path which led from the moor into the sand-pit. His step was slow and heavy, his air dull and discontented; but Harry Wittingham as soon as he beheld him started up and opened him the door of the cottage exclaiming, "Well, Wolf, what news?"

"Neither the best in the world nor the worst," answered the man somewhat sullenly.

"And what have you got for breakfast?" inquired the young gentleman; "I am as hungry as the devil!"

"You must wait a bit though," answered Wolf, descending, "I must look after the boy first. Poor little man, I dare say he has cried his eyes out, I've been so long—but if you're in a great hurry, you'd bettor light the fire, Master Harry; you'll find some wood in the corner there, and you can strike a light with the pistol flint."

Harry Wittingham did not look well pleased, and turning into the house again walked to the window, and affected to hum a tune, without undertaking the menial office that the other had assigned him. In the mean while, Wolf walked straight to the other door, unlocked it, and catching up the beautiful boy, who was sitting half-dressed on a stool crying, he pressed him eagerly to his breast, and kissed him once or twice. There were strange and salutary thoughts passing through his brain at that moment. He asked himself what would have become of that child if he had been detained and taken to prison, as indeed had been very likely. Who would have let the boy out of that solitary room, who would have given him food, who would have nursed and tended him? And once or twice while he was finishing what the child's tiny hands had left undone, in attempting to dress himself, the father rubbed his brow and thought heavily. Say what man will of the natural affections, they are the best ties to good conduct.

When he had done, he took the boy by the hand and led him into the other room, gave a glance to the fireplace, and then to Harry Wittingham as he stood at the window, and his brow gathered into a frown. He said nothing, however, lighted the fire himself, and taking the fish from his pocket proceeded to broil them. Then from the great chest he drew out a knife or two, a cut loaf of coarse bread, and two or three glasses, which he placed upon the table, and giving his child a large hunch of the bread, told him in a whisper, as if it were a mighty secret, that he should have a nice trout in a minute. To Harry Wittingham he said not a word, till at length the other turning round exclaimed, "Well, Wolf, you have not told me what news you bring."

"And you have not lighted the fire," said Ste Gimlet. "If you think, Master Wittingham, that you can live in a place like this and keep your hands clean, you are mistaken. You must shape your manners to your company, or give it up."

Harry Wittingham felt inclined to make an angry answer; but recollecting how much he was in his companion's power, prudence came to his aid, and he only replied, "Pooh, pooh, Wolf, I am not accustomed to lighting fires, and I do not know how to set about it."

"Faith, you may have to learn some day," answered his comrade. "When I built all this house and made all these chairs and tables with my own hands, I knew as little about a trade I never thought to practice, as you about this."

"Ay, you have practiced many a trade in your day," said Harry Wittingham, "and I never but one."

"Nor that a very good one," murmured Wolf to himself; but the storm thus passed away for the time, and the trout were broiled and put in a plate, from which the two men and the little boy made each a hearty meal.

The magistrate's son suffered their breakfast to pass over without making any further inquiry respecting the tidings which his companion had obtained in his morning's expedition; but after Ste Gimlet had produced a bottle of very fine white brandy, which certainly had not turned pale at the sight of a custom-house officer, and each had taken a glass mixed with some of the cold water which formed the purer beverage of the child, the poacher vouchsafed the information unasked, relating to Harry Wittingham a great part of what had taken place between himself and Ned Hayward. What he did not relate he probably thought of no consequence, though men's opinions might perhaps differ upon that subject; but at all events Harry Wittington gathered that he had been met and narrowly escaped being apprehended by a man, who had questioned him closely about the adventures of the night before, and who was acquainted with his name, and the share he had had in a somewhat perilous and disgraceful enterprise.

Such tidings cast him into another fit of dark and gloomy thought, in which he remained for about five minutes without uttering a word; but then he gave a start, and looked up with a gleam of satisfaction on his face, as if some new and pleasant conclusion had suddenly presented itself to his mind.

"I'll tell you what, Ste," he said, "I've just

thought of something. You must go down to Tarningham for me, and gather all the news you can about this fellow—find out who he is, and whether he is a London beak or not; and then when you have done all that—"

"I shall do none of it, Master Harry," answered the poacher, "I won't stir another step in this business—I don't like it, sir; it's not in my way. I undertook it just to please you for old companionship's sake, and because you told me the young lady would have no objection; and then when I was in it, I went through with it, though I saw well enough that she liked the thought of going as much as I should like to dance on a rope. But I will have no more to do with it now; it has done me enough harm already, and now I shall be watched ten times closer than ever, and lose my living—so go, I do not."

"Come, come, Wolf, there's a good fellow—this is all nonsense," said Harry Wittingham in a coaxing tone.

But the man cut him short, repeating sternly that he would not go.

"Then, by ——, I will go myself," exclaimed the young gentleman, with a blasphemous oath, "if you are afraid, I am not."

And starting up, he walked out of the cottage, took his way round to the shed at the back, trampling upon several of the flowers, which the poacher loved to cultivate, as he went; and in about a quarter of an hour he was seen riding up the little path toward the moor.

After he was gone, Ste Gimlet remained for some time in very thoughtful mood: now gazing idly at vacancy, now playing with the child's hair, or answering its infantine questions with an abstracted air. At length he muttered, "What's to be done now?" and then added aloud, "well, something must be done. Go out and play in the garden, Charley."

The child toddled out right gladly, and the poacher set himself down to mend his bird-net; but ever and anon he laid down the cunning meshes on his knee and let his thoughts entangle themselves in links not less intricate.

"I'll try the other thing," he said, after a time, "this does not do. I should not care for myself, but it's the poor baby. Poor dear Mary, that always rested on her heart, what I should do with the boy when she was gone. Well, I'll try and do better. Perhaps she is looking down on us—who knows?"

And then he fell to his work again with a sigh. He employed himself with several things for two or three hours. He finished the net; he made a wicker-basket—it was the first he had ever attempted, but he did it better than might have been expected, and then he called the boy into his dinner, giving him a trout he had saved when he broiled the others; for his own part he contented himself with a lump of the bread. When that was done, he went and caught some small birds on the moor, just above the edge of the pit, where he could see the child playing below. When he had thus provided their light supper—for the luxury of tea was unknown in Ste Gimlet's cottage, he came back and sat down by the boy, and played with him fondly for several minutes, gazing at him from time to time with a melancholy earnestness, which mingled even with the smile of joy and pride that lighted his eyes, as some movement of childish grace called forth the beauties of his child. Nevertheless, from time to time, there was a sort of absent look, and twice he went up to the bank above and gazed out over the moor toward Tarningham. At length he went away far enough to climb to the top of the neighboring barrow or tumulus, after having told the boy not to venture up the path. From the position in which he then stood, he had a fair view of the scene I have already described, and caught the windings of the high road down the hill more distinctly than from below.

"I shouldn't wonder if they had caught him," said Wolf to himself with a frown, and an anxious expression of countenance, "and then he will say it was my fault, and that I was afraid to go, and all that—Hang it! why should I care what he says, or what he thinks!" And with this reflection he turned round and went back homeward. He found the boy at the top of the bank, however, and gave him a gentle shake, scolding him till the big drops began to gather in his large blue eyes.

Stephen Gimlet was not satisfied with himself, and scolding the child he found did not act as a diversion to his own self-reproaches. After he had set his son playing again, he walked about moodily for near a quarter of an hour, and then burst forth impetuously, saying,

"I can't stand this, I must go and see what's become of him—they'll know at the turnpike if he's passed, and the old woman won't blab. Here, Charley, boy, you must go and play in the house now—it's growing late, and I'm going away—I shan't be long, and you shall have the bird-cages to play with."

The boy seemed to be well accustomed to it, and trotted away to the house before his father, without any signs of reluctance. He was placed in the same room where he had been in the morning, some empty bird-cages and two or three other things were given him for his amusement, and locking the door of the chamber, the poacher walked away, saying with a sigh, "There can no harm happen this time, for I am going to do no wrong to any one."

Vain, however, are all such calculations. The faults and virtues of others, as well as our own faults and virtues, enter into the strange composition of our fate, and affect us darkly and mysteriously, in a manner which we can never foresee. If we reflected on the eve of action on the number of beings throughout all time, and throughout our whole race, who may be affected, nay, who must be affected by any deed that we are about to perform, how many men would never act at all from hesitation, how many would still act rashly and heedlessly as they do now, from the impossibility of seeing the results. Happy is he who acts deliberately, wisely, and honestly, leaving the consequences with a clear conscience to Him who governs all aright.

The poacher had left his own door about a quarter of an hour, when two men took their way down into the sand-pit, the one on horseback, the other on foot. Harry Wittingham fastened his horse's bridle to the latch of the door, and going in with his companion looked round for Wolf, then crossing over to the other chamber, and finding it locked, he said,

"Stephen isn't here; there, take that up, and be off with it," and he pointed to his portmanteau in the corner where it lay.

The other man, who seemed a common farm-servant, or one of the inferior stable-men of an inn, got the portmanteau on his shoulder, and walked away with it, and Harry Wittingham remained for a minute or two with his hands behind his back looking out of the window. At the end of that time he said aloud: "Well, it's no use waiting for him, we should only have a ow, I dare say, so I'll be off too."

Before he went, however, he looked round the place for a moment, with an expression of mockery and contempt. What was in his bosom, it would be difficult to say, for the heart of man is full of strange things. Perhaps he felt it unpleasant to be under an obligation to the owner of that poor tenement, even for a night's shelter, and strove to salve the wound of pride by reducing the obligation to the lowest point in his own estimation. He might think that the misery he saw around did not make it a very desirable resting-place, and that he had little to be thankful for in having been permitted to share a beggar's hut. His eyes, as he looked around, fell upon some embers of smoldering wood on the hearth, and that called to mind one of the many bad habits which he had lately acquired, and in which he had not yet indulged through the whole of that day. He accordingly put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out some cigars, then not very common in England. Next taking up with the tongs a piece of the charred and still burning wood, he lighted one of the rolls of weed, cast down the ember, and threw the tongs back upon the hearth; after which, mounting his horse, he cantered away as blithely as if his heart had been innocent as a child's.

The embers fell upon the earthen floor, where, under ordinary circumstances they could do no harm; but it so happened that Stephen Gimlet, when he had done mending the net, had cast down the hank of twine close by the table. A long end of the string had fallen toward the fireplace, and a moment or two after Henry Wittingham had quitted the cottage, the piece of charred wood itself became black, but a small spot of fire was seen close to it, and a thin filing curl of smoke arose. It went on smoldering for about five minutes, creeping forward inch by inch, and then a gust of wind through the door, which he had left open, fanned it, and a flame broke out. Then it ran rapidly along, caught the hank of twine, which was in a blaze in a moment. It spared the netting needle, which was of hard box-wood, and for an instant seemed to promise to go out of itself; but then the flame leaped up, and the meshes of the net, which had been left partly on the table, partly on a chair, showed a spark here and there, flashed with the flame, and then, oh, how eagerly the greedy element commenced devouring all that it could meet with! Wherever there was a piece of wood-work it seized upon it; the table, the chair, the poles of the net, the upright posts of the wall, the beams of the roof, the thatch itself, and then instantly a cloud of dull black smoke, mixed with sparks, rose up upon the moor, from the sand-pit. The heat became intense, the smoke penetrated into the other chamber, the sparks began to fall before the window, a red light spread around, and then the terrified screams of a child were heard.

About a quarter of an hour before, a gentleman had appeared upon the moor, from the side of Sir John Slingsby's park. He had come up the hill as if he were walking for a wager, for there was something in the resistance of the acclivity to his progress, which made the vigorous spirit of youth and health resolute to conquer it triumphantly. When the feat was done, however, and the hill passed as if it had been a piece of level ground, Ned Hayward slackened his pace and looked about him, enjoyed to the full all that the wide expanse had of grand and fine, breathed freer in the high air, and let the spirit of solitary grandeur sink into his heart. He had none of the affected love of the picturesque and the sublime, which makes the folks who assume the poetical so ridiculous. He was rather inclined to check what people call fine feelings than not; he was inclined to fancy himself, and to make other people fancy him a very commonplace sort of person, and he would not have gone into an ecstasy for the world, even at the very finest thing that the world ever produced; but he could not help, for the life of him, feeling everything that was beautiful and great, more than he altogether liked, so that, when in society, he passed it off with a touch of persiflage, putting that sort of shield over what he felt to be a vulnerable point. Now, however, when he happened to be alone, he let Nature have her way, and holding his riding-whip by both ends, walked here and walked there, gazing at the prospect where he could get a sight of it, and looking to the right and the left as if not to let any point of loveliness escape him. His eyes soon fell upon the little tumulus already mentioned, with the sentinel fir-trees keeping guard upon the top, and thinking that there must be a good lookout from that high position, he walked slowly up and gazed over the park toward Tarningham. Suddenly, however, his eyes were withdrawn, as a cloud of white smoke came rolling up out of the sand-pit.

"Ha, ha!" he said, "my friend Master Wolf lighting his fire, I suppose."

But the smoke increased. Ned Hayward thought he saw some sparks rising over the bushes. A sudden sensation of apprehension crossed his mind, and he walked rapidly down the side of the hillock, and crossed the intervening space with a step quick in reality, though intended to appear leisurely; but in a moment a cloud of deeper-colored smoke, tinged with flame, burst up into the evening air, and he sprang forward at full speed. A few bounds brought him to the side of the pit, and as he reached it a scream met his ear. It was the easily-recognized voice of childhood, in terror or in pain, and Ned Hayward hesitated not an instant. There was a path down a couple of hundred yards away to the left, but the scene before his eyes counseled no delay. There was the cottage, with the farther part of the thatch all in a blaze, the window of the room beneath it fallen in, and the flame rushing forth, a cloud of smoke issuing from the door, and scream after scream proceeding from the nearer end of the building. His riding-whip was cast down at once, and grasping the stem of the birch-tree rooted in the very edge, he swung himself

over, thinking to drop upon a sloping part of the bank about ten feet below. The filmy roots of the shrub, however, had not sufficient room hold upon the sandy soil to sustain his weight; the tree bent, gave way, and came down over him with a part of the bank, so that he and his frail support rolled together to the bottom of the pit. He was up in an instant, however, he might be hurt or he might not, he knew nothing about it, but the shrill cry of the child rang in his ear, and he darted forward to the cottage-door. It was full of fire, and dark with suffocating vapor, but in he rushed, scorching his hair, hands, his face, and his clothes, found the other door blackened, and in some places alight with the encroaching fire, tried to open it, but failed, and then shouted aloud, "Keep back, keep back, and I will burst it open," and then, setting his foot against it, he cast it with a vigorous effort into the room. A momentary glance around showed him the child, who had crept as near to the window as possible, and, darting forward, Ned Hayward caught the boy up in his arms, and rushed out with him, covering his head with his arm, that none of the beams, which were beginning to fall, might strike him as they passed; then setting him down on the green turf when they were at a little distance, he asked eagerly, "Are there any more?"

The child, however, stupefied with terror, gazed in his face and cried bitterly, but answered not. Seeing he could obtain no reply, Ned Hayward ran back to the cottage and tried to go in again, but it was now impossible; the whole way was blocked up with burning rafters, and large detached masses of the thatch, which had fallen in, and were now sending up vast showers of sparks, as the wind stirred them. He hurried to the window and looked in, and though the small panes were cracking with the heat, he forced it open, and shouted at the extreme pitch of his voice, to drown the rushing sound of the fire, "Is there any one within?"

There was no answer, and the moment after, the dry beams being burnt away, and the support at the other end gone, the whole thatch above gave way, and fell into the room, the flame above carried up into a spire as it descended.

The heat was now intolerable, and forced a retreat to a distance. Captain Hayward took the boy up in his arms, and strove to soothe him, and gain some information from him. It was all in vain, however, and after a moment's thought, the gentleman said to himself, "I will carry him away to Tarningham House. Jack Slingsby will never refuse him food and shelter, I am sure, and in case there should be any one else in the place, it is vain to hope that one could save them now. We can send up people to look for the bodies. But let us see what's at the back of the house." He accordingly walked round, still carrying the boy in his arms, but found nothing there, except a low detached shed, which seemed in security, as the wind blew the other way. A long trough and spout, indeed, between the shed and the cottage, seemed in a somewhat perilous position, and as it was likely that they might lead the fire to the building yet uninjured, Ned Hayward thought fit to remove them before he left the ground. This cost him some trouble, as they were rooted in the sand; but when it was once accomplished, the took up the boy again, sought his hat, and crossing the moor, entered the western gates of Sir John Slingsby's park without meeting any one from whom he could obtain information, or to whom he could communicate the event which had just occurred.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHAPTER ON GHOSTS, AND A GHOST STORY.

The events detailed in the last chapter, or at least that portion of them in which he himself had borne a share, were related by Ned Hayward to the party at Sir John Slingsby's after he had rejoined them at the dinner table, having done his best to remove the traces of his adventure from his personal appearance. The smoke and sand were washed away, the burnt and singed garments had been changed for others, and Ned Hayward still appeared a very good-looking fellow, not the less interesting perhaps in the eyes of the ladies there present for all that he had done and suffered. Nevertheless, the fine wavy curls of his brown hair, which had been burnt off, were not to be recovered in so short a time, and both his hands showed evident signs of having been injured by the fire. He was in high spirits, however, for the assurance that there could be nobody else in the cottage but the boy, unless it was Gimlet the poacher himself, of which there was no probability, had relieved the young gentleman's mind of a heavy weight, and he jested gayly with Sir John Slingsby, who vowed that with those hands of his he would not be able to throw a line for a fortnight, replied that he would undertake to catch the finest trout in the whole water before noon the next day.

"And now, my dear sir," he continued, turning to the clergyman, "as you seem to know something of this good gentleman, Gimlet, and his affairs, I wish you'd give me a little insight into his history."

"It is a sad and not uncommon one," answered Dr. Miles, gravely, "and I will tell it to you some other time. My poor parishioners have a superstitious feeling about that pit, and that cottage, for a man was murdered there some years ago. You will find multitudes of people who will vouch for his ghost having been seen sitting on the bank above, and under a solitary birch-tree."

"It won't sit there any more," answered Ned Hayward, laughing, "for the birch-tree and I rolled down into the pit together, as I tried to drop down by its help, thinking it was quite strong enough to support me."

"Then I am afraid the ghost is gone altogether for the future," said Dr. Miles, in a tone of some regret.

"Afraid! my dear doctor," exclaimed Miss Slingsby, "surely you do not want ghosts among your parishioners!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sir John Slingsby, with a merry, fat, overflowing chuckle, "Isabella means, my dear doctor, that you may make your flock as spiritual as you please, but not reduce them quite to spectres."

"No, papa, you are a wrong interpreter," rejoined his daughter; "I meant to say that of all

men on earth, I should have thought Dr. Miles was the last to patronize a ghost."

"I don't know, my dear," replied the worthy clergyman, "a ghost is sometimes very serviceable in a parish. We are but children of a bigger growth, and a bugbear is as necessary sometimes for great babies as small ones, not that I ever used it or should use it; but the people's own imagination did that for me. I have heard, Sir John, that some men, when they were lying out to shoot your deer, were scared away by one of them fancying he saw the ghost, and you saved two good haunches of venison, to say nothing of the pasty."

"By Jove, that was a jolly ghost indeed," answered Sir John Slingsby, "and I'll give him a crown the first time I meet him. Doctor, a glass of wine."

"If ghosts have such effects upon poachers," said Beauchamp, who had been speaking in a low tone to Miss Slingsby, "how happens it that this man, the father of the boy whom Captain Hayward brought hither, fixed his abode in the spirit's immediate neighborhood?"

"Oh, he is a sad unbelieving dog," said Dr. Miles; but then suddenly checking himself he added, "and yet I believe in that I do him injustice; there is some good in the man, and a great deal of imagination. Half his faults proceed from an ill-disciplined fancy; but the truth is, being a very fearless fellow, and of this imaginative disposition, I believe he would just as soon have a ghost for a next door neighbor as not. Therefore I do not suppose that it was from any doubt of the reality of the apparition, but rather in defiance of it, that he set up his abode there; and perhaps he thought, too, that it might serve as a sort of safeguard to him, a protection against the intrusion of persons less bold than himself at those hours when ghosts and he himself are wont to wander. He knew well that none of the country people would come near him then, for all the ignorant believe in apparitions more or less."

"Now, dear Dr. Miles, do tell me," cried Isabella Slingsby with a gay laugh, "whether some of the learned do not believe in them too. If it were put as a serious question to the Rev. Dr. Miles himself, whether he had not a little quiet belief at the bottom of his heart in the appearance of ghosts, what would he answer?"

"That he had never seen one, my dear," replied the clergyman, with a good-humored smile, "but at the same time I must say that a belief in the occasional appearance of the spirits of the dead for particular purposes, is a part of our religion. I have no idea of a man calling himself a Christian and taking what parts of the Bible he likes, and rejecting or explaining away the rest. The fact of the reappearance of dead people on this earth is more than once mentioned in Scripture, and therefore I believe that it has taken place. The purposes for which it was permitted in all the instances there noticed, were great and momentous, and it may very possibly be that since the Advent of our Savior, no such deviations from usual laws have been requisite. Of that, however, I can be no judge; but at all events, my own reason tells me that it is not probable a spirit should be allowed to revisit the glimpses of the moon for the purpose of making an old woman say her prayers, or frightening a village girl into fits."

"You are speaking alone of the apparition of the spirits of the dead," said Mr. Beauchamp; "did you ever hear of the apparition of the spirits of the living?"

"Not without their bodies, surely?" said Miss Clifford.

"Oh, yes, my dear Mary," answered Dr. Miles, "such things are recorded, I can assure you, ay, and upon testimony so strong that it is impossible to doubt that the witnesses believed what they related, whether the apparition was a delusion of their own fancy or not—indeed it is scarcely possible to suppose that it was a delusion, for in several instances the thing, whatever it was, made itself visible to several persons at once, and they all precisely agreed in the description of it."

"One of the most curious occurrences of the kind that ever I heard of," said Beauchamp, "was told me by a German gentleman to whom it happened. It was the case of a man seeing his own spirit, and although we are continually told we ought to know ourselves, few men have ever had such an opportunity of doing so as this gentleman."

"Oh do tell us the whole story, Mr. Beauchamp," cried Isabella, eagerly, "I must beg and entreat that you would not tantalize us with a mere glimpse of such a delightful vision, and then let fall the curtain again."

"My dear Bella, you are tantalizing him," exclaimed her father. "Don't you see that you are preventing him from eating his dinner; at all events we will have a glass of wine first; shall it be Hermitage, Mr Beauchamp? I have some of 1808, the year before that rascal Napoleon mixed all the vintages together."

The wine was drunk, but immediately this was accomplished, Isabella renewed her attack, calling upon Mr. Beauchamp for the story, and in her eagerness laying one round taper finger upon his arm as he sat beside her, to impress more fully her commands upon him, as she said, "I must and will have the story, Mr. Beauchamp."

"Assuredly," he replied, in his usual quiet tone, "but first of all, I must premise one or two things, that you may give it all the weight it deserves. The gentleman who told it to me was, at the time of my acquaintance with him, a man of about seventy years of age, very simple in his manners, and, however excitable his fancy might have been in youth, he was, at the time I speak of, as unimaginative a person as it is possible to conceive. He assured me most solemnly, as an old man upon the verge of eternity, that every word he spoke was truth, and now I will tell it as nearly in his own language as I can, and my memory is a very retentive one. You must remember, however, that it is he who is speaking, and not I; and fancy us sitting together, the old man and the young one, warming ourselves by a stove on a winter's night, in the fine old town of Nuremberg."

BEAUCHAMP'S STORY.

"I am of an Italian family," said my friend, "but my father and my grandfather were both born in Germany; exceedingly good people in their way, but by no means very wealthy. My elder brother was being educated for a physi-

cian, and had just finished his course of study, when my father, having given me as good an education as he could in Nuremberg, thought fit to send me to Hamburg, that I might pursue my studies there, and take advantage of any opportunity that might occur for advancing myself in life. My stock of all kinds was exceedingly small when I set out; my purse contained the closely-estimated expenses of my journey, and the allowance made for my maintenance during six months, which did not admit the slightest idea of luxury of any kind. I was grateful however for what was given, for I knew that my father could afford no more, and I had no hope of another "heller" till my half-year was out. I had my ordinary traveling dress, and my mother gave me six new shirts, which she had spun with her own hands; beside these my portmanteau contained one complete black suit, two pair of shoes and a pair of silver buckles, which my father took off his own feet, and bestowed them upon me with his benediction. My elder brother always loved me, and was very kind to me; and when my going was first talked of, he regretted deeply that he had nothing to give me; but my little preparations occupied a fortnight, and during that time good luck befriended him and me, and he treated and killed his first patient. Thus he obtained the means of making me a sumptuous present for my journey, which consisted of a straight-cut blue mantle, with a square collar. Let me dwell upon the mantle, for it is important. It was in the Nuremberg fashion, which had gone out of vogue over all Germany for at least thirty years, and when I first put it on, I felt very proud of it, thinking that I looked like one of the cavaliers in the great picture in the town-hall. However, there was not another mantle like it in all Germany, except in Nuremberg—sky-blue, falling three inches below the knee, with a square-cut collar. I will pass over my journey to Hamburg, till my arrival in a little common inn, in the old part of the town. Not having a pfennig to spare, I set out early the next morning to look out for a lodging, and saw several that would have suited myself very well, but which did not suit my finances. At length, seeing the wife of a grocer standing at the door, with a good-humored countenance, in a narrow and dark street, containing some large fine houses, which had seen the splendors of former times, I walked up to her and asked if she could recommend a lodging to a young man who was not over-rich. After thinking for a moment, she pointed over the way to a house with a decorated front, which had become as black as ink with age. The lower story was entirely occupied by an iron-warehouse; but she said that up above on the first floor I should find Widow Gentner, who let one room, and who had, she believed, no lodger at the time. I thanked her many times for her civility, and walking across the street to the point she indicated, I looked up at the cornices and other ornaments which were displayed upon the façade. Dirty they were beyond all doubt. A pair of stone ladies with baskets in their hands, which had probably been once as white as snow, now displayed long, dripping lines of black upon their garments; their noses had disappeared, but the balls of the eyes were of the deepest brown, though above the center appeared a white spot, which seemed to show the presence of cataract. The fruit in the baskets, however, consisted apparently of black cherries, and a dingy cornucopia, which stood by the side of each, vomited forth swarthy fruit and flowers of a very uninviting quality. I gazed in surprise and admiration, and asked myself if it ever would be my fate to live in so fine a mansion. Taking courage, however, I inquired at the ironmonger's which was the door of Widow Gentner, and of the three which opened into the lower part of the house, I was directed to the second. On the first floor I found a tidy little maid, who introduced me to the presence of her mistress, a quiet dry old lady, who was seated in a room which had apparently formed part of a magnificent saloon —I say formed part, for it was evident that the size of the chamber had been much curtailed. On the ceiling, which was of the most magnificent stucco work I ever saw, appeared various groups of angels and cherubs in high relief, as large as life, and seated amid clouds and bunches of flowers as big as feather-beds. But that ceiling betrayed the dismemberment of the room; for all along the side where ran the wall behind the good lady were seen angels' legs without the heads and bodies, baskets of flowers cut in two, and cherubs with not above one-half of the members even, which sculptors have left them. This was soon explained: the widow informed me that she had divided her chamber into three, of which she reserved one for herself, another for her little maid, and let the third, which had a staircase to itself opening from the street. She had done so with a good wall, she said, to support the plafond, so that if I wanted to see the room she had to let, I must go down again with her and mount the other stairs, as there was no door of communication. I admired her prudence, and accompanied her at once to a small room, arrived at by a small stair-case with its own street-door; and there I found on the ceiling above my head the lost legs and wings of the angels on the other side, beside a very solid pair of cherubims of my own. It contained a little narrow bed, a table, a scanty proportion of chairs and other things necessary for the existence of a student; and though an unpleasant feeling of solitude crept over me as I thought of inhabiting an apartment so entirely cut off from all human proximity, yet, as the widow's rent was small, I closed the bargain at once, and soon was installed in my new abode. The good lady was very kind and attentive, and did all she could to make me comfortable, inquiring, among other things, what letters of introduction I had in Hamburg. I had but one which I considered of any value, which was addressed with many of those flourishes which you know are common among us, to Mr. S., a famous man in his day, both as a philosopher and literary man, and who was also a man of sense of the world, and what is more than all, of a kind and benevolent heart. I went to deliver it that very day, and met with a most kind and friendly reception from a good-looking old gentleman, of perhaps sixty-three or four, who at once made me feel myself at home with him, treating me with that parental air which inspired both respect and confidence. He asked several questions about my journey,

where I lodged, how I intended to employ my time, and last, what was the state of my finances. I told him all exactly as it was, and when I rose to depart, he laid his hand on my arm with the most benevolent air in the world, saying, 'You will dine with me to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and I shall expect to see you at dinner three days in the week as long as you stay. From eight to ten at night I am always at home, and whenever you have nothing else to do, come in and spend those hours with us, I will not pretend to say I was not quite well aware that the place thus granted me at his dinner-table was offered from a knowledge of the limited state of my finances; but pride in my case was out of the question, and I was exceedingly grateful for the act of kindness, which saved me a considerable sum in my housekeeping, and enabled me to indulge in a few little luxuries which I could not otherwise have commanded.

"It was the autumn of the year when I arrived at Hamburg, but the time passed very pleasantly. All the day I was engaged in my studies; at twelve o'clock I dined, either at my own chamber or at worthy Mr. S.'s, and almost every evening was spent at his house, where he failed not to regale me, either with a cup of fine coffee, or sometimes, as a great treat, with a cup of tea, according to your English mode. In short, I became his nightly guest, and as the evenings grew dark and sometimes foggy, I bought a little lantern to light myself through the long and lonely streets which I had to pass from his house to my own. On these occasions, too, as the weather grew intensely cold, my blue cloak with the square collar proved a most serviceable friend, and every night at ten o'clock I might be seen in precisely the same attire, with my black suit, in great part covered by the azure mantle, and the small lantern in my hand, finding my way homeward to my solitary abode. Mr. S. lived in the fine new part of the town, where he had a handsome house, with two maid-servants and his coachman, but the latter slept at the stables. I lived, as I have before said, in the old part of the town, well nigh a mile distant; thus, in coming and going, I got exercise at night, if I did not in the day, and I mark it particularly, that I used to enjoy my walk to his house and back, and used to look forward to it with pleasure during my hours of study, in order that you may see, that on the occasion of which I am about to speak, I was affected by no fantastical melancholy.

"At length, one night in the winter of 17—, after passing the evening at the house of Mr. S., where I had taken nothing but a cup of coffee and a slice of brown bread-and-butter, I took leave of my friend, put on my blue mantle with the square collar, lighted my lantern at the housemaid's candle, and having safely shut the glass, set out on my walk home. It was about a quarter past ten, and the night was clear and very dark; the sky, indeed, was full of stars, which looked peculiarly bright as I gazed up at them, between the tall houses, as if from the bottom of a well, and I felt a sort of exhilarating freshness in the air that raised my spirits rather than otherwise. I walked along to the end of the first street with a light step, turned into the second, and was just entering the third, when I saw a figure some thirty or forty paces before me, standing in a corner as if waiting for some one. Although the streets, in the good old days of Hamburg, were generally by that time of night quite deserted, yet there was nothing extraordinary in my meeting one or two persons as I went home, so that I took little or no notice of this figure, till I had advanced to within about twenty paces, when it turned itself full toward me, and at the same time the light of my lantern fell direct upon it. Guess my surprise when I saw a being so exactly like myself, that I could have imagined I was looking in a glass. There were the black legs, the shoes and silver buckles, the blue mantle with the square-cut collar, and the little lantern with the handle at the back, held just as I held mine. I stopped suddenly, and rubbed my eyes with my left hand; but the figure immediately turned round and walked away before me. At the same time my heart beat violently, and a sort of strange dreamy sensation of horror came over me, like that which takes possession of one sometimes when laboring under the nightmare. An instant's reflection made me ashamed of what I felt, and saying to myself, 'I'll look a little closer at this gentleman,' I walked on, hurrying my pace. The figure, however, quickened its steps in the same proportion. I did not like to run, but I was always a quick walker, and I hastened as fast as ever I could; but it had no effect; the figure, without the least apparent effort, kept always at the same distance, and every moment I felt the sort of superstitious dread which had taken possession of me increasing, and struggling against the efforts of resolution. Resolution conquered, however, and determined to see who this was that was so like me, without showing him too plainly that I was chasing him, I stopped at a corner where a street wound round, and entered again the one that I was pursuing at some distance, and then taking to my heels, I ran as hard as I could to get before my friend in the blue mantle. When I entered the other street again, though I must have gained two or three minutes at least, instead of seeing the figure come from the side where I had left it, there it was, walking on deliberately in the direction I usually followed toward my own house. We were now within three streets of widow Gentner's, and though they were all of them narrow enough, I generally took those which were most open. There was a lane, however, to the left, which, passing by the grocer's I have mentioned, cut off at least a quarter of the way, and as I was now overpowered by feelings I cannot describe, I resolved to take the shortest path, and run as hard as I could, in order to get home, and shut myself in before the figure in the blue mantle reached the spot. Off I set then down the narrow lane like lightning, but when I came to the grocer's corner, my horror was complete, on beholding the same figure walking along past the closed windows of the iron-shop, and I stopped with my heart beating as if it would have burst through my ribs. With eyes almost starting from my head, and the light of the lantern turned full upon it, I gazed at its proceedings, when behold, it walked quietly up to my door, stopped, turned round toward the house, put

the right hand in its pocket, and seemed feeling for my key. The key was produced, and stooping down, just as I should have done, after a little searching for the keyhole, the door was opened, the figure went in, and instantly the door closed again.

"If you had given me the empire of a world, I could not have made up my mind to go in after it, and setting off more like a madman than anything else, I returned to the house of Mr. S., with the intention of telling him what had occurred. The bell was answered quickly enough by the housemaid, who gazed at my wild and scared appearance with some surprise. She told me, however, that the old gentleman had gone to bed, and that she could not think of waking him on any account; and resolved not to go home, and yet not liking to walk the streets of Hamburg all night, I persuaded her, with some difficulty, to let me sit in the saloon till I could speak with Mr. S. in the morning. I will not detain you by describing how I passed the night; but when my friend came down the next day, I related to him all that occurred, with many excuses for the liberty I had taken. He listened gravely, and his first question naturally was, if I were quite sure I had gone straight homeward, without entering any of those places where strong drinks were sold. I assured him most solemnly that the only thing that had entered my lips that night was the cup of coffee which I had taken at his house.

"'The maid can tell you,' I said, 'that I had not been absent more than three quarters of an hour when I returned.'

"'Well, my young friend,' he replied, 'I believe you fully; very strange things occasionally happen to us in life, and this seems one. However, we will have some breakfast, and then go and inquire into it.'

"After breakfast we set out and walked to my house, I pointing out by the way, all the different spots connected with my tale. When we reached the gloomy old mansion, with its decorated front, I was going direct to my own door, but Mr. S. said, 'Stay, we will first talk to your landlady for a minute.' And we accordingly walked up to the rooms of Widow Gentner by the other door and the other stair-case. The widow was very proud of the visit of so distinguished a person in the town as Mr. S., and answered his questions with due respect. The first was a very common one in that part of Germany, namely, whether she had slept well that night. She assured him she had, perfectly well; and he then proceeded with a somewhat impressive air, to inquire if nothing had occurred to disturb her. She then suddenly seemed to recollect herself, and answered, 'Now you mention it, I recollect I was awoke about eleven o'clock, I think, by a noise on the other side of the wall; but thinking that Mr. Z. had thrown over his table, or something of that kind, I turned on the other side, and went to sleep again.'

"No further information being to be obtained, we descended to the street, and taking out my keys, I opened the door, and we went in. My heart beat a little as we mounted the stairs, but resolving not to show any want of courage, I boldly unlocked the room door and threw it open. The sight that presented itself made me pause on the threshold, for there on my bed, where I should have been lying at the very moment of its fall, was the whole ceiling of that part of the room, angels' legs, and cherubim's wings, flower-baskets, and everything, and so great was the weight and the force with which it had come down, that it had broken the solid bedstead underneath it. As I do not suppose my head is formed of much more strong materials, it is probable that it would have been cracked as well as the bed, and I heartily thank God for my preservation. All my good old friend ventured to say, however, was, 'A most fortunate escape! Had you slept here last night, you would have been killed to a certainty.' Though a doctor of philosophy, he did not risk any speculations upon the strange apparition which I had beheld the night before; but invited me to take up my abode in his house till my room could be put in order, never afterward mentioning the appearance of my double; and I have only to add that from that time to this, now between fifty and sixty years, I have never seen myself again except in a looking-glass."

"Such," continued Beauchamp, "is the story of my German friend, exactly as he told it to me. I must leave you to judge of it as you will, for unless you could see the old man, and know his perfect simplicity of character, and quiet matter-of-fact temper of mind, you could not take the same view of his history that I do."

"In short, Mr. Beauchamp, you are a believer in ghosts," said Sir John Slingsby, laughing; "well, for my part, I never saw any better spirit than a bottle of brandy, and hope never to see a worse."

"Take care you don't find yourself mistaken, Sir John," answered Dr. Miles, "for although it is rather difficult to meet with good spirits, the bad ones are much more easily conjured up."

"I am not afraid, doctor," answered Sir John, "and mind, I've only had three or four glasses of wine, so mine is not Dutch courage now; but let us talk of something else than ghosts and such things, or we shall all have the blue devils before we've done—a capital story, nevertheless, Beauchamp; but this is a good story too, doctor, about my sister being stopped on the king's highway. Has she told you about it?"

Dr. Miles merely nodded his head, and Sir John went on.

"I can't make out the game of that old rascal Wittingham, who seems devilish unwilling to catch the thieves, and had taken himself out of the way when Ned Hayward and I called this morning. The old linen-drapering scamp shall find that he can't treat Jack Slingsby in this way."

"Indeed, my dear brother, I wish you would let the matter rest," said Mrs. Clifford; "no harm was done, except frightening me very foolishly, and to pursue it further may, perhaps, lead to disagreeable consequences. The letter written beforehand, to bring me over by a report of your illness, shows that this was no ordinary affair."

"A fig for the consequences," cried Sir John Slingsby, "if it were to set half the town on fire, I would go on with it. Why, my dear Harriet, am not I a magistrate, one of his majesty's justices of the peace for the county of

—— ? Such a conscientious woman as you are, would never have me neglect my solemn duties." And Sir John chuckled with a low merry laugh, at the new view he chose to take of his responsibilities.

In such conversation the evening went on to its close, the subjects changing rapidly, for the worthy baronet was not one to adhere tenaciously to any particular line of thought, and Mrs. Clifford, but more particularly still her daughter, being anxious to quit the topic just started as soon as possible. Miss Clifford, indeed, seemed so much agitated and embarrassed, while the adventures of the preceding night were under discussion, that Ned Hayward, who was the kindest-hearted man alive, and not without tact, especially where women were concerned, came zealously to her relief, and engaged her in low and earnest conversation.

It was one of those cases in which two people, without well knowing what they are about, go on puzzling each other, though both may be as frank as day. They talked of every simple subject which all the world might have heard discussed—music, painting, poetry; but yet the whole was carried on in so low a tone that to any one who did not know them it would have appeared that they were making love. Miss Clifford was puzzled, perplexed, to make out her companion's character, for she certainly expected nothing from a man familiarly called Ned Hayward, and more especially from a particular friend of her uncle's, but a gay, rattling, good-humored scapegrace at the best; yet in order to gain her full attention, and withdraw her thoughts from a subject which he saw annoyed her, Captain Hayward put off for the time his usual careless, rapid manner, and spoke with so much feeling and good taste, and what is more, good sense also, upon all the many topics upon which their conversation ran—he showed her that he had read so much, and thought so much, and felt so much, that she became convinced before he had done of the complete fallacy of all her preconceived notions of his disposition. Such a change of opinion is always very favorable to a man with a woman; for they are such generous creatures, those women, that if they find they have done one injustice, they are sure to go to the opposite extreme, and give us credit for more than is our due.

Ned Hayward's puzzle was of a different kind, but it proceeded from the same source, namely, an erroneous preconception. He saw that Mary Clifford was embarrassed, whenever the subject of the attack upon their carriage was mentioned, that she changed color, not from red to white, as would have been the case had terror had aught to do with it, but from white to red, which is generally a change produced by other emotions. He therefore set it down as a certain fact, that the fair lady's heart was a little engaged in the transaction; and yet, as they went on talking in that same low voice, she twice returned to the subject herself, not without some degree of embarrassment it is true, but still as if she wished to say more, and Ned Hayward thought with some degree of pique, "Well, my pretty friend, I am not quite old enough to be made a confidant of yet."

At length, just as the dessert was being put upon the table, tiresome Sir John Slingsby harked back upon the subject, asking Mr. Beauchamp if he thought he could swear to any of the persons concerned; and taking advantage of a quick and somewhat loud conversation which went on between those two gentlemen and Dr. Miles, Miss Clifford suddenly broke through what she was talking of with her companion on the right, and said earnestly, but still almost in a whisper, "Captain Hayward, you rendered me a very great service last night, for which I shall ever feel grateful, and it will add immensely to the favor, if you can prevent my uncle from pursuing the matter in the manner he seems inclined to do. Particular circumstances, which I may some time have an opportunity of explaining, would render it most painful to me to have the scandalous outrage which was committed upon us last night dragged into a court of justice; indeed, I think it would half kill me, especially if I had to give evidence, as I suppose would be the case."

"I will do my best," answered Ned Hayward, "but you must not be angry or surprised, at any means I may take for that purpose. I could act better, indeed, if I knew the circumstances."

"All I can say at present," answered the young lady, in a low tone, "is, that this was not a case of robbery, as you all seem to suppose."

The color mounted into her cheek as she spoke, and she added quickly, "I cannot reproach myself with anything in the affair, Captain Hayward, although I have scrutinized my own conscience severely; but yet at the same time, even to have my name talked of in connection with such a proceeding, and with such — such a person, would distress me more than I can describe. I will say more another time."

"In the mean while, I will do my best," replied the other, and even while he was speaking, the roll of wheels was heard driving up to the door, and a minute or two after, one of the servants entered, announcing that Mr Wittingham was in the library.

"Let him stay, let him stay," said Sir John Slingsby, "he'll have an opportunity there of improving his mind. What, what do you say?" he continued, as the man whispered something over his shoulder, "we've neither secrets of state nor high treason here—speak out."

"Please you, Sir John, two of Mr. Wittingham's men have brought up Stephen Gimlet, whom they call Wolf, with irons upon him. I have kept him in the hall."

"Hang it!" cried Ned Hayward, "my little boy's father. I hope he has not been doing any serious mischief!"

"I don't think it, I don't think it," said Dr. Miles, eagerly, "the man has a heart and a conscience, a little warped, it is true; but still sound—sound, I think—I will go and speak to him."

"Hang him, he steals my pheasants!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby.

"Then why don't you put him to keep them, colonel?" asked Ned Hayward. "He would make a capital keeper, I am sure. Set a thief to catch a thief, Sir John."

"Not a bad idea, Ned," answered the baronet.

"Stay, stay, doctor, he's not condemned yet, and so does not want the parson. We had better talk to old Wittingham first. We'll have him in and fuddle him. Give my compliments to Mr. Wittingham, Matthews, and beg him to walk in. You need not go, Harriet. He's quite a lady's man."

But Mrs. Clifford rose, not at all anxious to witness the process of fuddling a magistrate, and withdrew with her daughter and her niece.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH THE MAGISTRATE IS FUDDLED BY THE BARONET.

"Ah! Wittingham! Wittingham!" cried the baronet, stretching forth his hand without rising, as the servant introduced the worthy magistrate, "is that you, my old buck? If you haven't come in pudding time, you have come in wine time, and will get what so few men get in life—your dessert. Sit down and pledge me, old fellow. What shall it be in? Here's port that was bottled when I came of age, so you may judge that it is good old stuff! madeira that has made more voyages than Cook, Comet claret of 1811, and a bottle of Burgundy that smells under my nose like oil of violets."

"Why, Sir John," replied Mr. Wittingham, taking the seat just left vacant by Mrs. Clifford, and very well pleased with so familiar a reception, when he expected quite the reverse; for to say the truth, although some circumstances had happened to make him resolve upon taking the bull by the horns, and visiting the old lion of Tarningham Park in his den, it was nevertheless with great pain and difficulty that he had screwed his courage to the sticking point, "why, Sir John, I come upon business, and it is better to transact affairs of importance with a clear head."

"Pooh, nonsense!" exclaimed the baronet; "no man ever did business well without being half-drunk. Look at my old friend Pitt, poor fellow! and Charley Fox, too, Sir William Scott, and Dundas, and all of them, not a set of jollier topers in the world than they were, and are still—what are left of them. Well, here's health to the living and peace to the dead—Burgundy, eh?" and he filled a glass for Mr. Wittingham to the brim.

The worthy magistrate took it, and, drinking Sir John Slingsby's toast, was about to proceed to business, when the baronet again interrupted him, saying, "Let me introduce you to my friends, Wittingham; there's no fun in drinking with men you don't know. Dr. Miles you are acquainted, this is my friend Mr. Beauchamp, and this, my friend Captain Hayward. Gentlemen both, know, esteem, and admire Henry Wittingham, Esq., one of the ornaments of the bench of the county of ——, one of the trustees of the turnpike roads, a very active magistrate, and a very honest man. Sink the shop, Witty," he continued, in a friendly whisper to his companion, for Sir John seldom, if ever, allowed Mr. Wittingham to escape without some allusion to his previous occupations, which naturally made that gentleman hate him mortally. "But before we have another glass, my good friend, I must make you acquainted with these gentlemen's high qualities," proceeded the baronet. "Here's Ned Hayward, the most deadly shot in Europe, whether with pistol, rifle, or fowling-piece, nothing escapes him, from the human form divine down to a cock sparrow. The best angler in England, too; would throw a fly into a teaspoon at fifty yards' distance. He has come down for an interminable number of months to catch my trout, kill my game, and drink my claret. Then there is my friend Mr. Beauchamp, more sentimentally given, a very learned man and profound, loves poetry and solitary walks, and is somewhat for musing melancholy made; but is a good hand at a trigger, too, I can tell you—a light finger and a steady aim; ha! Beauchamp;" and the baronet winked his eye and laughed.

Beauchamp smiled good-humoredly, and in order to change the course of the conversation, which was not exactly what suited him, he said that he had the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with Mr. Wittingham.

Ned Hayward, however, somewhat to Beauchamp's surprise, seemed determined to encourage their host in his light and rattling talk, and taking the latter up where Sir John had left it, he said, "Oh dear yes, I dare say we shall have capital sport down here. The old work of the 51st, Sir John; clearing all the fences, galloping over all the turnips, riding down the young wheat, forgetting the limits of the manor, letting the beasts out of the pound, making a collection of knockers and bell-pulls, fighting the young men, and making love to the young women—Mr. Wittingham, the wine stands with you."

Mr. Wittingham filled his glass and drank, saying with a grave and somewhat alarmed air, "I don't think that would exactly do in this county, sir; the magistrates are rather strict here."

"The devil they are," said Ned Hayward, with a good deal of emphasis, the meaning of which Mr. Wittingham could not well help understanding; but the next moment the young gentleman went on: "but who cares a pin for magistrates, Mr. Wittingham? They're nothing but a parcel of old women."

"Halloo, halloo, Ned," cried Sir John, "you forget in whose presence you are speaking; reverence the bench, young man, reverence the bench; and if you can't do that, reverence the colonel."

"Oh, you're a great exception to the general rule," replied Captain Hayward, "but what I say is very true, nevertheless; and as I like to define my positions, I will give you a lexicographical description of the magistrates. They should be called in any dictionary, a body of men selected from the most ignorant of the people, for the mal-administration of good laws."

"Bravo, bravo," shouted Sir John Slingsby, roaring with laughter, and even Dr. Miles nodded his head with a grave smile, saying, "Too just a definition indeed."

Mr. Wittingham looked confounded, but Sir John passed him the bottle, and for relief he again fell to his glass and emptied it. Now to men not quite sure of their position, there is nothing so completely overpowering as jest and merriment with a dash of sarcasm. In grave

argument, where they have their own vanity for their backer, they will always venture to meet men both of superior abilities and superior station, whether in so doing they expose themselves or not; for in that case, their notions are generally formed beforehand, and they are fully convinced that those notions are just; but in a combat of the wit, it requires to be a very ready man, and also to have all those habits of society which enable one to make the reply tart enough, with every semblance of courtesy. On the bench and in the justice room Mr. Wittingham would often venture to spar with Sir John Slingsby, and sometimes with a good deal of success; for although the baronet had much greater natural abilities and information, yet he had so many foibles and failings, and occasionally such a degree of perversity, that from time to time his adversary would get hold of a weak point, and drive him into a corner. It always ended, however, by Sir John coming off triumphant; for when he found that argument failed him he had recourse to ridicule, and in two minutes would utterly confound his antagonist, and overwhelm him amid peals of laughter.

In the present instance, Mr. Wittingham found that Sir John was in one of his jocular moods, and scarcely dared to say a word lest he should bring some of his hard jests upon his head, especially when he had the strong support which Ned Hayward seemed capable of giving. He was therefore anxious to proceed to the business that brought him as speedily as possible; and giving up the defense of the magistracy, after a momentary pause, he said, "Really, Sir John, as I must get home soon—"

"Not till you have finished your bottle, man," cried Sir John Slingsby, pushing the Burgundy to him; "whoever comes to see me after dinner, must fight me or drink a bottle with me; so here's to your health, Witty—a bumper, a bumper, and no heel-taps."

Now the glasses at Sir John Slingsby's table might well be called wine-glasses, for they seldom had any other liquor in them; but at the same time, in size they were not much less than those vessels which are named tumblers, I suppose from their being less given to tumbling than any other sort of glass. Mr. Wittingham had drank three already, beside the moderate portion which he had taken at his own dinner; but in order to get rid of the subject, he swallowed another of strong Burgundy, and then commenced again, saying, "Really, Sir John, we must go to business. We can sip your good wine while we are talking the affair over."

"Sip it!" exclaimed his host, "who ever heard of a man sipping such stuff as this! Nobody ever sips his wine but some lackadaisical, lovelorn swain, with a piece of Cheshire cheese before him, making verses all the time upon pouting lips and rounded hips, and sparkling eyes and fragrant sighs, and pearly teeth and balmy breath, and slender nose and cheek that glows, and all the O's! and all the I's! that ever were twisted into bad metre and bad sense; or else the reformed toper, who is afraid of exceeding the stint that his doctors have allowed him, and lingers out every drop with the memory of many a past carouse before his eyes. No, no, such wine as this is made to be swallowed at a mouthful, washing the lips with a flood of enjoyment, stimulating the tongue, spreading a glow over the palate, and cooling the tonsils and the throat only to inflame them again with fresh appetite for the following glass—sip it! why hang it, Wittingham, it is to insult a good bottle of wine, and I trust that you may be shot dead by a champagne cork to teach you better manners."

"Well, then," cried Mr. Wittingham, stimulated to *répartie* by impatience, "I will say, Sir John, that we can swill your wine while we are talking of business."

"Ay, that's something like," cried Sir John Slingsby, not at all discomposed, "you shall swill the wine, and I will drink it, that'll suit us both. Beauchamp we will let off, because he's puny, and Doctor Miles because he's reverend; Ned Hayward will do us justice, glass for glass, I'll answer for it. So another bumper, and then to business; but first we'll have lights, your worship, for it's growing dusky," and Sir John rose to ring the bell.

Scarcely, however, had he quitted his seat, when there was heard a loud report. One of the panes of glass in the window flew in shining splinters into the room, and a ball whistling through, passed close to the head of Mr. Wittingham, knocked off his wig, and lodged in the eye of a Cupid who was playing with his mother in large picture on the other side of the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH BETTER DAYS SEEM TO DAWN UPON THE POACHER.

A HIGH-SOUNDING oath from Sir John Slingsby passed unnoticed, for though every one had heard the shot, each person's attention was suddenly called to an object of his own. Ned Hayward sprang to the window and looked out, Dr. Miles started up and turned toward Mr. Wittingham; and Beauchamp, who was sitting next to that gentleman suddenly stretched out his hand and caught him by the arm and shoulder, so as to break his fall to the ground, though not to stop it; for the worthy magistrate, with a low exclamation of horror, which reached no ear but one, pressed his hand upon his heart, and fell fainting to the ground, just as if the ball, which had entered the window, had found out the precise spot in his skin, which had not been dipped in the Styx. Nevertheless, when Sir John, and Mr. Beauchamp, and Dr. Miles lifted him up off the floor, and seated him on his chair again, though they undoubtedly expected to find one of those small holes which I should call a life-door, were it not that they never let life in, if they often let life out, yet no wound of any kind was to be perceived, except in the wig. Lights were brought, servants hurried in and out, cold water was sprinkled on the old gentleman's face, the butler recommended sal volatile, Sir John Slingsby tried brandy; and at length Mr. Wittingham was brought to himself. Every one was busy about him but Ned Hayward; and as Ned was a very charitable and benevolent man, it may be necessary to say why he bestowed no care or attention on Mr. Wittingham. The fact was, that he did not know anything was the matter with him; for Ned Hay-

ward was no longer in the room; the window was open, indeed, and Ned Hayward had jumped out.

To return to Mr. Wittingham, however, no sooner did he recover breath enough to articulate, than he declared in a low voice, he must go home.

"Why, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "you're not hurt, only frightened, devilish frightened, that's all, and you're still white about the gills, and fishy in the eyes. Come, come, finish your bottle, and get rid of that haddock-look before you go, or you may faint again in the carriage."

"I must go home," repeated Mr. Wittingham, in a dismal tone.

"Then what's to become of the business you came about?" inquired the baronet.

"I must leave it in your hands, Sir John," replied Mr. Wittingham, rising feebly; "I have no head for it to-night. It was about that notorious poacher, Gimlet, I came; the constables will tell you how I happen to have him apprehended; but I must go, I must go, I have no head for it."

"Though the bullet kept out, plenty of lead has got in, somehow or other," muttered Sir John Slingsby, as his fellow-magistrate tottered toward the door; but the baronet was not a bad-hearted man, and taking compassion on Mr. Wittingham's state, he followed him with a large glass of madeira, insisted upon his drinking it, and supported him under the right arm to the hall-door, where he delivered him over to the hands of the butler to put him safely into his carriage. While this was being effected, Sir John turned round and gazed upon the figure of Stephen Gimlet, and the two officers who had him in charge; and if his look was not peculiarly encouraging to the poacher, it certainly was much less so toward the constables. To say the truth, a constable was an animal, toward which, for some reason or another, Sir John Slingsby entertained a great dislike. It is not impossible that his old roving propensities, and sundry encounters with the particular kind of officer which was now under his thumb, had impressed him with a distaste for the whole species; but, assuredly, had he been called upon to give a Linnæan description of the creature, it would have been: "A two-legged beast of the species hound, made to be beaten by blackguards and bullied by magistrates."

Waving his hand, therefore, with an air of dignity, over his extended white waistcoat, he said—

"Bring him in," and leading the way back to the dining-room, he seated himself in his great chair, supported on either side by decanters; and while the constables were entering, and taking up a position before him, he pushed a bottle either way, to Dr. Miles and Mr. Beauchamp, saying, in as solemn a tone as if he were delivering sentence of death, "A bumper, gentlemen, for a toast—now, Master Leathersides, why do you bring this man before me?"

"Why, please your worship's honor," replied the constable, "we apprehended him for poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and—"

"Halloah!" cried Sir John, "poaching in the streets of Tarningham, that's a queer place to set springes. Leathersides, you're drunk."

"No, please your honor's worship, I arn't, whimpered the constable, who would at any time rather have been sent for a week to prison than be brought up before Sir John Slingsby, "I said as how we apprehended him in the streets of Tarningham, not as he was a-poaching there."

"Then where was he poaching when you apprehended him?" demanded Sir John, half in fun, half in malice, and with a full determination of puzzling the constable.

"Can't say he was poaching anywhere just then," replied Mr. Leathersides.

"Then you'd no business to apprehend him," replied the baronet; "discharge the prisoner, and evacuate the room. Gentlemen, are you charged? The king, God bless him!" and he swallowed down his glass of wine, *winking his* eye to Beauchamp, at what he thought his good joke against the constables.

Mr. Leathersides, however, was impressed with a notion, that he must do his duty, and that that duty was to remonstrate with Sir John Slingsby; therefore, after a portentous effort, he brought forth the following words:—

"But, Sir John, when we'd a got 'un, Mr. Wittingham said we were to keep 'un."

"Where's your warrant?" thundered Sir John.

"Can't say we've got one," said the other constable, for Mr. Leathersides was exhausted.

"If you apprehended him illegally," said Sir John Slingsby, magisterially, "you detained him still more illegally. Leathersides, you're a fool. Mr. What's-your-name, you're an ass. You've both violated the law, and I've a great mind to fine you both—a bumper—so I will, by Jove. Come here and drink the king's health;" and Sir John laughed heartily while inflicting this very pleasant penalty, as they thought it, upon the two constables; but resolved to carry the joke out, the baronet, as soon as the men had swallowed the wine, exclaimed in a pompous tone: "Stephen Gimlet, you are charged with poaching in the streets of Tarningham, and convicted on the sufficient testimony of two constables. Appear before the court to receive sentence. Prisoner, your sentence is this: that you be brought up to this table, and there to gulp down, at a single and uninterrupted draught, one glass of either of those two liquors called port or madeira, at the discretion of the court, to the health of our sovereign lord the king; and that, having so done, you shall be considered to have made full and ample satisfaction for the said offense."

"With all my heart, sir," said Ste Gimlet, taking the glass of wine which Sir John Slingsby offered him. "Here's to the king, God bless him! and may he give us many such magistrates as Sir John Slingsby."

"Sir, I've a great mind to fine you another bumper for adding to my toast," exclaimed the baronet; and then waving his hand to the constables, he continued: "Be off, the prisoner is discharged: you've nothing more to do with him—stay here, Master Gimlet, I've something to say to you;" and when the door was shut, he continued, with a very remarkable change of voice and manner: "Now, my good friend, I wish to give you a little bit of warning. As I am lord of the manor for many miles round the place where you live, the game you have taken

must be mine, and, therefore, I have thought myself justified in treating the matter lightly, and making a joke of it. You may judge, however, from this, that I speak disinterestedly, and as your friend, when I point out to you, that if you follow the course you are now pursuing, it will inevitably lead you on to greater offenses. It will deprave your mind, teach you to think wrong right, to resist by violence the assertion of the law, and, perhaps, in the end, bring you to the awful crime of murder, which, whether in this world or not, is sure to meet its retribution hereafter."

"Upon my life and soul, Sir John," said Ste Gimlet, earnestly, "I will never touch a head of game of yours again."

"Nor any one else's, I hope," answered Sir John Slingsby; "you are an ingenious fellow I have heard, and can gain your bread by better means."

"How!" inquired the man, emphatically; but the moment after he added, "I will try at all events. This very morning, I was thinking I would make a change, and endeavor to live like other people; but then I fancied it would be of no use. First, people would not employ me, and I feared to try them. Next, I feared myself; for I have led a wild and rambling kind of life, and have got to love it better than any other. If there were a chance of men treating me kindly and giving me encouragement, it might answer; but if I found all faces looking cold on me, and all hearts turned away from me, though perhaps I have deserved it, I am afraid I should just fall back into my old ways again. However, I will try—I will try for the child's sake, though it will be a hard struggle at first, I am sure."

Sir John Slingsby laid his finger upon his temple and thought for a moment. He had been serious for a long while—fully five minutes—and he had some difficulty in keeping up his grave demeanor: but that was not all: some words that Ned Hayward had let fall, almost at random, suggested a plan to his mind which he hesitated whether he should adopt or not. Perhaps—though he was a kind-hearted man, as we have seen and said before—he might have rejected it, had it not been for its oddity; but it was an odd plan, and one that jumped with his peculiar humor. He was fond of doing all sorts of things that other men would not do, just because they would not—of trying experiments that they dared not try—of setting at defiance everything which had only custom and convention for its basis; and, therefore, after an instant's meditation, given to the consideration of whether people would suppose he was actuated by benevolence or eccentricity (he would not have them think he did an odd thing from benevolence for the world), he went on as the whim prompted to reply to Stephen Gimlet's last words, mingling a high degree of delicacy of feeling with his vagaries, in the strangest manner possible, as the reader will see.

"Well, Ste," he said, "perhaps we may make it less of a struggle than you think. I'll tell you what, my fine fellow, you're very fond of game—a little too fond, perhaps. Now, my friend, Ned Hayward—that's to say, Captain Hayward. Where the deuce has he gone to!—I don't know—ran after the clumsy fellow, I suppose, who fired through the window and missed the deer too, I'll be bound. It must have been Conolly, the under-keeper; nobody but Conolly would have thought of firing right toward the window—but as I was saying, my friend, Ned Hayward, said just now that you'd make a capital keeper. What do you think of it, Gimlet? Wouldn't it do?"

"Not under Mr. Hearne, sir," answered Ste Gimlet. "We've had too many squabbles together;" and he shook his head.

"No, no, that would never do," replied Sir John, laughing; "you'd soon have your charges in each other's gizzards. But you know Denman died a week ago, over at the Trottingham Hall manor, on t'other side of the common—you know it, you dog—you know it well enough, I can see by the twinkling of your eye. I dare you have looked into every nest on the manor, since the poor fellow was bagged by the grim archer. Well, but as I was saying, there's the cottage empty and eighteen shillings a week, and you and Hearne can run against each other and see which will give us the best day's sport at the end of the year. What do you say, Gimlet? you can go and take possession of the cottage this very night; I don't want it to stand empty an hour longer."

"Thank you a thousand times, Sir John," said the man heartily; "you are a kind gentleman indeed, but I must go up to my own place first. There's my little boy, you know. Poor little man, I dare say he has cried his heart out."

"Pooh, nonsense, not a bit," said the baronet, "I'll take care of all that. I'll send up and have him fetched."

The man smiled and shook his head, saying, "He would not come with a stranger."

"What will you bet?" cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "I'll bet you a guinea against your last ferret, that he'll come directly. Here, Matthew — Moore — Harrison," he continued, first ringing the bell, and then opening the door to call, "some of you d—d fellows run up and bring Ste Gimlet's little boy. Tell him his daddy's here," and Sir John Slingsby sat down and laughed prodigiously, adding every now and then, "I'll take any man five guineas of it that he comes."

There is an exceedingly good old English expression, which smart people have of late years banished from polite prose, but which I shall beg leave to make use of here. Sir John Slingsby then was known to be a *comical fellow*. Stephen Gimlet was well aware that such was the case; and though he thought the joke was a somewhat extravagant one, to send a man-servant up to the moor at that hour of the evening, to fetch down his little boy, yet still he thought it a joke. His only anxiety, however, was to prevent its being carried too far, and, therefore, after twirling his hat about for a minute in silence, he said—

"Well, Sir John, perhaps if he's told that I am here, he may come; but now I recollect, I locked the door; and besides, there are all my things to be fetched down; so if you will be kind enough to give me till to-morrow, sir, I will accept your bounty with a grateful heart, and do my best to deserve it—and I am sure, I am most grateful to the gentleman who first spoke of such a thing. I am, indeed," he added,

with some degree of hesitation, and cheek rather reddened; for while Sir John was still laughing heartily, he saw that Mr. Beauchamp's fine lustrous eyes were fixed upon him with a look of deep interest, and that Doctor Miles was blowing his nose violently, while his eyelids grew rather red.

"I don't doubt it in the least, Ste," said Sir John; "Ned Hayward is a very good fellow—a capital fellow—you owe him a great deal, I can tell you. There! there!" he continued, as the door opened to give admission to the servant, "I told you he would come—didn't I tell you? There he is, you see!"

Stephen Gimlet gazed for an instant in silent astonishment when he beheld the boy in the butler's arms, wrapped warmly up in the housekeeper's shawl; for at Sir John's indisputable commands, they had taken him from his bed. He was confounded—he was as one thunderstruck; but the moment after, the child, recovering from the first dazzling effect of the light, held out his little hands to his father with a cry of delight, exclaiming, "There's my daddy, there's my daddy!" and the poacher sprang forward and caught him to his heart.

Sir John Slingsby was himself overset by what he had done: the tears started in his eyes; but still he laughed louder than ever; outtrumpeted Doctor Miles with blowing his nose, wiped away the tears with the back of his hand, put on his spectacles to hide them, and then looked over the spectacles to see Ste Gimlet and his boy.

The child was nestling on his father's breast and prattling to him; but in a moment the man started and turned pale, exclaiming, "Fire!—the place burnt! What in heaven's does he mean?"

"There, there!" cried Doctor Miles, coming forward and making the man sit down, seeing that he looked as ghastly as the dead, with strong emotion. "Don't be alarmed, Stephen. Don't be agitated. Lift up the voice of praise and thanksgiving to God, for a great mercy shown you this day, not alone in having saved your child from a terrible death, but in having sent you a warning with a most lenient hand, which will assuredly make you a better man for all your future days. Lift up the voice of praise, I say, from the bottom of your heart."

"I do indeed!" cried the poacher, "I do indeed!" and bending down his head upon the boy's neck, he wept. "But how did it happen?—how could it happen?" he continued, after a while, "and how, how was he saved?"

"Why, Ned Hayward saved him, to be sure," cried the baronet. "Gallant Ned Hayward—who but he? He saw the place burning from the top of the barrow, man, rushed in, burnt himself, and brought out the boy."

"God bless him! God bless him!" cried the father. "But the fire," he added, "how could the place take fire?"

"That nasty cross man set it on fire, daddy, I'm sure," said the boy; "the man that was there this morning. He came when you were away, and he wouldn't answer when I called, and I saw him go away, through the peep-hole, with a lighted stick in his mouth. I didn't do it indeed, daddy."

A glimpse of the truth presented itself to Stephen Gimlet's mind; and though he said nothing, he clenched one hand tight, so tight that the print of the nails remained in the palm; but then his thoughts turned to other things, and rising up out of the chair in which Doctor Miles had placed him, he turned to Sir John Slingsby, and said, "Oh, sir, I wish I could say how much I thank you!"

"There, there, Stephen," replied the baronet, waving his hand kindly, "no more about it. You have lost one house and you have got another; you have given up one trade and taken a better. Your boy is safe and well; so, as the good doctor says, praise God for all. Take another glass of wine, and when you have talked a minute with the little man, give him back to the housekeeper. He shall be well taken care of till you are settled, and, in the mean time, you can go down to the Marquis of Granby in the village, and make yourself comfortable till to-morrow. Hang me if I drink any more wine to-night. All this is as good as a bottle;" and Sir John rose to join the ladies.

The other two gentlemen very willingly followed his example; but before they went, Beauchamp, who had had his pocket-book in his hand for a minute or two, took a very thin piece of paper out of it, and went round to Stephen Gimlet.

"You have lost all your furniture, I am afraid," he said, in a low voice; "there is something to supply its place with more."

"Lord bless you, sir, what was my furniture worth?" said the poacher, looking at the note in his hand, with a melancholy smile; but by that time Beauchamp was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PURSUIT.

"I WONDER where the deuce Ned Hayward can be gone," was the exclamation of Sir John Slingsby about ten o'clock at night when he found that his young guest did not reappear; and so do I wonder, and, perhaps, so does the reader too. It will, therefore, be expedient, in order to satisfy all parties, to leave the good people at Tarningham Park, and pursue our friend at once, for we have no time to spare if we would catch him. He is a desperate hard rider when there is any object in view, and he certainly left the park on horseback.

When last we saw him, the hour was about half-past seven or a quarter to eight, night was beginning to fall, and without doing anything figurative in regard to the evening—without comparing the retiring rays of light to the retreat of a defeated army, or the changing color of the sky to the contents of a London milkmaid's pail under the influence of the pump—we may be permitted to say that the heavens were getting very gray; the rose and the purple had waned, and night, heavy night, was pouring like a deluge through the air. Nevertheless, the night was fine, a star or two shone out, and the moment Ned Hayward sprang to the window through which the ball had come, he saw a figure hurrying away through the trees at the distance of about three hundred yards. They were fine old trees with no underwood—English park trees, wide apart, far-spreading,

gigantic; and Ned Hayward paused an instant to gaze after he had jumped out of the window, and then took to his heels and ran on as fast as a pair of long, strong, well-practiced legs would carry him. There was turf below him, and his feet fell lightly; but he had not gained more than fifty yards upon the figure, when he saw through the bolls another figure, not human but equine. For a short distance the person he pursued did not seem aware that he had a follower, but before the time arrived when the horse became apparent some indications seemed to reach his ear, and, if Ned Hayward ran quick, the other seemed to run nearly as fast. When the young gentleman was within about a hundred yards of him, however, the man was upon the horse's back and galloping away.

Ned Hayward stopped and followed him with his eyes, marking the course he took as far as the light would permit. He then listened, and heard the noise of the horse's feet distinctly beating the ground in one direction. The next moment the sounds became confused with others, as if another horse were near, and turning round to the road which led from the gate on the side of Tarningham, the young officer saw a mounted man coming slowly up toward the house.

"By Jove, this is lucky!" said Ned Hayward, as he recollected having heard Sir John Slingsby tell a groom to carry a note to Mr. Wharton, the lawyer: and running down to the road as fast as possible, he stopped the servant, and bade him dismount, and let him have the horse immediately.

The groom recognized his master's guest; but he had some hesitation, and began his reply with a "please, sir—" But Ned cut him short at once, in a very authoritative tone; and in two minutes he was in the saddle. He paused not an instant to think, for calculation was a very rapid process with him, and, during his morning's rambles, he had marked, with a soldier's eye, all the bearings and capabilities of the park and the ground round about it. The result of his combinations was thus expressed upon the mental tablet, or nearly thus:—

"The fellow cannot get out by the way he has taken; for there is no gate, and the park paling is planted at the top of the high bank, so that no man in England dare leap it. He must take to the right or left. On the left he will be checked by the river and the thick copse, which would bring him round close to the house again. He will, therefore, take to the right, and pass the gates on the top of the hill. He must come down half-way to the other gates, however, before he can get out of the lane; and I shall not be much behind him."

He rode straight, therefore, to the gates on the Tarningham side, passed them, turned sharp to the left, galloped up the sandy lane under the park wall, and blessed his stars as he saw the edge of the moon beginning to show itself in the east.

"Hang me if I give up the chase till I have run him down," said Ned Hayward; but when a man sets out hunting a fox with such a determination, he never knows how far the fox or the determination may lead him. Away he went, however, like a shot. The horse was a strong, well-built cob, of about fourteen hands three, which had been accustomed to bear the great bulk and heavy riding of Sir John Slingsby to cover; and it sprang out under the lighter weight and better balance of the younger man, as if it had a feather on its back. Up this hill they went, all gathered together like a woolpack: an easy hand, an easy seat, and an exact poise, made the rider feel to the beast not half his real weight; and, in two minutes, Ned Hayward's quick ear caught the sound of other hoofs beside those underneath him. "I shall have him now!" he said; but suddenly the sounds became fainter. Three springs more and he had the horseman before him—but at a hundred and fifty yards' distance, going over the moor. There was a fence and ditch on the right hand; and Ned Hayward pushed his horse at them. The good little beast rose gallantly by the moonlight; but there was a ditch on the other side also, which neither saw. He cleared it with his forefeet, but his hind went in, and over he came sprawling. Neither rider nor beast were hurt; and Ned Hayward picked him up in a minute, and away again.

The fugitive had gained ground, nevertheless, and was shooting off like a falling star; but the moonlight was now bright, lying in long misty lines upon the moor. A few rapid steps brought them to the sandy road, and on—on they dashed as if for life. On, however, dashed the other horseman likewise. He knew the ground well, his horse was good, he really rode for life. It was as even a race as ever was seen. The wide moor extended for miles, every tree and bush was visible, and even the distant belts of planting where the common ended on the right could be seen lying black and heavy against the moonlight sky; but yet there was a darkness over the ground which showed that it was not day; and still, as he urged the willing beast forward, Ned Hayward kept a ready hand upon the bridle in case of need. Soon he thought he gained upon the other, but then he saw him turn from the sandy road and take over the turf to the left. Ned Hayward ran across, and pressed hard the beast's sides. On, on they went; but the next instant the ground seemed darker than before, and the pursuer checked up his horse suddenly upon the very edge of a deep pit, while the other rode on unobstructed on the further side.

Not more than a moment was lost or gained, however, for turning quickly round the edge of the pit, though keeping a sharper eye upon the ground than before, Ned Hayward still followed a diagonal course, which saved him as much of the distance between him and the fugitive as he had lost by the temporary check. When he, too, had got to the other side of the pit, the space between them was about the same that it had been at first, but the ground sloped gently downward, and then spread out in a perfect flat with neither trees nor bushes, although some thick rushy spots assumed here and there the appearance of bunches of bramble, or bilberry, but afforded no interruption to the horses' speed, and on they went, helter skelter, over the moor, as if the great enemy were behind them.

In a few minutes a light was visible on the right, and Ned Hayward said to himself, "He is making for some house;" but the next instant the light moved, flitting along from spot

to spot, with a blue, wavering, uncertain flame, and with a low laugh, the young gentleman muttered, "A will-o'-the-wisp, that shan't lead me astray this time at least."

On he dashed, keeping the horseman before him; but ere he had passed the meteor a hundred yards, he felt the pace of his horse uneasy, the ground seemed to quiver and shake under his rapid footfalls, and a plashy sound was heard, as if the hoofs sank into a wet and marshy soil.

"A shaking bog, upon my life," said Ned Hayward, "but as he has gone over it, so can I."

With his horse's head held lightly up, his heels into his sides, the bridle shaken every minute to give him courage, and a loud "Tally ho!" as if he were in sight of a fox, on went Ned Hayward, with the water splashing up around him till the hoofs fell upon firmer ground, and a slight slope upward caught the moonlight, and showed the fugitive scampering away with a turn to the right.

"Hoiks, hoiks! halloo!" cried Ned Hayward, applying the flat of his hand to the horse's flank, and, as if inspired by the ardor of the chase, the brave little beast redoubled its efforts, and strained up the hill after the larger horse, gaining perceptibly upon it.

Clear and full in the moonlight the dark figure came out from the sky as he cleared the edge of the hill, and in two seconds, or not much more, Ned Hayward gained the same point.

The figure was no longer visible. It had disappeared as if by magic; horse and rider were gone together, and all that could be seen was the gentle slope downward that lay at the horse's feet, a darkish spot beyond, which the moon's rays did not reach, and then the moor extending for about a couple of miles farther, marked in its undulations by strong light and shade.

"Why what the devil is this!" exclaimed Ned Hayward; but though he sometimes indulged in an exclamation, he never let astonishment stop him, and seeing that if the figure had taken a course to the right or left he must have caught sight of it, he rode straight at the dark spot in front, and found that it consisted of one of the large pits, with which the moor was spotted, filled to the very top of the banks with low stunted oaks, ashes, and birch-trees.

"Earthed him! earthed him!" said Ned Hayward, as he looked round, but he made no further observation, and soon perceived the sandy cart-road which the man must have taken to descend into the pit.

The young gentleman was now a little puzzled; the natural pertinacity and impetuosity of his disposition would have led him to plunge in after the object of his chase, like a terrier dog after a badger, but then he saw that by so doing, the man, who knew the ground apparently much better than he did, would have the opportunity of doubling upon him, and escaping his pursuit, while he was losing himself among the trees and paths. Rapid in all his calculations, and seeing that the extent of the hollow was not very great, so that, by the aid of the moonlight, any figure which issued forth would become visible to him as long as he remained above, Ned Hayward trotted round the edge of the pit to make himself perfectly sure that there was no small path or break in the banks, by which the object he had lodged in the bushes beneath him, might effect its flight without his perceiving it. Having ascertained this fact, he took up his position on the highest ground near, that he might command the whole scene round, and then dismounting, led his horse up and down to cool it gradually, saying to himself, "I will stop here all night rather than lose him. Some person must come by in the morning who will help me to beat the bushes."

Ned Hayward concluded his reflections, however, with a sentence which seemed to have very little connection with them.

"She's an exceedingly pretty girl," he said, "and seems to be as amiable as she is pretty, but I can't let that stop me."

I do not at all understand what he meant, but perhaps the reader may find some sense in it. But while he was reflecting on pretty girls, and combining them in the honestest way possible with his hunt after a man who had fired a shot into the window of Tarningham House, an obtrusive recollection crossed his mind that moons will go down, and that then wide open moors with many a shaking bog and pitfall were not the most lustrous and well-lighted places upon earth, which remembrance or reflection puzzled him most exceedingly. Though we have never set up Ned Hayward for a conjuror, he was an exceedingly clever, dashing, and amiable person; but he was far from being either a magician or an astronomer, and not having an almanac in his pocket, nor able to read it if he had, he was not at all aware of the hour at which the moon went down. He saw, indeed, that she had already passed her prime, and was verging toward decline, and it was with a very unpleasant sensation that he thought, "Hang her old untidy horns, she will be gone before the day breaks, and a pleasant dark place it will be when she no longer gives me light. I will stop and watch, however, but I must change my tactics, and hide under the hill. Perhaps he may think I am gone, and come out with fresh courage. The young blackguard! it would be a good turn to all the world to hang him, if it is but to prevent him marrying such a nice girl as that, who is a great deal too good for him. He won't thank me, however, for my pains."

This thought, somehow or other, was not pleasant to our friend Ned Hayward, and, indeed, like most of us, in many even of the ordinary circumstances of life, he was affected by very different emotions. Why it was, or wherefore, he could not tell, but he had been seized with a strong inclination to hang, or otherwise dispose of any gentleman whom he could suspect of being a favored lover of Mary Clifford's; and yet, on the other hand, he had every disposition in the world to oblige Mary Clifford himself. These two objects seemed incompatible, but there is a fashion in the world which has a strange knack of trying to overcome impossibilities, and sometimes succeeds too—at least in overcoming those things which fathers and mothers, relations, guardians, and friends, have pronounced to be insurmountable. At all events, Ned Hayward made up his mind that it was his duty not to abandon his pursuit, so long as there was a chance of its being successful, and, consequently, he drew his horse a little farther from the edge of the pit, as soon as he

had considered the peculiar circumstances of Mistress Moon, and endeavored to keep out of sight as far as possible, while he himself watched eagerly, with nothing but his head as far as the eyes above the edge of the acclivity.

Fancy is a wonderful thing, and it has been accounted for some people as good as physic. I should say it was better for most men, but yet, taken in too large doses it is dangerous, very dangerous. Now Ned Hayward had, that night, taken too large a dose, and the effect was this: he imagined he was perfectly well acquainted with the figure, person, and appearance of the horseman whom he had hunted from under the walls of Tarningham Park to the spot where he then stood, with his horse's bridle over his arm. He could have sworn to him!—very lucky it was that nobody called upon him to do so, as he found out within a quarter of an hour afterward. Fancy painted his face and his figure, and a tremendous black eye, and a bruised cut down the side of his nose. Now as the man lay there quietly ensconced in the pit, his face was very different, his figure not at all the same, and no black eye, no bruised cut, gave evidence of the scuffle which took place two nights before. It was, in fact, quite a different person, and all the young gentleman's calculations were wrong together. It is a very happy thing indeed for a man in the wrong, when he acts in the same manner as he would if he were right. His doing so, it is true, sometimes proceeds from good feeling, sometimes from fortunate circumstances, but, at all events, such was Ned Hayward's case in the present instance, for he had made up his mind to remain upon the watch, and he would have watched as zealously and only a little more pleasantly, if he had known perfectly well who the man was, instead of mistaking him for another. When he had remained about seven minutes and a half, however—I cannot speak to a few seconds more or less, and a slight mistake will make no great difference, as the first heat was over, and our friends were only taking breathing time; but when he had remained for about seven minutes and a half, his horse shied at something behind him, and when the young gentleman turned round, he perceived a long shadow cross the space of moonlight on the common, showing that some living object was moving in a slanting direction between him and the southwestern side of the sky. The first question he asked himself was naturally, who he could be, and the first answer that suggested itself was, "Perhaps one of this fellow's comrades."

Two to one, however, were not odds that at all daunted our young friend; and turning quite round, for an instant he looked at the figure as it came down, and then directed his eyes toward the edge of the pit again. He kept a sharp look upon the approaching party however; though the step upon the soft turf made no great sound, his eyes were suddenly brought round upon the visitor of his solitary watch, when about ten yards still remained between them. The moon now served our good friend as well as if he had been a lover, showing him distinctly the face, features, and figure of the person before him, and he instantly exclaimed,

"Ah, Stephen, this is lucky! What brought you here?"

"Why, sir," answered the man, "this is part of my beat, and as soon as I had got some supper down at the village, as it is not fair to take a gentleman's money without doing something for it, and as I am rather accustomed to a walk on a moonlight night, I might as well just come out to see that all is safe. I can guess what brought you here, for Ned, the groom, told me you had taken his horse and were off like a shot."

"Hush," said Ned Hayward, "don't speak so loud, my good fellow; I have earthed him among those trees in the pit there, but I could not dig him out, for I was afraid he would escape one way while I was hunting him the other."

"Ah! ah! you have got him, then?" said Gimlet, "then, that's a piece of luck. If he swings it will be no bad job; a bloody-minded scoundrel!"

Ned Hayward was somewhat surprised to hear his friend Wolf qualify by so unsavory an epithet a gentleman, whose friend and companion he had very lately been; the young officer, however, knew a good deal of the world and the world's ways, and he was not at all inclined to honor the ci-devant poacher for so sudden a change of opinion. His first thought was, this man must be a scoundrel at heart, after all, to abuse a man whom he has been consorting with in this manner, without any motive for so doing, except the simple fact of a change in his own avocations. If he thought young Wittingham a very respectable person two or three hours ago, when he himself was only Wolf the poacher, I do not understand why he should judge him a bloody-minded villain, now that he himself has become Stephen Gimlet, second keeper to Sir John Slingsby. This does not look like honesty.

A second thought, however, upon all he had seen of the man's character, the frankness, the hardihood, even the dogged determination he had shown, induced Captain Hayward to say to himself, "The fellow can't know who it is;" and as thought is a very rapid thing, he replied with a perceptible pause, "Yes, I have got him, safe and sure, and if you'll help, he cannot get away. You guess who he is, I dare say, Stephen!"

"Oh, to be sure, sir," answered Gimlet; "it is that young scoundrel, Harry Wittingham. Bad's the crow and bad's the egg," he continued, without knowing he was using a Greek proverb, "I suppose it can be no one else; for I heard from the old housekeeper down in the town, that he swore like fury that he would have vengeance on his father if he laid the information against him before Sir John."

"Humph!" said Ned Hayward: "but then," he thought, "I am rather hard upon the man too. The idea of any one in cold blood firing a shot at his own father is certainly enough to rouse the indignation and disgust even of men who would wink at, or take part in, lesser crimes to which they are more accustomed. Come, Sephen," he continued aloud, "now you are here, we may do better than I could alone. Let us see what is to be done."

"Oh, we'll soon manage it, sir," answered Wolf, "I know every bit of the pit well enough; there is but one place he can go to with his horse, and but one road up the bank. He can round the inside of the pit two ways, sure

enough, but what we had best do is, to go in till we can see what he is about, and then have a rush upon him together or separate, or cut him off either way."

Captain Hayward agreed in this view of the case, and after a few more words of consultation, the horse was fastened to a scraggy hawthorn tree, and stooping down as low as possible to conceal their approach, Captain Hayward and his companion advanced along the cart-road down into the pit. The moment after they began to descend, the bank on the right cast a shadow over them, which favored their operations, and Gimlet, taking the lead, crept silently along a path which had once served for the waggons that carried the sand out of the pit, but was now overgrown with grass, and hemmed in with bushes, shrubs, and trees of forty or fifty years' growth. No moonlight penetrated there, and all was dark, gloomy, and intricate. Now the path turned to the right, now to the left, then proceeded straightforward again, and then began to mount a little elevation in the surface, or floor, as the miners would call it, of the pit itself, still thickly surrounded by green shrubs, through which, however, the slanting beams of the moon were shining over the edge of the pit. Stephen Gimlet's steps became still more quiet and cautious, and he whispered to Ned Hayward to walk lightly, for fear the fugitive should catch a sound of their approach, and make his escape. Each step occupied several seconds, so carefully was it planted; the slight rustling of the leaves, catching upon their clothes, and each falling back upon a branch, which, pushed aside as they passed, was dashed back upon those behind, made them pause and listen, thinking that the object of their eager pursuit must have caught the sound as well as their own nearer ears. At length, Stephen Gimlet stopped, and putting back his hand, held his companion aloof for an instant, while he leaned forward and brought his eyes close to a small hole between the branches. Then, drawing Ned Hayward forward, he pointed in the same direction in which he had been looking, with his right finger, and immediately laid it upon his lips as a token to be silent. Ned Hayward bent his head and gazed through the aperture as his companion had done. The scene before him was a very peculiar one. In broken beams, filtered, as we may call it, by the green leaves and higher branches, the moonlight was streaming upon a small open space, where the ground rose into a swelling knoll, covered with green turf and moss. There was one small birch-tree in the midst, and a hawthorn by its side, but all the rest was clear, and on the right hand could be seen, marked out by the yellow sand, the cart-road which led to the moor above. Standing close to the two little trees was a horse, a fine, strong, powerful bay, with a good deal of bone and sinew, long in the reach, but what is unusual in horses of that build, with a chine and shoulder like those of a wild boar. Close to the horse, with the bridle thrown over his arm, and apparently exceedingly busy upon something he was doing, stood a tall, powerful man, whose face, from the position in which he had placed himself, could not be seen; his back, in short, was toward Ned Hayward and his companion, but from under his left arm protruded part of the stock of a gun, which a moonbeam that fell upon it, showed as plainly as the daylight could have done. From the position in which he held the firelock it seemed to Ned Hayward as if he were attending to the priming, and the moment afterward the click of the pan showed that the supposition was correct.

At the same time this sound met his ear, the young gentleman was drawn gently back by the hand of his companion, and the latter whispered, "That's Harry Wittingham's horse, I'd swear to him among a thousand, but that's not Henry Wittingham himself, of that I'm quite sure."

"I cannot see his face," answered Ned Hayward, in the same low tone, "but the figure seems to me very much the same."

"Hush! he's moving," said the man; "better let us go round and cut him off by either road, you to the right and I to the left—straight through that little path there—we shall have a shot for it, but we must not mind that—see, he is looking at his girths."

The man whom they spoke of had seemed perfectly unconscious of the presence of any such unwelcome visitors near him. His motions were all slow and indifferent, till the last words had passed Stephen Gimlet's lips; then, however, he turned suddenly round, displaying a face that Captain Hayward did not at all recollect, and gazing direct to the spot where they stood, he raised his gun, already cocked, to his shoulder, and fired.

Fortunately, it so happened that Ned Hayward had taken one step in the direction which his companion had pointed out, otherwise the ball, with which the piece was charged, would have passed right through his breast. As it was, it grazed his left arm, leaving a slight flesh wound, and, seeing that they were discovered, both he and Stephen Gimlet dashed straight through the trees toward the object of their pursuit. He, in the mean time, had put his foot in the stirrup, and sprung upon his horse's back. One rushed at him on either side, but perchance, at all hazards and at all events, without a moment's consideration, the man dashed at the poacher, brandishing the gun which he held in his hand like a club. As he came up without giving ground an inch, Stephen clutched at his bridle, receiving a tremendous blow with the stock of his gun, and attempting to parry it with his left hand. The man raised his rein, however, at the same moment he struck the blow, and Stephen missed the bridle. He struck at him with his right, however, in hope of bringing him from his horse, and with such force and truth did he deliver his reply to the application of the gun-stock, that the man bent down to the horse's mane, but at the same time he struck his spurs deep into the beast's flanks, passed his opponent with a spring, and galloped up to the moor.

"I am away after him," cried Ned Hayward, and darting along the road like lightning, he gained the common, unhooked his own horse from the tree, and recommenced the pursuit with the same figure still flying before him.

The steep rise of the pit had somewhat blown the fugitive's horse, and for the first hundred yards or so Captain Hayward gained upon him, but he soon brought all his knowl-

edge of the country to bear, every pond, every bank, every quagmire, gave him some advantage, and when, at the end of about ten minutes, they neared the plantations at the end of the moor, he was considerably farther from his pursuer than when their headlong race began. At length he disappeared where the road led in among trees and hedge-rows, and any further chase seemed to promise little. Ned Hayward's was a sadly persevering disposition, however; he had an exceedingly great dislike to be frustrated in anything, and on he therefore rode without drawing a rein, thinking, "in this more populous part of the country I shall surely meet with some whom he has passed, and who will give me information."

It was a wonderfully solitary, a thinly peopled district, however, which lay on the other side of the moor from Tarningham. They went early to bed, too, in that part of the world, and not a living soul did Ned Hayward meet for a full mile up the long lane. At the end of that distance, the road branched into three, and in the true spirit of knight-errantry, the young gentleman threw down his rein on the horse's neck, leaving it to carry him on in search of adventures, according to its own sagacity. The moor was about four miles and a half across; but in the various turnings and windings they had taken, now here, now there, upon its surface, horse and man had contrived to treble that distance, or perhaps something more. There had been a trot to the town before and back again, a hand-canter through the park, and then a tearing burst across the moor. The horse therefore thought, with some reason, that there had been enough of riding and being ridden for one night, and as soon as Ned Hayward laid down the reins, it fell from a gallop to a canter, from a canter to a trot, and was beginning to show an inclination to a walk, if not to stand still, when Ned Hayward requested it civilly with his heels to go on a little faster. It had now selected its path, however, remembering Ovid's axiom, that the middle of the road is the safest. This was all that Ned Hayward could have desired at his hands, if it had had any; but of its hoofs he required that they should accelerate their motions, and on he went again at a rapid pace, till, suddenly turning into a high road, he saw nearly before him on the left hand, six large elms in a row, with a horse-trough under the two nearest; an enormous sign swinging between the two central trees, and an inn, with four steps up to the door, standing a little back from the road.

There was a good light streaming from some of the windows; the moon was shining clear, but the dusty old elms were thick with foliage, which effectually screened the modest figures on the sign from the garish beams of either the domestic or the celestial luminary.

Ned Hayward drew in his rein as soon as he beheld the inn and its accompaniments; then approached softly, paused to consider, and ultimately rode into the court-yard, without troubling the people of the house with any notification of his arrival. He found two men in the yard in stable dresses, who immediately approached with somewhat officious civility, saying, "Take your horse, sir?"

And Ned Hayward, dismounting slowly, like a man very much tired, gave his beast into their hands, and affected to saunter quietly back to the inn, while they led his quiet little cob into the stables. Then suddenly turning, after he had taken twenty steps, he followed at a brisk pace, he passed the stable door, walked deliberately down the whole row of horses in the stalls, till he stopped opposite one—a bright bay, with a long back, and thick, high crest, which was still covered with lather, and had evidently been ridden furiously not many minutes before.

Turning suddenly to the ostler and his help, who had evidently viewed his proceedings with more consternation than was quite natural, he placed himself between them and the door, and demanded with a bent brow and a stern tone, "Where is the master of this horse?"

The help, who was nearest, gasped in his face like a caught trout, but the ostler pushed him aside, and replied instantly, "He is indoors, sir, in number eleven."

And turning on his heel, Ned Hayward immediately entered the inn.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LETTER.

We left Sir John Slingsby with an exclamation in his mouth. An expression of wonder it was, at what could have become of his friend Ned Hayward, and the reader may recollect that it was then about ten o'clock at night. Quitting the worthy baronet in somewhat abrupt and unceremonious haste, we hurried after the young officer ourselves, in order to ascertain his fate and fortune with our own eyes; and now, having done that, we must return once more to Tarningham Park, and make an apology to Sir John, for our rude dereliction of his house and company. He is a good-natured man, not easily put out of temper, so that our excuses will be taken in good part; nor was he inclined to make himself peculiarly anxious or apprehensive about any man on the face of the earth; so that, even in the case of his dear friend Ned Hayward, he let things take their chance, as was his custom, trusting to fortune to bring about a good result, and philosophically convinced, that if the blind goddess did not choose to do so, it was not in his power to make her. During the evening he had once or twice shown some slight symptoms of uneasiness when he looked round and remarked his guest's absence; he had scolded his daughter a little, too, for not singing as well as usual; and, to say the truth, she had deserved it; for, whether it was the story told by the gentlemen on their return from the dining-room had frightened her—it not being customary at Tarningham House to have shots fired through the windows—or whether it was that she was uneasy at Captain Hayward's prolonged absence, she certainly did not do her best at the piano. Sing as ill as she would, however, Mary Clifford, who sang with her, kept her in countenance. Now Mary was a very finished musician, with an exceedingly rich, sweet-toned voice, flexible, and cultivated in a high degree, with which she could do anything she chose; so that it was very evident that she either did not choose to sing well, or else that she was thinking of something else.

But to return to Sir John. Perhaps, if we could look into all the dark little corners of his heart—those curious little pigeon-holes that are in the breast of every man, containing all the odd crotchets and strange feelings and sensations, the unaccountable perversities, the whimsical desires and emotions, that we so studiously conceal from the common eye—it is not at all improbable that we should find a certain degree of satisfaction, a comfort, a relief, derived by the worthy baronet, from the unusual events which had chequered and enlivened that evening; he had looked forward to the next six or seven hours with some degree of apprehension; he had thought it would be monstrous dull, with all the proprieties and decorums which he felt called upon to maintain before his sister; and the excitement of the interview with Mr. Wittingham, the examination of Stephen Gimlet, and the unaccountable disappearance of Ned Hayward, supplied the vacancy occasioned by the absence of the bottle and jest. Soon after the gentlemen had entered the drawing-room, Sir John placed his niece and his daughter at the piano, and engaged Dr. Miles, his sister, and even Mr. Beauchamp, in a rubber at whist; and though from time to time he turned round his head to scold Isabella for singing negligently, yet he contrived to extract amusement from the game, laughing, talking, telling anecdotes, commenting upon the play of his partner and his opponents, and turning everything into jest and merriment. Thus passed the evening to the hour I have mentioned, when Mrs. Clifford rose and retired to bed; and the first exclamation of Sir John, after she was gone, was that which I have recorded.

"It is strange, indeed," said Beauchamp, in reply; "but you know his habits better than I do, and can better judge what has become of him."

"Indeed, my dear uncle," said Miss Clifford with an earnest air, "I think you ought to make some inquiries. I do not think Captain Hayward would have gone away in so strange a manner, without some extraordinary motive, and after the alarming circumstance that has happened to-night, one cannot well be without apprehension."

"A harum-scarum fellow!" answered Sir John; "nobody ever knew what he would do next. Some wild-goose scheme of his or another; I saw him once jump off the mole at Gibraltar, when he was a mere boy, to save the life of a fellow who had better have been drowned, a sneaking Spanish thief, a half-smuggler and half-spy."

"And did he save him?" exclaimed Miss Clifford, eagerly.

"Oh, to be sure," answered Sir John; "he swims like a Newfoundland dog, that fellow."

"Your carriage, sir," said a servant, entering and addressing Mr. Beauchamp.

"Here, Jones," cried Sir John Slingsby; "do you know what has become of Captain Hayward? we have not seen him all night."

"Why, Sir John," answered the man, "Ralph, the under-groom, told me he had met the captain in the park, as he was returning from taking your note to Mr. Wharton, and that Captain Hayward made him get down, jumped upon the cob, and rode away out at the gates as hard as he could go."

"There, I told you so," said Sir John Slingsby; "heaven only knows what he is about, and there is no use trying to find it out; but this is too bad of you, Mr. Beauchamp, ordering your carriage at this hour; the days of curfew are passed, and we can keep the fire in a little after sundown."

"You should stay and see what has become of your friend, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella Slingsby; "I don't think that is like a true companion-in-arms, to go away and leave him, just when you know he is engaged in some perilous adventure."

Beauchamp was not proof against such persuasions; but we are all merchants in this world, trafficking for this or that, and sometimes bartering things that are of very little value to us in reality for others that we value more highly. Beauchamp made it a condition of his stay, that Isabella should go on singing; and Mary Clifford engaged her uncle in a *tête-à-tête*, while Beauchamp leaned over her cousin at the piano. The first song was scarcely concluded, however, when the butler again made his appearance, saying—

"You were asking, Sir John, what had become of Captain Hayward, and Stephen Gimlet has just come in to say that he had seen him about an hour ago."

"Well, well," said Sir John, impatiently, "what the devil has become of him? what bat-fowling exhibition has he gone upon now? By Jove! that fellow will get his head broken some of these days, and then we shall discover whether there are any brains in it or not. Sometimes I think there is a great deal, sometimes that there is none at all; but, at all events, he is as kind, good-hearted fellow as ever lived, that's certain."

"Stephen Gimlet says, Sir John," replied the butler, with his usual solemnity, "that the captain went out on horseback to hunt down the man who fired through the window."

"Whew!" whistled Sir John Slingsby, "was it not one of those cursed fools of game-keepers, shooting a deer?"

"No, Sir John," answered the man, "it was some one who came in on horseback by the upper gates. Captain Hayward got upon the cob and hunted him across the moor, till he lodged him in one of the pits on the other side, and was watching him there by the moonlight when Stephen Gimlet came up; for he was afraid, if he went in one way, that he might get out the other."

"Well, have they got him? have they got him?" cried Sir John; "by Jove! this is too bad, one must have his plate made bomb-proof, if this is to go on."

"They have not got him, please you, Sir John," replied the butler, "for when Stephen came up, he and the captain went in, and both got close up to the fellow, it seems, but he had time to charge his gun, and he fired straight at them. Wolf—that is, Mr. Gimlet—says he is sure Captain Hayward is wounded, for the man rode away as hard as he could go before they could stop him, and the captain jumped upon the cob and went after him again at the full gallop."

"Where did they go? which way did they take?" exclaimed the baronet, bustling up warmly; "by Jove! this is too bad, it must be put down! Tell Matthews and Harrison, and two or three more, to get out horses as fast as

possible—which way did they take!—can't you answer!—have you got no ears!"

"Stephen said, sir, that they seemed to go toward Buxton's inn," replied the butler, "but he could not well see, for they got in among the woods."

"By Jove, I'll soon settle this matter," cried Sir John; "I'll just get on a pair of boots and be off—Mr. Beauchamp, you must stay till I come back, so come, be friendly, send away your carriage, and take a bed."

"Upon one condition, Sir John," replied Beauchamp, "that you allow me to be the companion of your ride."

"No, no," cried Sir John, rubbing his hands, "my dear fellow, you must stay and protect the ladies."

"Oh, we shall do very well, papa," cried Isabella; "only order all the doors and windows to be shut, and I will command in camp till your return."

"There's a hero," cried Sir John Slingsby, "agreed! Jones, Jones, you dog, tell the boy to take away his horses, and not to come for Mr. Beauchamp till this time to-morrow night—nay, I insist, Beauchamp—no refusal, no refusal—capital haunch of venison just ready for the spit—bottle of Burgundy, and all very proper—everything as prim as my grandmother's maiden aunt—but come along, I'll equip you for your ride—ha, ha, ha, capital fun, by Jove! Ned Hayward's a famous fellow to give us such a hunt extempore; as good as a bagged fox, and a devil a deal better than a drag."

Thus saying, Sir John Slingsby rolled out of the room, followed by Mr. Beauchamp, to prepare themselves for their expedition from a vast store of very miscellaneous articles, which Sir John Slingsby's dressing-room contained. He was, heaven knows, anything but a miser, and yet in that dressing-room were to be found old suits of clothes and equipments of different kinds, which he had had, at every different period, from twenty to hard upon the verge of sixty; jack-boots, dress pumps, hobnailed shoes, Hessians, and pen-dragons, great coats, small coats, suits of regimentals, wrap-rascals, the complete costume of a harlequin, which now scarcely would have held one of his thighs, and a mask and domino. But with each of these pieces of apparel was connected some little incident, or tale, or jest, which clung lingering to the old gentleman's memory, associating with events sweet, or joyous, or comic, sometimes even with sad events, but always with something that touched one or other of the soft points in his heart; and he never could make up his mind to part with them. From these he would have fain furnished his guest with a wardrobe, but unfortunately the baronet's and Mr. Beauchamp's were of very different sizes, and he laughingly put away the pair of boots that were offered, saying, "No, no, Sir John, my shoes will do very well; I have ridden in every sort of foot-covering under the sun, I believe, from wooden boots to morocco leather slipper; but I will take this large cloak that is hanging here, in case we should have to bivouac."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried Sir John again; "a capital notion; I should not mind it at all:—light a great fire on the top of the moor, turn our toes in, and put a bundle of heath under our heads:—we have got capital heath here. Were you ever in Scotland, Mr. Beauchamp!"

"I was, sir, once," answered Beauchamp, in a tone so stern and grave, that Sir John Slingsby suddenly looked up and saw the countenance of his guest clouded and gloomy, as if something exceedingly offensive or painful had just been said to him. It cleared up in a moment, however, and as soon as the baronet was ready they issued forth again and descended into the hall.

In the mean while, Isabella and her cousin had remained sitting near the piano, both rather thoughtful in mood. For a minute or two each was silent, busied, apparently, with separate trains of thought. At length Mary looked up, inquiring, "What do you intend to do, Isabella!"

"What do you mean, Mary, love!" replied her cousin; "if you mean to ask whether I intend to marry Ned Hayward, as I have a slight notion papa intends I should, I say no, at once:" and she laughed gayly.

"Oh, no," answered Miss Clifford; "my question was not half so serious a one, Isabella; though I do not see why you should not, either. I only wished to ask whether you intended to sit up or go to bed."

"Why I should not," exclaimed Isabella, gayly, "I can give you twenty good reasons in a minute. We are both so thoughtless; we should ruin ourselves in a couple of years; we are both so merry, we should laugh ourselves to death in a fortnight; we are both so harum-scarum, as papa calls it, that it would not be safe for one to trust the other out of sight; for, a thousand to one, we should never meet again; he would go to the East Indies, and I to the West seeking him; and then each would go to meet the other, and we should pass each other by the way."

Mary Clifford smiled thoughtfully; and after pausing in meditation for a moment or two, she answered, "After all, Isabella, I have some doubts as to whether either of you is as thoughtless as you take a pleasure in seeming."

"Oh, you do me injustice—you do me injustice, Mary," cried Miss Slingsby; "I seem nothing but what I am. As to Captain Hayward," she added, with a sly smile, "you know best, Mary dear. He is your *preux chevalier*, you know; delivered you from lions and tigers, and giants and ravishers, and, as in duty bound, has talked to nobody but you all day."

Mary colored a little, but replied straightforwardly, "Oh yes, we have talked a good deal, enough to make me think that he is not so thoughtless as my uncle says; and I know you are not so thoughtless as you say you are yourself. But what do you intend to do while they are gone!"

"Oh, I shall sit up, of course," answered Isabella; "I always do, till papa goes to bed. When he has a large party, and I hear an eruption of the Goths and Vandals making its way hither—which I can always discover by the creaking of the glass door—I retreat into that little room and fortify myself with lock and key, for I have no taste for mankind in a state of drunkenness; and then, when they have roared and bellowed, and laughed, and quarreled, and drank their coffee and gone away, I come out and talk to papa for half an hour, till he is ready to go to bed."

"But is he always in a very talking condition himself!" asked Mary Clifford.

"Oh, fie! now, Mary," exclaimed her cousin; "how can you suffer your mind to be prejudiced by people's reports. My father likes to see every one happy, and even jovial under his roof—perhaps a little too much—but if you mean to say he get's tipsy, it is not the case; I never saw him the least so in all my life; in fact I don't think he could if he would; for I have seen him drink as much wine as would make me tipsy twenty times over, without its having any effect upon him at all—a little gay, indeed; but he is always gay after dinner."

Mary Clifford listened with a quiet smile, but replied not to Isabella's discourse upon her father's sobriety, merely saying, "Well, if you sit up, my dear cousin, I shall sit up too to keep you company;" but scarcely had the words passed her sweet lips, when in came Sir John Slingsby and Mr. Beauchamp, the baronet holding a note open in his hand.

"Ha, ha, ha," he cried, "news of the deserter, news of the deserter, we had just got to the hall door, horses ready, cloaks on our backs, servants mounted, plans arranged, a gallop of five or six miles, and a bivouac on the moor before us, when up walks one of the boys from Buxton's inn with this note from the runaway; let us see what he says," and approaching the lamp, he read by its light several detached sentences from Ned Hayward's letter, somewhat to the following effect: "Dear Sir John, for fear you should wonder what has become of me—so I did, by Jove—I write this to tell you—ah, I knew all that before—cantered him across the common—earthed him in old sand-pit—rascal fired at me—not much harm done—chased him along the road, but lost him at the three turnings—came on here—very tired—comfortable quarters—particular reason for staying where I am—over with you early in the morning—Ned Hayward."

"Ah, very well, very well," continued Sir John, "that's all right; so now, Beauchamp, if you are for a game at piquet I am your man; if not, some wine and water, and then to bed. I'll put you under the tutelage of my man Galveston, who knows what's required by every sort of men in the world, from the Grand Turk down to the Methodist parson, and he will provide you with all that is necessary."

Mr. Beauchamp, however, declined both piquet and wine and water; and, in about half an hour, the whole party had retired to their rooms; and gradually Tarningham Hall sank into silence and repose.

One of the last persons who retired to rest was Sir John Slingsby himself; for, before he sought his own room, he visited the library, and there, lying on the table where his letters were usually placed, he found a note, neatly folded and sealed, and directed in a stiff, clear, clerk-like hand. He took it up and looked at it; laid it down again; took it up once more; held it, for at least three minutes, in his hand, as if irresolute whether he should open it or not; and at length tore open the seal, exclaiming,

"No, hang me if I go to bed with such a morsel on my stomach."

Then, putting it on the other side of the candle, and his glass to his eye, he read the contents. They did not seem to be palatable; for the first sentence made him exclaim,

"Pish! I know you, my buck!"

After this he read on again; and though he made no further exclamation, his brow became cloudy, and his eye anxious. When he had done, he threw it down, put his hands behind his back, and walked two or three times up and down the room, stopping every now and then to gaze at the Turkey carpet.

"Hang him!" he cried, at length. "By Jove! this is a pretty affair."

And then he walked up and down again.

"Well, devil take it!" he cried, at length, tearing the note to pieces, and then throwing the fragments into the basket under the table, "it will come, some how or other, I dare say. There is always something turns up—if not, the trees must go—can't be helped—improve the prospect—landscape gardening—ha! ha! ha!"

And laughing heartily, he rolled off to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHANCE-MEETING IN THE PARK.

The morning sky was very gray. There was a thin film of vapor over the greater part of the heavens, retarding, as it were, the advance of dawn, as a mother keeps back her wayward child struggling forward too fast upon all the varied ways of life. Yet toward the east there was a bright streak of gold, which told that the star of light, and warmth, and genial influences, was coming up rapidly from below the round edge of the rolling ball. It was a line, defined and clear, marked out from the vapor, which ended there by an edge of lighter yellow; and as the strong golden tints became more and more intense, the filmy cloud split and divided into fragments of strange shapes, while the beams streamed through, and, passing across the wide extent of air, tinted with purple the vapors above. Toward that glowing streak all things seemed to turn; the sunflower inclined her head thither; the lark bent his flight in that direction; toward it all the songsters of the wood seemed to pour the voices of their choir. It is a strange thing, the East; full of curious associations with all the marvelous history of man. Every good thing and almost every bright thing, has come from the East; religion, salvation's hope; daylight and the seeming movement of the stars and moon; summer and sunshine and Christianity have sprung thence, as if there were the fountain of all the best gifts to man. There have all nations risen, and still the progress is from the East toward the West; as if there were some law by which all things on the earth followed the course of the great light-giver. Nevertheless, how have these blessings been mingled with many evils! The cutting winds of spring and winter, pestilence and destruction, earthquakes and wars, have there arisen to sweep over the world, and blacken it with grief and mourning. It is a strange place, the East; and I can never look toward it and see the rising sun, without a strange feeling of awe and mystery, from the various associations which exist between it and the wonders of the past.

The scene from the windows of Tarningham

Hall was not a very extensive one, but it was fine in its peculiar character: the sweeps of the park; the dewy lawns; the large old trees; the broad and feathery fern; the stately deer, walking along with unconfirmed steps and half-awakened deliberation; the matutinal hares, scudding about in the gray twilight; and the squirrels, rushing from tree to tree; were all pleasant to the eye that looked upon them, though that eye could only at one small point, where the break in the wood gave a wilder view, catch anything beyond the domain, and all that even there was gained, consisted of a narrow portion of that same streak of yellow light, which broke the monotonous curtain of the cloud toward the east.

Nevertheless, for several minutes, Mary Clifford gazed upon the whole with pleasure and interest. She was early in her habits; a familiar child of the morning; and the dew on the leaves was a delight to her; the soft gray of the early day, a sort of invitation to contemplation and enjoyment. After marking the deer, and smiling at the sportive gambols of the hares, who, as it was forbidden to shoot near the house, played fearless on the lawns, she turned her eyes toward the spot where the dawning morning-light was visible, and recollecting that not far from the house, and what was called the terrace, there was a point whence the whole scene over the country was visible, and where she could watch, with uninterrupted pleasure, all the effects of the breaking day upon that beautiful landscape, she sallied forth to enjoy a peculiar sort of pleasure, which requires a very pure and unsullied mind, and a heart naturally elevated and devout, to understand it fully.

The hour was a very early one; for, at that season of the year, Dan Phœbus, as the ancient poets call him, shaking off the lazy habits of the winter, gets up betimes; and, as the servants of good Sir John Slingsby were not subjected to very severe discipline, not a single soul in the house was up to give our sweet friend exit. There is always a curious sensation in walking alone through a house, all the other tenants of which are still sleeping; there is a deathly feeling about it; a severing of the ties, which so lately existed between us and those who are now insensible; but that sensation is most strongly felt, when the morning sunshine is on the world; when nature has revived, or is reviving from the trance of night; and other things are busy in restless activity, though the gay companions of a few hours gone by are silent and still, as if death had struck them.

Down the broad oak stairs, with its narrow strip of carpet, along the old marble hall with its tesselated floor, Mary Clifford went slowly and quietly, lighted alone by a skylight overhead, and a large window over the great doors; but she could hear the gay birds singing without; the thrush upon the tree-top; the wood-lark in the shade; the linnet, with its small, sweet song, and the chaffinch, in his spring dress and his spring notes, among the bushes. She opened the door of the library and went in, leaving it unclosed behind her, then unbarred and unlocked the glass door, went out and gazed about her. Some deer that were near the house started and withdrew a few steps, and then paused to stare at her; but whether it was that they had never seen any of their companions slaughtered by a being in a woman's dress, or that they thought she looked, as she really did, sweet and gentle as the morning, they did not take fright, trotting a few steps farther, after a long look, and then stopping with their heads to converse over the matter.

After closing the door, Mary walked on toward the terrace, which was at the distance of about a couple of hundred yards, climbed the steps and proceeded toward the end, where the finest view was to be obtained, at a spot sheltered by six rugged yews, underneath which there was a seat: and there she paused, for at least ten minutes, drinking in the beauty of the scene, as if changed to a thousand hues under the influence of the rising sun. All was still and tranquil; but at length she heard some voices speaking, and looked in the direction in which they came.

Some of the grooms, she thought, as her eyes rested on the stables at some little distance in the rear of the house; and although it was not at all probable that they would disturb her reveries, yet she prepared to go back, for one half of the pleasure which she derived from her early walk lay in its solitude. She was wishing that the grooms had thought fit to lie in bed for half an hour longer, when she heard proceeding from the lower ground under the bank of the terrace, the light and rapid footfalls of some one apparently walking from the stables to the mansion; and, not at all wishing to meet any one, she turned back again toward the yews. At the end of the terrace, however, the footsteps stopped; there was a momentary pause, and then they mounted the steps and came along the gravel toward her. Mary walked on to the end, and then turned, when straight before her appeared Captain Hayward, coming on with his usual light and cheerful air, though the sleeve of his coat was cut open, and it was evident that he had bandages round his arm.

"Good morning, good morning, Miss Clifford," he said, advancing frankly and taking her hand; "what a magnificent morning! I see you are as early in your habits as myself. But did you ever see such a rich dove-color as has come upon those clouds! I love some of these calm gray mornings, with the promise of a bright day they give, better far than those skies all purple and gold, such as are described by that rhodomontade fellow, Marmontel, in his 'Incas,' which are always sure to end in clouds and rain. I have always thought those very bright mornings like a dashing woman of fashion, tricked out in her best smiles and her brightest colors, promising all sorts of things with her eyes, which she does not intend to perform, and cold or frowning before half an hour is over."

"And the gray morning, Captain Hayward," asked Mary, with a smile, "what is that like?"

"Oh, I don't know," answered Hayward, laughing, "you must not drive my imagination too hard, dear lady, lest it stumble—perhaps the gray morning is like a calm, quiet, well

brought up country girl, with a kind heart under the tranquil look that will give a long day of sunshine after its first coolness is passed."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and did not answer; but, as she was walking on toward the house, Ned Hayward continued in his usual straightforward way; "You must not go in yet, my dear Miss Clifford; I want you to take a turn or two with me upon this delightful terrace. You must, indeed, for I have got a thousand things to say, and I know I shall find nobody else to say them to for the next two or three hours."

His fair companion did not think fit to refuse, though some prudish people might have thought it a little improper to take a walk at five o'clock in the morning with a young captain of infantry unattached; but Mary Clifford had only known Captain Hayward six-and-thirty hours, and therefore she saw nothing in the least improper in it in the world. Young ladies, who guard so very scrupulously against being made love to, forget that they show what they expect. She turned, therefore, with him at once, and replied, "You must, indeed, have a long series of adventures to tell us; I am delighted to forestall the rest of the family, and to have the news myself three hours before any one. We were all in great alarm about you last night. My uncle and Mr. Beauchamp, and half-a-dozen servants were setting out to seek you, upon the report of Stephen Gimlet, as they call him, the father of the little boy you saved; but your note just arrived in time to stop them."

"Oh, then, Master Gimlet, I suppose, has told my story for me?" said Ned Hayward.

"Only very briefly," answered the young lady; "he said you had chased some man over the common, who had fired at you, and he was afraid had wounded you; and I fear, from what I see, he was right."

"Oh, it was nothing, nothing at all," replied Ned Hayward; "but I'll tell you all about it as circumstantially as a newspaper;" and he went on in a gay and lively tone to give an account of his adventures of the preceding night, till his arrival at Buxton's inn. Sometimes he made Mary Clifford laugh, sometimes look grave and apprehensive, but he always interested her deeply in his tale; and she showed that she had marked one part particularly by asking, "Then did you know the man when you saw his face so distinctly in the pit?"

"Up to that moment I thought I did," replied her companion, "but then I saw I was utterly mistaken. I will acknowledge to you, my dear Miss Clifford, that, till he turned round, I fancied he was one I had seen before—the same height, the same make—and, under existing circumstances, I felt that nothing would justify me in giving up the pursuit, although it was most painful to me, I assure you, to follow, with the purpose of punishing a young gentleman, in whom, from what you said yesterday at dinner, I conceive you take a considerable interest."

"Who? Mr. Wittingham!" exclaimed Mary Clifford, her face turning as red as scarlet. "Oh, Capain Hayward, you are mistaken, I take no interest in him, I abhor him; or, at least—at least I dislike him very much."

Ned Hayward looked puzzled; and he really was so in a considerable degree. His own prepossessions had done something to mislead him; and a man never conceives a wrong opinion but a thousand small circumstances are sure to arise to confirm it. A man may long for green figs, but in any country but England he will not get them in the month of March; he may desire grapes, but he cannot find them in May; but if he have a suspicion of any kind, he will meet with, whenever he likes, all sorts of little traits and occurrences to strengthen it, for the only fruit that is ripe in all seasons is corroborative evidence; and, among the multitude of events that are ever in the market of life, it must be a hard case if he do not find enough of it. After a moment given to consideration, he replied more cautiously than might have been expected, "I have somehow mistaken you, my dear lady," he said at length, "and such mistakes may be dangerous. I have no right to force myself into your confidence; but really the whole of this affair is becoming serious. When first I had the pleasure of seeing you, I found you subjected to what was certainly a great outrage. I call it so; for I am perfectly certain that you yourself must have considered it as such; and there could not even be a palliation for it except—" he paused an instant, and then added, gravely, "except love on both sides, disappointed by objections arising in the prejudices of others."

Mary Clifford colored deeply, but suffered him to proceed. "I need not tell you, after what I have said," he continued, "that I have recognized and identified the principal person concerned in this business. At dinner you expressed a very strong desire that the offender should not be punished; but the former offense was followed by a very serious crime. A shot was fired last night into your uncle's dining-room amid a party of gentlemen quietly drinking their wine, which very nearly struck the father of the very man who had already rendered himself amenable to the laws of his country by his attack upon you. I had suspicions that he was the perpetrator of this crime, and although he certainly was not the person I pursued across the moor, yet I have some very strong reasons to think that he was a participator in the offense. These are all very serious circumstances, my dear young lady; but I am ignorant of those which have preceded these events, and if without pain to yourself you could give me any explanations which might guide my mind to the causes of all that has occurred, it might be very serviceable in many respects. I am sure you will answer me frankly, if it be possible, and believe me, I am not one to act harshly, or to abuse your confidence—nay, more, thoughtless as I may seem, and as I am called, be assured I will do naught without consideration and forethought."

"I am sure you will not, Captain Hayward," answered Mary Clifford, warmly—"quite sure and I have no hesitation in giving you my confidence, though, indeed, I have very little to tell. These things are always unpleasant to speak about, and that is the only motive I could have for remaining silent; but this gentleman's conduct has been so very public, that I am

saved from all scruples on his account. About two years ago, I met Mr. Henry Wittingham at the county ball, danced with him there, and observed nothing in his behavior which should make me treat him differently from other new acquaintances. I did not think him agreeable, but he was not offensive. He asked me to dance again the same night, and I refused; but, shortly after, he was formally introduced at our house; my father asked him to dinner, and was, indeed, very kind, both to him and to Mr. Wittingham, his father, because he thought that they were unjustly looked down upon and treated coldly by the county gentry on account of their family. I soon began to find that—that—I really do not well know how to go on—but that this young gentleman's visits were more frequent than was pleasant, and that he always contrived to be near me, especially when we met in public. His conversation, his manners, as I knew more of him, became insupportably disagreeable: I tried, as much as I could, to avoid him—to check his advances—at first quietly, but decidedly, without speaking to any one else, for I did not wish to produce any breach between my father and Mr. Wittingham; but, at last, I found that he made a parade and a boast of his intimacy, and then I thought it best to speak both to mamma and my dear father. What was done I really do not know; but certainly something took place which very much enraged both father and son, and the latter was forbidden to visit at our house. The result was anything but deliverance from his persecution. From that moment he chose to assume that the objection was on the side of my parents, and I cannot tell you how I have been annoyed. I have not ventured to walk out alone; for, although once when I met him in the village, I told him plainly my sentiments toward him, he still persisted, in the most unpleasant manner, that I spoke alone from mamma's dictation, and for months he used to hang about the place, till I really grew nervous at the sight of every human being whom I did not instantly recognize. This last outrage has been worse than all, and I will admit that it deserves punishment; but I am afraid, from various circumstances which accompanied it, that the law, if carried into effect, would punish it too severely. My uncle declared he would hang the man if he could catch him; and oh! think, Captain Hayward, what a horrible reflection that would ever be to me through life, to think that I had been even the innocent cause of bringing a fellow-creature to a disgraceful death."

"Painful, indeed, I do not doubt," answered Ned Hayward; "but yet—"

"Nay, nay," cried Mary; "do not say *but yet*, Captain Hayward. I could never make up my mind to give evidence against him; and, to speak selfishly, the very fact of having to appear in a court of justice, and of having my name in public newspapers, would render the punishment nearly as great to me as to him. These were my sole motives, I can assure you, in what I said yesterday, and not the slightest personal interest in one who has, I am afraid, in all situations disgraced himself."

For some reason or another, Ned Hayward was glad to hear Mary Clifford defend herself, and so warmly, too, from the imputation of any feeling of regard for Harry Wittingham; but he took care not to show, to its full extent, all the pleasure that he felt.

"I thought it strange, indeed," he said, "that you should entertain any great feeling of esteem for a person who certainly seemed to me not worthy of it; but there are often circumstances, my dear Miss Clifford, unseen by the general eye, which endear two persons to each other, who seem the most dissimilar—youthful companionship, services rendered, old associations—a thousand things build up this between persons the least likely to assimilate, which are stronger than all opposing principles. I thought that such might be the case with you; but as it is not, let me tell you what was the end of my adventure last night, and then you will see what cause I have for suspicion. I must inform you, in the first instance, that I marked the person of Mr. Henry Wittingham well on the evening of the attack, notwithstanding the twilight, and that I saw him yesterday in Tarningham. His father's unwillingness to enter into the charge, when made against some unknown person, excited suspicion; but I found, afterward, from other sources, that Mr. Wittingham and his son had quarreled, and were completely at variance; and, in the justice-room, the young man whispered something to the old one, of which I heard only two or three words, but they were of a threatening nature. I have told you that I thought I recognized the figure of the man who fired the shot, and Stephen Gimlet declared he could swear the horse he rode was Henry Wittingham's; but I found, as I have said, that the man in the pit was a stranger. When, after pursuing him as long as I had any trace, I at length arrived at a place called, I find, Buxton's Inn, I saw the very horse in the stable, in a state which left no doubt that it had been ridden hard for several hours, and had not been in five minutes. I inquired for the master, and was told the number of the room where he was to be found. I walked straight in, and found Mr. Henry Wittingham sitting quietly at supper. Some conversation ensued, in the course of which I told him the cause of my intrusion, and his whole manner was confused and agitated. He swore violently at the idea of anybody having ridden his horse, and affected not to believe it; but I made him come down to the stable, when, of course, his mouth was closed."

"But who did ride it, then?" exclaimed Miss Clifford.

"Nay, that I cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward; "but I resolved to wait at the inn, and see if I could discover anything. I was shown into a very neat little sitting-room, and wrote a note to your uncle, Sir John, while they were getting my coffee. It was now nearly ten o'clock, and there was a room, apparently similar to my own, on each side of me, with a door of communication with either. I suppose they were locked, so as to prevent the passage of anything very fat or corporeal from one room into the other, but certainly were not so well closed as to exclude all sound. It may seem a strange thing for me, my dear Miss Clifford, to give you an account of the sitting-rooms of an inn; but so much depends in this

world upon what is called juxtaposition, that very important events have depended upon the keyhole of a door. You must not suppose, however, that I made use of either of the keyholes in my room for the laudable and honorable purpose of eaves-dropping; on the contrary, I spoke loud enough to the waiter to give sufficient notice to my neighbors, if I had any, that voices were distinguishable from one room to the other; and it would seem that Mr. Henry Wittingham, who was on the left-hand side, was determined to impress me, not only with the same fact, but also with a notion that he was in a towering passion on account of the usage his horse had met with; for he cursed and swore very severely, to which the waiter, or whosoever he spoke to, did not reply. There seemed to be nobody on the other side for about half an hour, when, as I was sitting at my coffee, after having dispatched my note, I heard steps come up from below, a door open, and the voice of the waiter say, most respectfully, 'I will tell the captain you are here, Mr. Wharton.'"

"It is Mr. Wharton, the lawyer, then!" exclaimed Mary, with some degree of eagerness.

"I really cannot tell," answered Ned Hayward; "but I suspect it was, from what passed afterward. All was silent for about three minutes, except when I heard a step walking up and down the room. As your uncle had mentioned Mr. Wharton's name more than once in the course of yesterday, I fancied he might have come upon business to some one, which there was no necessity for my hearing; and, therefore, I rattled the cups and saucers, moved about the chair, tumbled over a footstool, and left them to take their own course."

"Mr. Wharton is a very shrewd man," said Mary Clifford, "and one, I should think, a hint would not be thrown away upon."

"He did not choose to take mine, however," replied Ned Hayward; "for, at the end of a few minutes, some one seemed to join him, saying, in a loud and familiar tone, 'Ha! how do you do, Wharton?—very glad to see you again! I hope you have brought me some money.'"

"Was it Mr. Wittingham's voice?" asked Miss Clifford.

"Oh, dear no," replied Captain Hayward: "one quite of a different tone—a good deal of the same swaggering insolence in it, but, to my fancy, there was more bold and dogged determination. Every now and then there was a small pause, too, before a word was pronounced, which one generally finds in the speech of a cunning man; but yet there was a sort of sneering persiflage in the words, that I have more generally met with in the empty-headed coxcombs of fashion, who have nothing to recommend them but impertinence and a certain position in society. However, it could not be Mr. Wittingham, for him this lawyer must have known very well, and his reply was, 'Indeed, Captain Moreton, I have not; but I thought it better to come over and answer your note in person, to see what could be done for you.'"

"Captain Moreton!" cried Mary; "I know who it is very well—not that I ever saw him, as far as I can remember; for he quitted this part of the country ten or twelve years ago, when I was quite a child; but I have often heard my father say that he was a bad, reckless man, and had become quite an adventurer, after having broken his mother's heart, ruined his other parent, and abridged poor old Mr. Moreton's days also. He died quite in poverty, three years ago, after having sold his estate, or mortgaged it, or something of the kind, to this very Mr. Wharton, the attorney."

"Indeed!" said Ned Hayward, "that explains a great deal, my dear young lady. Where did this property lie?"

"Just beyond my uncle's, a little way on the other side of the moor," replied Miss Clifford.

Ned Hayward fell into a fit of thought, and did not reply for some moments; at length he said with a laugh, "Well, I do not know that their conversation would interest you very much, though, in spite of all I could do, I heard a great part of it, and as for the rest, I must manage the best way I can for myself."

"You are very tantalizing, Captain Hayward," said his fair companion, "and you seem to imply that I could aid in something. If I can, I think you are bound to tell me. Confidence for confidence, you know," and when she had done she colored slightly, as if feeling that her words implied more than she meant.

"Assuredly," replied Ned Hayward; "but I only fear I might distress you."

"If what you say has reference to Mr. Wittingham," the young lady answered, raising her eyes to his face with a look of ingenuous frankness, "let me assure you, once for all, that nothing you can say will distress me, if it do not imply that I feel something more than the coldest indifference."

"Nay, it does not refer to him at all," replied Ned Hayward, "but to one you love better."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his companion, her lip trembling with eagerness, "tell me—tell me, Captain Hayward! After what you have said, I must beg and entreat that you would."

"I will, then," answered Ned Hayward, gazing upon her with a look of admiration blended with sorrow at the pain he was about to inflict. "I believe, Miss Clifford, I am about to commit an indiscretion in mentioning this subject to you at all; for I do not know that you can assist materially; and yet it is something to have one to consult with—one, in whose generosity, in whose kindness, sympathy, ay, and good sense too, I can fully trust Beside, you know, I dare say, all the people in the neighborhood, and may give me some serviceable hints."

"But speak—speak," said Miss Clifford, pausing in their walk up and down the terrace, as she saw that he fought round the subject which he thought would distress her, with a timid unwillingness to do so; "what is it you have to tell me?"

"Why, I very much fear, my dear young lady," answered Captain Hayward, "that your uncle is very much embarrassed—nay—why should I disguise the matter?—absolutely ruined."

Mary Clifford clasped her hands together, and was about to answer with an exclamation

of sorrow and surprise; but I do believe that no person on earth was ever permitted to give an explanation uninterrupted. The Fates are against it: at least they were so in this instance; for just as Ned Hayward had uttered the last very serious words, they heard a light step tripping up behind them, and both turning suddenly round, beheld Miss Slingsby's French maid.

"Ah, ma'amselle," she said as soon as she reached them, "I saw you out in this early morning without anything on, and so I have brought you a shawl."

"Thank you, thank you, Minette," replied Mary, and as she was well accustomed to early walks, was about to decline the shawl; but, judging the quickest mode of getting rid of the maid would be to take it, she added, "very well—give it to me," and cast it carelessly round her shoulders.

The maid would not be satisfied with that arrangement, however, adjusted it herself, showed how the ladies of Paris shawled themselves, and occupied full ten minutes, during which her poor victim remained in all the tortures of suspense.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISS CLIFFORD IS MADE ACQUAINTED WITH HER UNCLE'S EMBARRASSMENTS BY CAPTAIN HAYWARD.

As soon as the maid had taken herself away, Ned Hayward said in a kind and feeling tone, "I fear I have distressed you much, Miss Clifford; let us walk quite to the other end and talk over this matter: for I have only been hurried into revealing this painful fact by my anxiety to consult with some one as to the possibility, if not of remedying the existing evil, at least of preventing it from going further."

Mary walked on by his side in silence, with her hands clasped and her eyes cast down with a look of deep thought; but at length she looked up, saying in a tone of one communing with herself—"Is it possible! what, with this fine property! But how can it be, Captain Hayward? here he is, with an estate of at least eight thousand a-year in his own possession, to do with it what he chooses."

"To explain all, I had better tell you what I have heard," said her companion. "The tale may be false; I trust part of it is so; but a great part must be true; and the man spoke as if from authority. The first part of their conversation was in a light tone; for a time the lawyer seemed to avoid grappling with the subject, and asked his companion after madam, in not the most respectful manner. The captain replied, she was very well, and in the other room; but pressed the lawyer to the point. He turned away again, and inquired whether Captain Moreton had been successful at the card-table lately. He answered 'Tolerably; he had won a thousand pounds just before he came from London;' but then added, 'Come, come, Wharton, no bush-fighting; you know you owe me five hundred pounds, and I must have it.' To this the lawyer answered: 'No, indeed, Captain Moreton, you are mistaken; I have told you so twice: the property was sold to a client of mine; and if I had chosen to send in my whole bill, your father would have been greatly my debtor instead of I being yours. The sum given was fifty-four thousand pounds; forty thousand went to pay off the mortgage and your debts; twelve thousand your father had; and my bill, together with that of the solicitor's of the opposite party, amounted in fact and reality to two thousand four hundred and seventy-two pounds. You recollect, I had not been paid for six years.'

"The next thing I heard," continued Ned Hayward, "was a loud laugh; and then Captain Moreton exclaimed, 'Your client! Wharton! very good, very good, indeed; you must think me exceedingly green: I know as well as possible who bought the property for two thirds of its value; employed other solicitors for a fictitious client; pocketed one half of their bill, and added thereto a bill of his own, which was more than the double of what he was entitled to—come, come, sir; don't affect to sham a passion, for we have business to talk upon, and that of a very serious kind. You are just going to sell the property again for the full value; and, before you do so, you shall disgorge a little.' The lawyer attempted to bluster, but unsuccessfully; for when he asked how Captain Moreton would stop him from selling the property, even if all he said were true, that worthy gentleman reminded him that his signature had been necessary to one of the papers, and then when he asserted it had been given, informed him with a laugh, that the signature he had obtained was that of a marker at a billiard-table; the lawyer's clerk sent after him to Paris, having been unacquainted with his person. Mr. Wharton attempted to show that it was of no consequence; but the matter so far ended by his giving a check for five hundred pounds, on Captain Moreton's signing another paper, which I suppose was drawn up in the room, for a silence succeeded for some minutes. A part of what took place then was not distinct; and I certainly made no effort to hear it."

"But my uncle," said Miss Clifford, "how does this affect my uncle?"

"He came upon the carpet next," replied Ned Hayward; "Captain Moreton asked who was going to buy the property; and when the lawyer made a mystery of it, saying that he really did not know the true parties, but that Doctor Miles had meddled in the business, the other named Sir John as the probable purchaser. Thereat Mr. Wharton laughed heartily, and said, 'I'll tell you what, captain, Sir John Slingsby is at this moment next thing to a beggar.'"

Mary put her hands before her eyes and turned very pale.

"Forgive me, my dear Miss Clifford," continued Ned Hayward, "for repeating such unpleasant words; but it is better you should hear all. I will hasten, however: Captain Moreton affected not to believe the tale; and then the lawyer went on to mention the facts. He stated that your uncle's property was mortgaged to the utmost extent, that the interest of two half-years would be due in four or five

days; that notice of foreclosure had been given, and the time would expire before six weeks are over; that there are considerable personal debts, and that Sir John had written to him this very day to get a further advance of ten thousand pounds, which are absolutely necessary to stave off utter ruin even for a short time. Now I happen to know that Sir John did actually write to this man; and as Mr. Wharton could have no object in deceiving the person he was speaking to, I fear the tale is too true."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Mary Clifford; "Oh, Captain Hayward, how terrible it is to know this, and not to be able to assist!"

Captain Hayward paused a single instant, and then replied with a look of deep feeling and interest, "Perhaps I ought not to have told you this, Miss Clifford," he said; "but I am a very thoughtless person, I am afraid, and yet I did not do this without thought, either; you know that I have a deep regard for your uncle, he was a very kind friend to me in days gone by, but having observed him well and with that accuracy which, strange as it may seem to say, is only to be found in extreme youth; I know that it is perfectly in vain to talk with him on the subject of his embarrassments, unless at the very moments when they are the most pressing and severe. To talk with him then may be too late. He is one of those—and there are many of them—who, with a hopeful disposition, many resources in their own minds, and a happy faculty of banishing unpleasant thoughts, go on from one difficulty to another, finding means through a great part of life of putting off the evil day, and who, thinking the chapter of accidents inexhaustible, come suddenly to a full stop in the end, with all their resources exhausted, and no possible means of disentangling themselves from their embarrassments. It has been his constant axiom for years, to my certain knowledge, that something would turn up, and when such is the case, it is perfectly in vain to attempt to consult with a person so circumstanced as to the means of extricating him from difficulties, of which he always expects to be delivered by a lucky chance. Having found fortune his best friend, he goes on trusting to her, till the fickle dame deserts him, and then looks around in bewilderment for assistance which cannot arrive."

"Too true a picture, too true a picture," replied Miss Clifford, in a sorrowful tone; "I have seen it myself, Captain Hayward, and have been grieved to see it."

"Well, do not let us grieve, but act, my dear lady," said Ned Hayward; "let us consult together, and see what can be done, for good Sir John must be saved at any cost."

"But what can I do, Captain Hayward?" she inquired. "Perhaps you do not know that the whole of my fortune is tied up by my father's will so strictly, that I can dispose of nothing till I have reached one-and-twenty years of age; and though I would willingly, most willingly sacrifice anything to relieve my uncle, I am as powerless in this business as a child."

"This is unfortunate, indeed," said Ned Hayward in reply, "very unfortunate; I had hoped that you had command of your own property, or that you might be able to point out one, who would be able and willing to take this mortgage and relieve your uncle."

"I know of no one, no one on earth," she answered; "my mother's is but a jointure; I am not of age for nine or ten months, and before that time it will be all over."

"The security is perfectly good," continued Ned Hayward in a musing tone, as if he had not heard her, "and I feel very sure that the property is worth a great deal more than this man has advanced, or any of his clients, as he calls them. Otherwise it would not have been done. We should easily find some one, I think, to take the mortgage, if we could but pay this accursed interest and stop the foreclosure—perhaps at a less per centage, too—that man is a rogue, I am sure, and we may very likely cut down a great many of the charges; for I feel very certain he has been purposely entangling good Sir John, till at length, when he thinks there is no possibility of escape, he pounces upon him to devour him."

"But what is to be done? what is to be done?" reiterated Miss Clifford.

"Well, it does not matter," said Captain Hayward, in the same thoughtful tone; "I'll tell you what we must do: I have a sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the funds. Ten thousand, it seems, will be wanted for the most pressing matters—we will call it twelve thousand; for no man in your uncle's position reckons very closely what is needed, and his calculation is always below instead of above the mark. I will go up to town and sell out; that will put off matters for six weeks or two months; and, in the mean time, we must set all our wits to work for the purpose of finding some one who will take the mortgage at reasonable terms, and of putting your uncle's affairs altogether into order."

"Oh, how can I thank you, Captain Hayward?" said Mary Clifford, putting her hand upon his arm; "indeed, indeed, I am very grateful."

"Without the slightest occasion," replied Ned Hayward. "I wish to heaven I had the means of taking the mortgage myself; but the fact is, my poor father—as good a man as ever lived—was too kind and easy a one. He put me very early into what is called a crack regiment, which in plain English means, I suppose, a regiment likely soon to be broken, or, at all events, likely to break those that enter it. I had my expensive habits like the rest, and never fancied that I should not find five or six thousand a-year, when I returned from Gibraltar at my father's death. Instead of that, I found the unentailed property totally gone; the entailed property was mine, as I was the last of my race; but there were debts to the amount of forty thousand pounds; but if I did not pay them, who would? The men would have had to go without their money; so I sold the property, paid the debts, put the little that remained, between fifteen and sixteen thousand pounds, in the funds, and have lived within my income ever since. Thus, you see, I have not the means of taking the mortgage."

Mary Clifford cast down her eyes, and was silent for minute or two; for there were very

tions at her heart—sincere respect ion; more powerful, far, than they been had she conceived a high led Hayward's character at first, or ade a parade of his feelings and his treated it also lightly, however, so natter of course, both what he had hat he was about to do, that many y-minded person would have taken n showing, and thought it a matter o. But Mary Clifford was not an inded person, and she felt deeply.

it will you do yourself, Captain Hay- said, at length; "my uncle will be he is able to repay you, and the want may be a serious inconvenience t

r, no!" replied Ned Hayward, wit air in the world, "I have four thou- s left, which will enable me to get ay again, and, though this is a sad ie we are in, may have some oppor- led me. I had held this sum, which ite sacred, and would never touch a t, though I was very much tempted ce to buy a fine horse or a fine pic- it off as I am, my dear Miss Clifford, of fortune, from forming those ties he comforts and happiness of latter st men, I may as well go and serve as well as I can to the best of my inger out my days in hunting, and id fishing, reading poetry, and look- res. Sir John will pay me when he ; for he will look upon it as a debt nd, if he never can, why, it can't be all events, I do not wrong my heirs, got none;" and he laughed right

ford looked in his face with a smile; rt of philosophy so new to her, so nerous, so self-devoted, and yet so at she felt strongly infected by it. en bred up among people equally ly generous in all great things; but igid in smaller ones; severe if not re if not harsh: and they committed ul mistake of thinking, and of trying er to think, that true piety is not ler father had been the person from st this spring of chilling waters had l forth; and Mary's mother, though if a gay disposition, had been very d by the petrifying influence of the he contrast, too, in Mrs. Clifford's en her brother and her husband; whom she might love, but could not e other, whom she loved and re- , somewhat feared, tended to clench , which the dean had striven to im- to make her believe that cheerful- olly, if not vice, were companions rate. Mary Clifford saw the mis- hough her own heart had told her that an error existed somewhere. t at the same time, that she also had ay toward one who had sacrificed so he nearest relation she had except ; and with a beaming smile upon her id:

Hayward, I shall never forget your is day; but at the same time, you must not run any risk, or be any loser. If I had any power over my own fortune, I would do what you are now kind enough to do; but, at all events, I give you my word, that the moment I am of age, I will repay you."

"Oh, I dare say Sir John will do that," answered Ned Hayward, "but at all events, my dear young lady, pray say nothing to him on this subject till the last moment. We must let the matter press him very hard before he will hear reason; then, when he sees no means of escape whatever, he will consent that others shall find one for him. You had better talk to his daughter, but enjoin her to secrecy. If I have an opportunity, I will sound Beauchamp; I have a notion that he is rich; I feel very sure he is liberal and kind, and may take the mortgage if he finds it a reasonable security. That it is so, I am quite certain—nay, more, I am convinced, that if Sir John would let me manage all his affairs for one year, I would remove all his difficulties, and leave him a better income, in reality, than he has had for a long while. But now I must run away and leave you, for I see the people are getting up about the place, and I have two important pieces of business to do before noon."

"Indeed," said Mary, struck by something peculiar and indefinable in his manner; "I hope nothing unpleasant?"

"I will tell you what they are," said Ned Hayward, in a gay tone; "and then you shall judge for yourself. I have first to catch the largest trout in the river; I made a bet last night with your uncle that I would do so, and I always keep my engagements; and then I have to make ready for London to sell out this money."

"But need you go yourself!" said Miss Clifford, with a look of interest, "can you not send?"

"True, I can," said Ned Hayward, "I never thought of that—but yet I had better go myself. Good-by, good-by!" and he turned away; then pausing for a moment, something which he struggled against got the better of him, and, coming back, he took Mary Clifford's hand in his and pressed it gently, saying, "Farewell! There are some people, Miss Clifford, whose society is so pleasant, that it may become dangerous to one, who must not hope to enjoy it long or often."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NED HAYWARD'S MISSIVE TO THE YOUNGER WITTINGHAM.

"What hour does the coach start for London?"

"Half-past four, sir."

"Arrives in town at twelve to-morrow, I think?"

"No, sir; last time I went up, we got there by eleven."

"Then down again at half-past four?"

"Yes, sir—gets to the White Hart at half-past eleven—longer coming down than going up."

"That will do very well." And Ned Hayward, who had held the above conversation with one of Sir John Slingsby's servants, hurried up

stairs. His room was all in the most exact order. His fishing tackle, two fowling-pieces in their cases, shot-pouches, game-bags, powder-flasks, &c., were in array, on the top of the drawers. His clothes were all in their separate places, his boots arranged under the dressing-glass, his writing-desk upon the table, flanked on either side by half-a-dozen volumes. Everything could be found in a moment, so if called upon suddenly to march, the baggage would require no time to pack. It was to the writing-desk he first went, however; he opened it, unscrewed the top of the inkstand, took out a sheet of note-paper and a memorandum-book, and then sat down deliberately in the chair. The memorandum-book was first called into service, and in the column of accounts he put down what he had paid at the inn that morning, and then, on another page, wrote down the following list, which I will not attempt to explain:—

"Catch trout.
"Write to H. W.
"See Ste Gim.
"Make inquiries.
"Provide for boy.
"Pack car. bag.
"Coach to London.
"Sell out 12,000*l*.
"Alter will.
"Pistols.
"Friend—qy. Beauchamp.
"Talk to him of No. 2 and No. 8."

When this was done, he put the memorandum-book in the pocket of a frock-coat, sat down again, drew the sheet of note-paper toward him, and on it wrote as follows, with a bold, free, rapid hand.

"Captain Hayward presents his compliments to Mr. Henry Wittingham, and begs to inform him that since he had the honor of seeing him last night, some business has occurred which compels him to go to London for a short time. He goes by the coach this day at half-past four, returns by the coach which leaves London at the same hour to-morrow, and expects to arrive at the White Hart by half-past eleven or twelve. If by that time Mr. Wittingham has found some gentleman of honor to use as his friend, Captain Hayward will have much pleasure in seeing that gentleman at the White Hart any time between the arrival of the coach and one o'clock. If not, he will be found for about a fortnight at Tarningham Park."

The note was then addressed and sealed, and as soon as that was done, without a moment's pause, Ned Hayward threw off the dress-coat in which he was still habited, put on a sporting costume, looked through his book of flies, and taking fishing-rod and basket in one hand, and the note in the other, descended the stairs.

The house was now in the bustle of morning preparation; housemaids were sweeping, men-servants were taking away lamps and candlesticks, and to one of the latter the note was delivered, with a half-crown, and directions to send some lad immediately to Buxton's inn. That being done, Ned Hayward strolled out into the park, taking his way toward the stream, where we will join him by and by.

We must now return to Mary Clifford, however, who stood where Ned Hayward had left her in deep thought for several minutes. Had she been the least of an actress she would not have done so, for she might have fancied that it would betray to her companion, as he walked away, what was passing in her mind; but Mary was not the least of an actress. Graceful by nature, ladylike and polished by heart and education, it had never been necessary for her to picture to her imagination what others would think of any of her movements or words. She was unaccustomed to do so. She never did it. She did not feel herself upon a stage; she was never acting a part. How few there are of whom we can say the same! But there she stood, silent, grave, and thoughtful, with Hayward's words still ringing in her ear, his manner still before her eyes; and both had been somewhat marked and peculiar. But three minutes were all that she would give to such thoughts. They came upon her in confused crowds, so numerous, so busy, so tumultuous, that they frightened her; and not being very brave by nature, she ran away from them, to take refuge with the calmer but sterner meditations regarding her uncle's situation. What was to be done, and how it was to be done, were very puzzling questions, which she asked herself over and over again, without receiving any satisfactory reply from her own mind. Under the pressure of difficulties and dangers, whether affecting ourselves, or those near and dear to us, there comes upon us a necessity for action, a *cacoethes agendi*, which we can scarcely restrain. We cannot sit down quietly and wait for time and circumstances to present favorable opportunities, as we should do, when the affairs in our hands were but matters of indifference to ourselves; calm, business-like transactions, in which we have no personal feeling. The heart comes in at every turn, and perplexes all the fine plans of the head; and we must be up and doing, whether the moment be favorable or not. Mary Clifford felt all this, and was, in some degree, aware of the unreasonableness of precipitancy. She thought it might be better to wait and see, and yet anxiety, eagerness, affection, urged her to do something, or something, at least, for her uncle, as soon as possible. She could not rest under the load; she felt as if activity would be almost a crime; and thought she could see no light whichever way she turned, yet she resolved to attempt something, not feeling very sure, whether she should do injury or not.

Such were the course of her meditations for nearly half an hour, after Ned Hayward left her; and yet it must be confessed that, though these meditations were upon painful subjects, they were not altogether painful. Did you ever listen attentively, dear reader, to one of those fine and masterly pieces of Beethoven's writings, where the great composer seems to take a delight in puzzling and perplexing the hearer, drowning him, as it were, under a flood of harmony, where discords are as frequently introduced as anything else? But still, through them all runs a strain of melody, which links them all together.

Such was very much the case of Mary Clifford. For, although the general train of her thoughts was somber, and there was much cause for sadness in all she had heard, there was something very sweet—she herself knew not

what—that mingled with the old current of reflection, and harmonized it beautifully. It was something hopeful—expectant—trustful—a belief that by the agency of some one all would go right. Was it love? Was it the first dawn of that which, to the young mind, is like the dawn of the morning, that softens and beautifies everything? I cannot tell; but at all events, it was so far undeveloped, that, like the strain of melody which pours through the whole of a fine composition, giving a tone of richness and sweetness to every part, it was undistinguishable from the rest, felt and known to be there as a thing separate and alone, and yet inseparable.

Whenever she tried to distinguish it, fear seized upon her, and she flew away again. Why was she happy, when all that she had heard was the most likely to render her otherwise? She did not know, she would not know; but still she gave way to the feeling, although she would not give way to the thought; and while she shrunk from clothing her own sensations in distinctness, longed to render them distinct, that she might enjoy them more fully.

"I will go and seek Isabella," she said at length, "she must know of this; and then we can all consult together, perhaps, if one can but teach her light gay heart to be prudent and discreet—and yet," she continued, thoughtfully, "she has, perhaps, more worldly wisdom than myself, more knowledge of life and all life's things. Those who are accustomed to commune much with their own thoughts, gain, I am afraid, a conceit in their own opinion, which makes them undervalue those which are formed upon a practical knowledge of the world. Isabella is full of resources, and, perhaps, may devise many means that would never strike me."

These thoughts passed through her mind as she was approaching the house, and very soon after she stood in her cousin's dressing-room, finding her, even at that early hour, up and partly dressed.

"Why, dearest Mary," exclaimed Isabella, "where have you got all those roses? The morning air must be very good for the health, as every one says, to change your cheek, which was yesterday as pale as twilight, into the very aspect of the dawn."

"I have been out walking on the terrace, more than an hour," replied Mary, "and I was pale yesterday, I suppose, from the fright of the night before. I have had a companion too, Isabella," she continued gayly, though her voice trembled a little; "Captain Hayward came up and joined me, and told me all his adventures of the night before."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Slingsby, "his adventures must be very wild and singular, I suppose; for his is just the spirit to seek them, and to make the most of them when he has got them. But what has happened since, Mary? We had all the details, you know, up to the period at which, like Don Quixote, he arrived at an inn."

"I do not think there is anything in the least like Don Quixote about him, Isabella," replied Mary Clifford, gravely; "if he seeks adventures, it is for the advantage of others."

"So did Don Quixote," replied her cousin, giving her a sly smile; "but what did he say, dear cousin?"

"Oh, there was a great deal beside what you heard last night," replied Miss Clifford, "you only had the sketch, the picture is still to be filled up, and he had better do it for himself. However, I have other things to talk to you about, Isabella, of more importance;" and she glanced at the maid that was arranging her mistress's hair.

"I shall be ready in a minute," answered Miss Slingsby; "make haste, Minette, I think you have been longer than usual this morning."

The maid, however, had a thousand reasons to give for being longer, all perfectly valid in her own estimation; and, whether out of spite, or in the hope that the two young ladies would grow tired of waiting and say plainly all they had to say, I cannot tell, but she contrived to occupy a full quarter of an hour more in dressing her mistress's hair. Those who calculate upon the difficulty of carrying a secret are rarely mistaken; but in this case Mademoiselle Minette did not arrive at her end. Mary said nothing more; and, at length, the girl was dismissed, and the two cousins were left alone together.

"In the name of fortune!" exclaimed Miss Slingsby, as soon as the maid was gone; "what solemn thing have you got to tell? Has he proposed already? On my word, it is a very speedy declaration."

Mary colored like a rose, but answered gravely, "Dear Isabella, how can you be so light? If you speak of Captain Hayward, our conversation has been upon very different subjects, and was a very serious one. I am afraid I shall have to distress you, Isabella, as much or more, than his information distressed me."

"I hope not," replied Isabella. "I did not know at all that he was a distressing person. I always thought him a very pleasant fellow, and imagined you thought so too, dear cousin; but how has he contrived to distress you?"

"Why, by some news of no very pleasant character," answered Mary Clifford, "he overheard, accidentally it seems, some conversation relating to your father, from which he learned some particulars that grieve me greatly to hear."

"Indeed!" cried Miss Slingsby, with a start; "they are not going to shoot at him, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no," replied Mary, "nothing of that kind; but about his affairs generally."

"Well, speak out boldly, Mary, dear," answered her cousin, "I see you are going round the matter, love, for fear of vexing me; tell it at once, whatever it may be. You know I have a bold heart, not easily put down; and, though you judge me light and thoughtless, I know, believe me, Mary, it is more a necessity of my situation than anything else. If I were to think by the hour together over all the things that are unpleasant to me, as you or my dear aunt would do, I should only kill myself without altering them. Papa has his own ways, which were formed before I was born; and coming so late in the day, I don't think I have any right to meddle with them. I get out of the way of all that is disagreeable to me as much as I can; and, when I can't, like a good, dutiful daughter, I submit. You know that he is, to use our good old gardener's expression, 'as kind as flowers in May;' and I should be very ungrateful if I teased him by constantly opposing habits which I cannot change, and which are my elder brothers and

sisters. My philosophy may be a bad one, but pray leave it to me, Mary, for I could not be happy with any other."

Mary Clifford took her cousin's hand and pressed it kindly in her own; "I would not take it from you for the world," she said, "for I know and understand all you feel, and am quite well aware that you are performing the first of duties in endeavoring to make your father's house as happy for him as you can, while you don't suffer your own mind and manners to be tainted by customs you do not approve. You have had a hard part to play, dear cousin, and you have played it well; but it is not upon these subjects I come to speak to you, but upon one, which, though perhaps of less vital importance, unfortunately affects the happiness of this life more. Your father's means and fortunes, which I am sorry to say, from all I hear, are very much embarrassed."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" exclaimed Isabella, gazing anxiously in her face; and Mary went on as delicately as she could to tell her all that Ned Hayward had communicated. At first the poor girl seemed overwhelmed, exclaiming, "A week before they call for such a large sum! six weeks before the whole is finally gone from us! Good heavens, Mary, what is to be done?"

In a moment, however, she rallied: "Well," she exclaimed, "I have been very blind—as blind as a great politician, Mary. A thousand things should have prepared me for this that I now recollect, letters, and messages, and intimations of various kinds. That sleek knave, Wharton, is at the bottom of it all; but he shall not crush me; and I dare say we shall do very well with what is left. I have jewels and trinkets of my own, and poor mamma's, to keep house for a long time; and there must be something left out of the wreck."

"But the thing is, if possible, to prevent the ship from being wrecked at all," answered Mary Clifford; and she then went on to tell all that Captain Hayward proposed to do, in order to prevent any immediate catastrophe, not trusting her voice to comment upon his conduct for a moment.

But Isabella did it for her, "Oh, dear, kind, generous fellow," she cried, "how I love him! Don't you, Mary? Although papa may have many bad and foolish friends, you see there are some noble and wise ones—but I'll tell you what, Mary, we'll go down and talk to him after breakfast, and we'll all consult and see what is to be done; we'll have a plot to serve papa, whether he will or not; and I declare Mr. Beauchamp shall be one of the conspirators."

"Just what I should propose," answered Mary Clifford; "for although you have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time—"

"A good deal longer than you have known Ned Hayward," answered Miss Slingsby with a smile.

"Nay, nay, pray do be serious, Isabella," answered her cousin; "I was going to say though we have known Mr. Beauchamp but a very short time, I do believe from various traits I have seen, I do think he is an amiable and kind-hearted man, though perhaps somewhat cold and stately."

"*Oh, he* may be warm enough for aught we know," replied Miss Slingsby, "but there is the breakfast bell; papa will be down and want his coffee."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRUGGLE NEAR THE RIVER.

Nobody could perceive at the breakfast-table that Sir John Slingsby had suffered from the strong emotions by which we have seen him influenced on the preceding night. No one could have conceived that his state and fortune were in the tottering condition which Ned Hayward had represented. He was as gay, as happy, as full of jest and merriment, as a schoolboy of seventeen. And as his sister was peculiarly cheerful, it seemed to excite in him even a more merry and jocund liveliness. To say the truth, Mrs. Clifford felt that her bond was broken; that her visit to her brother's house, and her stay with him, had unlinked one of the chains of cold and formal proprieties which had been wound round her for so many years. Heaven knows, she never wished to see, hear, or do, think, or countenance anything that was evil; but yet her heart felt freer and lighter—it had more room to expand. In fact the sunshine of early days seemed to be reflected upon it, and it opened out to the light like a flower. She was gayer than her daughter, though silent and still, except when called into conversation by some lively sally; but she smiled, was good-humored, and answered even merrily, when a jest passed round, and seemed to wonder at the more than wonted gravity of her Mary. Isabella was almost too gay; as gay as the habits of the world and her own sense of propriety permitted; but, to an observing eye, this cheerfulness was rather assumed than real; and to any one who, like Mary, had the secret of her heart, it was very evidently affected to cover a deeper and a graver current beneath.

"Well, what's the news this morning?" said Sir John, as Isabella poured out the tea and coffee; "a quarter to nine and no tidings stirring? This seems to promise a dull day. Nobody's mill burnt down? Nobody's cat killed? Nobody's wife eloped? Nobody's daughter gone to Gretna-green? Nobody's house been broken open, game stolen, hen-roosts been plundered, pocket been picked, or nose been pulled? Faith we shall never get through the four-and-twenty hours without something to enliven us. All the objects of country life are gone. It seems to me that the world has turned as dead as a horsepond, and men and women nothing but the weed at the top, waiting coolly in green indifference for the ducks to come and gobble them up. Lack-a-day! lack-a-day! if we had but Ned Hayward here to cheer us up! What can have become of him?"

"Oh, he has come back, my dear uncle," replied Mary; "I saw him up on the terrace as I was taking my morning's walk."

"Then why is he not here?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, "why is he absent from his post? What business has he at Tarningham Park, unless it be like a ray of the summer sunshine to make everything gay around him?"

"He told me that he was going down to

catch a trout," replied Miss Clifford; "he has some bet with you, my dear uncle, it seems!"

"The boy is mad! irretrievably gone! Bedlam or Saint Luke's, or some of those places they call a *private asylum*, is the only place for him now," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby; "what, gone down to catch a trout, without pausing to take either rest or breakfast, with his hands burnt and a shot in his arm—so that fellow Gimlet said, they tell me."

"He seemed very well," answered Miss Clifford; "and he said he had his breakfast before he left the inn."

"I don't believe a word of it," answered her uncle; "that's just one of his old tricks, Mary; if there was anything to be done, he used never to mind breakfast, or dinner, or supper, or anything else; the matter was always done first, and then he did not mind a good dinner and a bottle of claret, or even two, as the case might be. I never saw such a fellow! We used to call him 'thoughtless Ned Hayward;' but the fact is, he used to think more in five minutes than the rest of us altogether in four-and-twenty hours, and then he was free for the whole day—but here come the letters, and papers; we shall have some news now, and we shall have something to laugh at, with, or because of."

Thus saying, Sir John took the bag which was brought to him by the butler, opened it with a key attached to his watch-chain, and drew forth the articles it contained, one by one. First came a newspaper in its cover—it was, I suppose, the *Times*, by its bulk—then another and another. All these were laid down beside him; and next came the small packet of letters, and then, oh! how eager all were to devour the contents. Strange and mysterious mixture of old rags and size, what a world of emotions have you conveyed about this earth! Not the most terrible stage that has ever represented to the eyes of admiring thousands the works of the poet, or displayed the skill of the actor, has produced such deep tragedy as you. How often has the sight of the thin folded sheet, with its strange, crooked, black hieroglyphics, overwhelmed the lightest and the gayest heart with heaviness and mourning! how often changed the smile into the tear! how often swept away the gay pageants of imagination, and memory, and hope, and left the past all darkness, and the future all despair! But, on the contrary, how often have ye been the unexpected messengers of happiness and joy! how often have ye brought sunshine and light into the benighted breast! how often dispelled in a moment the dark thunder-clouds of the world's blackest storms,—ay, and sometimes, too, have closed, as with a lightning-flash, the black tempestuous day of a long sorrowful life, with a gleam of ecstasy, too intense and potent to survive!

All eyes turned eagerly to Sir John Slingsby, while he looked over the letters. The first was in a stiff and clerk-like hand, which he put down beside him with a low chuckle, which probably indicated an intention of not reading it at all. The next displayed a scrawl, written as if with a butcher's skewer, thin, straggling, and irregular, like the scratching of a hen in the last agony. That met the fate of the former one. Then came an address in a good, bold, dashing hand, with a name written in the corner.

"Ah, ah!" cried he, "from Tom South, about the borough of Twistandskin. Before I stand, I'll see him—Lord bless me, what was I going to say?" and putting his hand to his mouth, he looked to his sister with a low laugh; but that letter was put at a little distance from the two others. "Ah! Mr. Beauchamp, here is one for you," continued the baronet, "sent up with the postmaster's compliments! damn his compliments! who wants his compliments?" and he gave the letter over to Beauchamp, who was sitting at the opposite side of the table next his daughter. "My dear Harriet, do try that pasty, it is excellent; or take something, in the name of Heliogabalus; this is not a fast-day, is it? There's the best ham that ever came out of Yorkshire, on the side-board. There, Isabella, there's an epistle for you, from one of your sweet, maudlin, blond and satin friends in London, as soft and insipid as a glass of orgeat, I'll answer for it; full of loves, and dears, and sweet friends, and languishing for your darling society, and wondering what you can be doing in the country, spending your beauty on the desert air. Don't let me hear a word of it; I hate them all; and, if I had my will, would smother them all to death under eider-down quilts. Pray read your letter, Mr. Beauchamp. Everybody in this world is anxious to read their letters but me; and as yours may very likely require an answer, you had better look at it at once; for one post here goes out at eleven."

Now, Sir John Slingsby, in the latter part of his speech, showed himself considerate; for Mr. Beauchamp, during the first part of breakfast, had borne a very grave and business-like air. He had given himself up, it is true, to a more cheerful spirit on the day before; he had been calmly cheerful at dinner; gay in the evening; especially when he was near Miss Slingsby. But who is not gay in the evening hours, when the whole nervous fluid seems to have accumulated about the brain and the heart, when the anticipated, or actual labors of the day are over, the apportioned task of care and anxiety is done? The load of the four-and-twenty hours is thrown off, and we snatch at the brief portion that remains between labor and repose for enjoyment. Who is not gay, when beauty and cheerfulness pour their mingled rays upon us, flooding our feelings and our thoughts with a bright, happy, and congenial stream? Take a glass of iced-water, dear reader—as cold as you will, so that it be not actually frozen—and pour into it a merry glass of warm champagne; see how it will sparkle and dance up to the brim; and, unless the heart of man is a mass of ice indeed, such will be the effect upon it of mere association with youth, beauty, and innocent gayety.

But since then, Beauchamp had slept upon the matter. The night before he had gone on with the current; and now time had been afforded him to ask himself how far that current had carried him. He was doubtful whether he had not been borne too far; there were doubts, hesitations, apprehensions in his mind; and he was grave—very grave indeed. He had wished Miss Slingsby good-morning, he

had expressed a hope she had rested well, he had been most gracefully courteous—too courteous; for very polished surfaces are generally cold; and Isabella, who had come down with the intention of speaking to him frankly and freely upon matters that interested her deeply, had shrunk into herself more than was her wont.

Beauchamp opened the letter, however, with rather a languid and unexpectant air, but the first words seemed to rivet his attention. The eye of Isabella, without her will, or rather against it, fixed upon him. She saw his cheek turn pale, then glow again warmly, and then a glad and well-satisfied smile curled his lip. He ended the letter, and, looking toward the ceiling, his lips moved for an instant, and folding up the paper, he put it in his pocket, giving way for a few seconds to thought, which did not seem unsatisfactory.

Isabella Slingsby was the most straightforward girl in the world, by nature; and she had but one class of experimental teaching in regard to concealing her feelings. She could hide, occasionally, how much she disliked some of her father's guests; she could conceal from him how painful to her was much that she saw under his own roof. In everything else, however, she was frank as the day; and, seeing Mr. Beauchamp receive a letter, and look not discontented with it, she said, somewhat inconsiderately:

"You seem to have had pleasant intelligence, Mr. Beauchamp!"

That gentleman turned his eyes suddenly upon her, and very fine and lustrous eyes they were, and he gazed at her for an instant with a smile so blended with many emotions, that Isabella, she knew not why, cast down her eyes, and colored. After a brief pause, he replied:

"Not unpleasant, Miss Slingsby; for so strange a thing is the heart of man, or, rather I should say, so strange a thing is his fate, that, in the course of years and with the change of circumstances, there will be pleasure even in the total ending of what were once bright hopes. The things we coveted and obtained, in the world's variation become burdensome to us; as, at the end of a long day's journey, we lay down with relief the weight which, at the outset, we carried with joy or pride."

"That is because men are so fickle, I suppose," answered Isabella. "The only constant beings on earth are women and Newfoundland dogs, Mr. Beauchamp—it is so, I assure you, whatever you may think of it. I know the wicked world takes a different view of the subject; but the world is man's; and woman might very well say a different picture would be produced, 'if we lions were painters!'"

"Nay," said Beauchamp, laughing, "I am not one of those evil speakers and slanderers. I have had time to observe in the world where I have been these many years as a mere spectator, watching the characters of men and women; and I can justly say, that there are, at least, ten good women for one good man. Circumstances may have something to do with it; education, opportunity for good or evil; but still there must be a fine and pure spirit at the heart, teaching to avoid evil and to seek good."

"I believe, in truth, there is," answered Mrs. Clifford, joining in the conversation; "and that the bent of almost every woman's mind is toward that which is right. But if you are the creatures of circumstances, Mr. Beauchamp, we are, in many respects the creatures of your hands; you give the bent and the direction of somewhat more than half our thoughts, I am afraid, and are—"

"To be blamed, if you go wrong," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, with a loud laugh; "to be sure; that is a woman's philosophy, my dear Harriet; all that she does good is her own, all that she does wrong is man's; but let me tell you, my dear sister, that there is no little doubt, in the minds of the best informed, which has the most influence; man over woman, or woman over man. I am of the last opinion; and I see it every day in my case and that of others; here this girl, Isabella, rules me with a rod of iron, does anything she likes with me; but, by my faith, for this day I shall abstract myself from her authority; for I have business to settle during the morning; and she must entertain her guests as she can. Mr. Beauchamp, if you leave my house during the next four-and-twenty hours, it will be a clear proof that Miss Slingsby does not entertain you properly; and I shall be very angry with her inhospitality, if I do not find you at lunch and dinner, tea, and supper, and breakfast to-morrow morning; for I shall be quite sure she has not made my house agreeable."

"An imputation that I should be the last to bring upon Miss Slingsby," said Mr. Beauchamp; and in truth he seemed to feel what he said; for when they rose from the breakfast-table, and the party sauntered to the window, in that pleasant indolence which generally succeeds the first meal of the day—that five minutes that succeeds to breakfast, in short, before we put on the armor of active exertion—he attached himself closely to Miss Slingsby's side, engaged her in conversation so light and cheerful, that the whole character of the man seemed changed. Not that what he said was without thought; for there was a deep undercurrent of reflection running all the time, which gave it quite a different tone from what is called small-talk. It was sparkling, brilliant, even playful; but its principal effect on the minds of those who heard was to set them thinking. There was a marked attention in his manner toward Isabella Slingsby, which flattered her a little. She might have perceived before that he was struck with her beauty, that he admired her, that he liked her society, when he had twice or thrice met her at Dr. Miles's. She had thought him exceedingly agreeable, and had fancied that he thought her so too; but there had been nothing said or done—not one word, one look, one gesture, that could set imagination flying any further, and she had rested satisfied with letting things take their course, without any other feeling than a slight degree of regret that her father had not made the acquaintance of one so superior in manners and in mind to the generality of those around. During the preceding evening, Beauchamp had appeared in no other

character than that of the calm, dignified, quiet, and well-informed gentleman. But after breakfast his attentions were more pointed; and Isabella felt a little agitated, and doubtful of what all this would come to. She was not fond of anything that agitated her: and, therefore, somewhat more abruptly than was necessary, she broke through the conversation that was going on, saying:

"Mr. Beauchamp, Mary and I have entered into a compact to go down and see Captain Hayward win his bet."

"What bet?" asked Beauchamp, who had forgotten all about it.

"To catch the largest trout in the river before twelve o'clock," replied Isabella; "will you escort us? My dear aunt, won't you come too?"

"No, my dear," answered Mrs. Clifford; "I have letters to write, too, like your father."

"I have no letters to write," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, somewhat petulantly; "I wish I had nothing less pleasant to do; but I have to see the steward and a damned lawyer about business—the greatest bores on the earth. I wish to heaven Peter the Great had been autocrat of England for but one bare month. Heaven and earth! how he would have thinned the roll of attorneys! or if we could but bring them under the cutting and maiming act, what hanging and transporting we should have. I am sure they cut up our time and our comforts, maim our property, and cripple our resources. But the devil never abandons his own; and so they slip out of every noose that is made to catch them. There's that fellow, Stephen Gimlet, can make, they say, springes that will catch woodcocks and snipes, hares, pheasants, partridges, ruffs, and rees; hang me, if I don't ask him if he has not got any trap that will strangle an attorney."

"If he fails, ask Ned Hayward," said Isabella, half-jokingly, half-earnestly; "I have no doubt he would furnish you with what you want."

"Perhaps he would, perhaps he would," answered Sir John; "not a bad thought, Bella: but hang it, I must go and see the steward before that fellow Wharton comes. So good-bye, good-bye, for the present. Mind the luncheon time; and if Ned loses and does not bring me home a trout of at least three pounds, we'll drink his health in a bottle of the old hermitage—get your shawls and bonnets, get your shawls and bonnets; and now, Harriet, if you want to send over to your place, be quick with your letters, for I have got a man going to Tarningham at twelve."

Mrs. Clifford left the room with her brother, and was followed immediately by her daughter and niece. Beauchamp walked out into the hall, and got his hat, gave some directions to one of the servants in regard to sending up some of his clothes from the inn at Tarningham, when anybody was sent down to the town; and then returned to the window of the breakfast-room. There he paused and looked out, revolving various things in his mind, and coming to the half-muttered conclusion, at length: "It must be so, it is quite clear—it is certain." But when any one determines that a thing is quite clear, is certain, before we agree with him in opinion, we should know what other trains of thought are going on in his mind at the moment, jostling this idea and that out of their right places, leaving others far behind, and stimulating others again to run at lightning speed, the Lord knows whither, to win their race. It is not at all impossible, that if you or I, dear reader, could see into Mr. Beauchamp's mind at this moment, we might come to a very different conclusion on the premises, and think that the proposition was anything but *quite* clear, the result not at all *certain*.

However that might be, there he stood with his hat in his hand, in very good spirits, when Miss Slingsby and her cousin appeared.

Isabella was rather fluttered, as we have said, about something or another; she felt a timidity that was not usual with her, and she got her cousin between herself and Mr. Beauchamp before they reached the door, as if she intended that he should offer Mary Clifford his arm. Beauchamp manœuvred so skillfully, however, that before they were through the door and down the steps, he was by Isabella's side again, and, as she had two sides, one of which was certain to be unprotected, while that side was almost certain to be the point of attack to a dextrous enemy, she gave up the battle at once, and let things take their course.

The walk, as Isabella managed it, was an exceedingly pleasant one. In the first place, there were the beauties of nature. To what heart, under what circumstances, do the beauties of nature fail to bring sweet feelings? There is something in the universe, of which we have no definite conception; perhaps, it is too universal, too wide, too vast, to submit itself to anything like demonstration. We all feel it, we all know it, we all enjoy it. The ancients and some of the moderns have deified it, and called it Pan. It is, in fact, the universal adaptation of one thing to another: the harmony of all God's works; the infinite music of an infinite variety. It is figured in music—faintly figured; for music is only the image of the whole by a part; the sequence of bright things is the melody of creation; their synchronous existence, the harmony of God's almighty will. But in this, as in all else, woe be unto those who have worshiped the creature for the Creator, and who have mistaken this great harmony in the infinity of created things, for the Godhead itself. It is but one of the expressions of Almighty love, and those expressions are as infinite as the love from which they emanate. It is our finite, our contracted, our exceedingly minute view of all things, that constantly keeps us down from the contemplation and the conception of the immeasurable, to that which is within the ken of our own microscopic vision. If creation itself is infinite, the infinite harmony thereof is but a part of creation, and is in itself a proof of that intelligent Providence, which man denies, because he does not see.

The walk was an exceedingly pleasant one, coming in varied scenes upon the mind, each contrasted with the other, yet each harmonizing beautifully. After about a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards of short turf they entered a glade, where tall trees, backed by deep shrubs, cut off the sunbeams, except where here and there they struggled through an open spot. Tall beeches, more than a century old, crossed

their arms above to give shade to the ground below, and though the walk, nearly fifty feet in breadth from bole to bole of the old trees, was mown along its whole extent, yet a little to one side and the other, the wild flowers appeared gemming the earth like stars upon a firmament of green. There was the purple columbine and the blue periwinkle, and the yellow primrose, and the pale bending anemone; the hyacinth and the violet; and if art had had any share therein, the arrangement of the flowers was so skillfully managed, that all seemed owing but to nature's hand. The deep branches of the beech, and the green shade that they cast through the air, gave a solemn and elevating tone to the whole. The flowers and the occasional burst of sunshine, the rich colors of the moss, yellow, and brown, and green, enlivened the scene, and made the solemn stillness of the long avenue seem like a thoughtful countenance brightened by a smile. Then, suddenly, when they had walked on for about a quarter of a mile, they turned to the left through a wide break in the alley, and all was wonderfully changed. Shade and melancholy were gone; and they stood upon the edge of a round sloping descent of some three or four hundred feet covered with green short turf, and marked out, at short distances, by chumps of birches and hawthorns. On the right was the woody crest of the hill, concealing in its bosom the continuation of the avenue, which they had just quitted; but on the left, wide over the tree-tops and waving ground beyond, stretched out an extensive prospect in the sunshine, all light and loveliness. It was one of the bright days of early summer. Scarcely a cloud was in the sky, and yet there was a softening effect in the atmosphere, which mellowed the lights and shades into each other, and suffered the light to pass softly and gently from each line of the distance to that which succeeded with a sort of dreamy pleasure, vague and indefinite, but very sweet, like the sounds that sometimes come upon our sleeping ears in the visions of the morning.

Skirting along the hill with a gradual descent, the broad gravel-walk plunged into the valley, and there all was altered once more. A wide and uncultivated wood swept round, a small sparkling rivulet, dashing on toward the broader stream, amid bushes, and shrubs, and water-plants; a willow here and there bending down its long, pliant branches over the glittering stream, and a patch of tall bulrushes raising their long green stems, where any occasional interruption occasioned the water to spread out. The trees were far apart, though the ground was broken and uneven, and the flapping wing of a heron, with his gray shadowy form rising up at some fifty or sixty yards' distance, added to the saddening and sombering effect. It was like a discord in a fine piece of music: just protracted long enough to make what had gone before and what followed after more delightful, and the next minute they issued forth upon the warm green meadows, gilded with buttercups, that lay by the side of the wider river.

Heaven only knows what Isabella meant in bringing Beauchamp by that path, if she did not intend him to make love to her. She could have taken him round by the other side of the house, and the straight horse-road to the bridge, or down over the turf through the open parts of the park, among the deer and fern to the further end of the river, where it issued out of the grounds. But no, whether from something that was going on in her own bosom, which made her instinctively choose the scenes that most assimilated with her feelings, or from accident, caprice, or design, she led him through a path full of the sense of love. There was one too many for a declaration, it is true; and she knew she was so far guarded; but yet it was a very dangerous walk for any two people, whose hearts had no better security than the simple presence of another, to stray along upon such a day as that.

The letter, which Beauchamp had received at breakfast, had evidently either pleased, or entertained, or relieved him; but the effect was, that he was infinitely gayer when he set out than he had ever been since we have first met with him. He crossed the open ground by Isabella's side with a firmer and more elastic step, with his head high and his shoulders back, he gazed over the wide-spread park scenery around, and seemed to snuff the air like a horse about to start upon a race. He commented upon the loveliness of such views, remarked how very English they were—how very seldom one ever saw anything similar in any other land—and seemed to enjoy the whole so highly, as to leave an impression that the pleasure of the walk was heightened by the society in which it was taken. When he came under the shade of the tall trees his tone was somewhat changed, it became softer, more serious, more earnest; and so he went on, his thoughts seeming to receive a coloring from the scenery through which he passed, without losing their general character, or particular train for the moment. It was evident through all that he was thinking of Isabella Slingsby; and though, with finished courtesy, he divided his conversation very equally—not quite—between her and her cousin, yet even when he was speaking to Mary Clifford, it was very evident that his words, or, at all events, his thoughts, were addressed to Isabella.

Mary said little, except just to keep up the conversation and deprive it of anything like awkwardness; but she felt, and indeed nobody could help feeling, that Mr. Beauchamp's manner toward her cousin was too marked and particular to be mistaken. Isabella, on her part, gave way to all the gayety of her heart, sometimes with bright and laughing sallies playing round Beauchamp's more earnest and deep-toned thoughts, sometimes yielding to the impulse which she imparted, and venturing into the deep waters of feeling and reflection, whither he led her, till startled at herself she took fright and retreated. She was very happy, too; secure in Mary's presence from anything that might agitate or alarm, she felt that she could give way to the pleasure of the moment; and even the knowledge of her father's situation, and of the dangers and difficulties that beset him, acted but as a softening and subduing power, which brought down her spirits from their habitual gayety, and rendered her heart more susceptible of tenderer and deeper impressions

Beauchamp felt that he was listened to, that he pleased, that he might be beloved. He had seen nothing coquetish about Isabella; he had heard a high character of her; he had been told by one, who had known her from childhood, that she seemed lighter than she really was; that if there was anything assumed, it was the gayety; that all the more profound things that occasionally appeared in her character, might be trusted and relied upon, and that the seemingly high spirits were but as the breeze, that ruffled the tree-tops without touching the depth of the forest. He felt sure, therefore, that she would not sport with him, if she believed he was in earnest, and he took care, that upon that subject she should have little doubt.

Thus passed away their walk; and though Mary Clifford would have given a great deal, had she dared to venture, to make Mr. Beauchamp a sharer in the secret of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, and asked the advice and assistance of one who had evidently gained much experience of the world, without being spoiled by the world, yet she knew not how to begin; a feeling of timidity came over her that stopped her; and the course of the conversation—its sparkling rapidity at some times, its deep and intense feelings at others—gave no opportunity of introducing a subject entirely discordant, without forcing it in a manner both harsh and discourteous. She determined, therefore, as they approached the river, to leave the matter to Captain Hayward, whose frank straightforwardness, she thought, would soon either find or make an opportunity.

When they reached the bank, however, Captain Hayward was not to be seen; but Isabella pointed to an elbow of the wood, which concealed a turn in the stream, saying that he was most likely higher up, and accordingly they walked on. As they were passing through the little path that cut through an angle of the woodland, they heard suddenly a loud exclamation, then a very ungentlemanly oath, and the next moment, as they issued forth, they saw Ned Hayward grappling with a tall, powerful man, in what may be called a semi-military dress. The two were, apparently, well matched, though few, either in strength, activity, or skill, could match our friend. But the stranger, whoever he was, practiced a trick, which he thought likely to free himself from his adversary, even at the risk of his own life. He struggled hard, and in the struggle drew toward the brink. Ned Hayward made a violent effort to resist the impulse, and most likely would have been successful; for if anything, he was the stronger man of the two. But a part of the green turf gave way, undermined by the course of the current, and both plunged in together into a deep pool, and disappeared for an instant in the water.

CHAPTER XX.

A MAP is a very useful thing: I wonder what people did without it before it was invented. Yet there were great travelers in those days, too, both by land and water. Adam began the first, and Noah the second, and they managed very well without either chart or compass, so that it it is evident these instruments are nothing but luxuries, and ought to be done away with. Nevertheless, I feel that I should be better off, and so would the reader too, if I could give here, on this page, a map of the county of ——, just to show him the relative position of the place called Buxton's Inn and the little village of Coldington-cum-Snowblast, which lay nearly northwest of Buxton's Inn, and at the distance, by the road, of about six miles. The innkeepers charged seven miles' posting, because it was the seventeenth part of a furlong beyond the six miles. However, a dreary little village it was, situated on one of the two roads to London, which was indeed somewhat shorter than the other, but so hilly, so tiresome, so bleak, and so stiff, as the postboys termed it, that man and beast alike preferred the other road, and generally went to and from Tarningham by Buxton's Inn. Nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary that a pair or two of posters should be kept at Coldington, as that was the only direct road to several considerable towns; and though it was only an eight-mile stage, yet the cattle, when they had got over the hills, had no inclination to go farther. The post-horses had engendered a public house, which was designated by courtesy an inn, but it was a very solitary one, with very few visitors but those who took a glass of beer or spirits at the bar, and a chance mercantile traveler, who came to supply the two shops that ornamented the village, and slept there for the night.

At a very early hour of the morning, however, on the day of which we have just been speaking, a post-chaise drew up to the door with horses from Buxton's Inn, and a fresh relay was immediately ordered to carry the travelers on toward Bristol. A tall, powerful, showily-dressed man got out with a lady closely veiled, whose costume spoke of Parisian manufacture; and while the portmanteaus and other articles of baggage were being taken into the doorway till they could be placed upon the new chaise, the gentleman paid the postboy, and then asked if he was going back directly.

"In about an hour, sir," replied the man, touching his hat, with the look of one well satisfied with his fee.

But at this reply the traveler looked blank, and said, "Well, it does not matter. I must get some lad to run over across the moor with this note to Mr. Wittingham. Just see for some one, my good fellow. He shall have half-a-crown for his pains."

But the postboy was not such a goose as to let the half-crown slip by him, and, with the most respectful air in the world, he assured the gentleman that he was quite ready to go that minute, and that he had only proposed to stay an hour because he did not know—how should he?—that the other wanted to send back.

The note and the half-crown were immediately given, the postboy got into his saddle again; resisted the soft entreaties of the ostler to take a glass of something, and trotted away. No sooner was he gone, however, in the full persuasion that ere a quarter of an hour was over his two travelers would be on their way to Bristol, than the gentleman he left behind seemed to have suddenly changed his mind.

The horses were countermanded, a room up stairs looked at, some breakfast ordered, and there he and his fair companion seemed disposed to pass the day. After a short but hearty breakfast, which was crowned by a glass of brandy, upon the strength of such an early drive, the gentleman himself sallied forth, saying to the lady, "I must see that fellow Stephen, and find out if he has peached. If he has, we had better get over the water for a while, at all events; though they can prove nothing, I am sure."

"You will take your rash, wild ways, love," answered the lady, in a languid tone; "and then you are sure to get into a scrape." But the gentleman did not wait for the end of the admonition, leaving the room and shutting the door behind him.

We will stay with the lady, however, and a very pretty woman she was, though, indeed, there had been a time when she was prettier. She was certainly not less than three or four-and-thirty, with good, small features, and a complexion which had once been exceedingly fine. It had become somewhat coarse now, however, and looked as if the process of deterioration had been assisted by a good deal of wine, or some other stimulant perhaps still more potent. Her eyes were fine dark eyes, but they had grown somewhat watery, and there was an occasional vacancy in them, a wandering uncertainty that bespoke either some intense preoccupation with other subjects than those immediately in question, or some failure of the intellect, either from temporary or permanent causes. Her figure was tall and fine, and her dress very handsome in materials and make; but yet there was a something about it too smart. There was too much lace and ribbon, too many bright and gaudy colors, too much flutter and contrast, to be perfectly ladylike. There was also a negligence in the way of putting it on—almost a slovenliness, if one may go that length, which made things nearly new look old and dirty.

Her air and manner, too, were careless and languid; and as she set herself down on one chair, then moved to another, and rested her feet upon a third, it seemed as if something was continually weighing upon her mind, which yet wanted vigor and solidity enough to make an effort to cast it off.

It was not that she seemed to mope at being left alone by her male companion, or that she felt or cared for his absence very much, although she evidently deemed his plans and purposes imprudent and perilous. Far from it; she was as gay, or perhaps gayer, when he was gone than before; sung a little bit of an Italian song, took a small note-book out of her bag and wrote in it some lines, which seemed, by their regular length, to be verses; and then, getting up again, she opened a portmanteau, brought out a book, and began to read. She had not continued long, however, when she seemed to become tired of that also, and putting back the book again, gave herself up to thought, during the course of which her face was chequered with slight smiles and slight frowns, neither of which had the most pleasant expression in the world. There was a littleness in it all, indeed, a sort of careless indolence, which, perhaps, bespoke a disposition hackneyed and spoiled by the pleasures, if not the pains of life. And there she sat, casting away from her everything but thought, as if there were nothing in the world valuable or important, except the little accidents, that might disturb or promote her own individual comfort. The maid who carried away the breakfast things informed the landlady, that "the woman up stairs was a-taking on it easy, a-sitting with her feet on one of the best chears." And although the good dame did not think fit to object to this proceeding, she mentally commented on it thus: "Them quality-folks is always giving themselves airs; but if she spiles my new kivers, I'll take it out in the bill, anyhow."

After this state of things had continued for somewhat more than an hour and a *half*, the gentleman came back, apparently in great haste, dripping like a Newfoundland dog, and, calling to the ostler before he ran up stairs, directed him to put-to the horses as soon as possible. Then, running up, he entered the room where he had left the lady, exclaiming, "Quick, Charlotte, we must be off like the devil!"

"Why, what's the matter, Moreton?" she said, without moving an inch. "You are dripping wet; you have met with some adventure."

"And something else, too," answered the gentleman. "I have met with that devil of a fellow again, and he recognized me and tried to stop me, but I pulled him into the river, and left him there, getting to the other bank, heaven knows how. All I am sure of is, that I kept his head under water for two or three minutes; for he fell undermost. But I have not time to talk more now, for we must go as if Satan drove us, and I will tell you more as we go along."

"I hope he's drowned," said the lady, with the sweetest possible smile; "it is an easy death, they say. I think I shall drown myself one day or other."

"Pooh!" said the gentleman. "But come along, come along! I have something to tell you of Charles; so make haste."

"Of Charles!" exclaimed the lady, starting up as if suddenly roused from a sort of stupor, while a look of intense and fiery malignity came into her face. "What of him? Have you seen him? Did he see you?"

"I don't know," answered her companion. "But come along;" and taking up one of the portmanteaus as the chaise drove up to the door, he hurried down, and sent up for the other. The lady followed with a quick step, drawing her veil over her face; for she now seemed to be all life and eagerness; and while the gentleman was paying the bill, she got into the chaise and beat the bottom of the vehicle with her small foot, as if impatient for his coming.

Before he could reach the door, after having paid the bill, however, a man on horseback galloped quickly up, and, springing to the ground, caught the gentleman by the arm, exclaiming, "Why, hang it, Moreton, you have played me a scurvy trick, to go off and leave me before it was daylight."

"I could not help it, my dear Wittingham," replied the other: "I was obliged to be off; there is a d—— cousin of mine down here whom I would not have see me for the world. You must not stop me now, by Jove; for they

have found out where I am, and I expect him to pay his respects very soon."

"Devil take it! that's unfortunate," cried Wittingham; "I wanted you to go and call out that meddling scoundrel, Hayward, whom I told you of. He bolted into my room last night, and we had a regular set-to. I told him he was a blackguard, and he told me he had horsewhipped me once, and would horsewhip me again whenever he met me, if I could not get some gentleman of honor to arrange a meeting with him."

"Upon my life, I can't stay," cried the other, "though I should like to see you shoot him, too, if he is alive, which I have some doubts of—but stay," he continued, after a moment's thought, "I will find a man for you, and I will send him down without loss of time—Major Woolstapler; he has been lately in foreign service, but that's all the same, and he's a capital hand at these things; and, if you follow his advice, you will shoot your man to a certainty—he shall be down before three days are over; I am off for Bristol, and so up the Cath road to London. We shall get there to-night; and he will be down to-morrow or the next day early. He'll hear of you at Baxton's, I suppose. Good-bye, good-bye." And he jumped into the chaise.

A moment after, as soon as the door was shut, he seemed to recollect something, and putting his head out of the window he beckoned up young Wittingham, saying in a low voice, "You'll need the bull-dogs, so I'll send you down mine. Tell Woolstapler to contrive that you have number one. It will do his business if tolerably well handled—and I say, Wittingham, don't mention to any one that you have seen me either here or at Oxford. My cousin fancies I am in India still." Then turning to the postillion, he said, "Go on and brush along fast. Sixpence a mile for good going."

Never was such an intimation given to a postillion without the horses suffering for it. I actually once made a Bavarian go seven miles and a half an hour between Ulm and Augsburg by the same process. I record it as among the memorable events of my life, proudly satisfied that no man upon earth ever did the same either before or since. On the present occasion, the postillion, without fear, stuck his spurs into the horse's side, laid the whip over the back of the other with that peculiar kind of gentle application which intimated that if the brown-coated gentleman did not get on as hard as his four legs would carry him, the instrument of propulsion would fall more heavily the next time; and they went at a pace which was a canter up hill, a trot down, and a gallop over the flat. Captain Moreton leaned back in the chaise and murmured, "We've cut them, by Jove!"

"But what is to be the end of all this?" asked the lady, who seemed to be now thoroughly roused: "if that man is to go on forever having his own way I do not see anything that is to be gained. We cannot keep this up much longer, Moreton; and so you thought two days ago. I shall be compelled to come forward and claim the arrears of the annuity by actual want of money. You told me, when we were at the inn there, that you had but ten pounds left, and now you seem to take a different view of the subject. You men are certainly the most vacillating creatures in the world."

"Nay," answered Moreton, bowing his head with an air of persiflage, "ladies, it must be owned, are superior to us in that, as in everything else. Two or three months ago you seemed enchanted with your plan, and declared though it had not answered yet, it would answer in the end. I only thought it would not answer for want of means, otherwise I was as well disposed toward it as you could be. Now, on the contrary, you are eager to abandon it, while I wish to pursue it, for this simple reason: that I have got the means of carrying it on for some time at least, and see the greatest probability of success. You must recollect, my dear Charlotte, that this is not a matter where a few hundreds or a few thousand pounds are at stake, but many thousands a-year."

As usually happens—for nobody ever hears or attends to more, at the utmost, than the twentieth part of what is said to them, the lady's mind fixed upon one particular sentence without listening to anything more, and she repeated, as if contemplating and doubting, "You have got the means! You have the means!"

"Ay, indeed I have," answered Captain Moreton, with a smile; "I have got the means; for, while you were thinking I was doing nothing, I was shrewdly laying out my own plans, by which I have contrived to screw full five hundred pounds out of that terrible miser, Wharton. Was not that somewhat like a *coup?* With that we can live for some five or six months in Paris—economically, you know, my love—we must not have champagne and oysters every day; but we can do well enough; and before the time is out, the very event we wished to bring about will have happened; otherwise my name is not Moreton. I can see very well how matters are going. He is caught: for the first time in his life really and truly captivated; and, if we but take care to play our game well, he will be married and completely in our power within a few weeks. I know he will never be able to stand that; and there will but be one choice before him, either to buy you off at the highest possible price, or—"

"Buy me!" cried the lady; "if he had the diamond mines of Golconda, he could not buy me! If he could coin every drop of blood in his heart into a gold piece, I would see him mind them all to the very last, and then refuse them all with scorn and contempt. No, no, I will bring him to public shame and trial; I will make him a spectacle, have him condemned as a malefactor, break his proud spirit and his hard heart, and then leave him to his misery, as he has left me. For this I have toiled and longed; for this I have saved and scraped, like the veriest miser that ever worshiped Mammon in his lowest shape; for this I saved every sixpence, and lived in self-inflicted poverty and neglect, till I met you, Moreton, in order to hoard enough to keep me, till this revenge could be accomplished; and often, very often since, I have been tempted to curse you for having, by the extravagance you taught and practiced, squandered away the very means of obtaining all that I have longed and pined for."

"You speak in a very meek and Christian spirit," cried Captain Moreton, with a laugh; "but, nevertheless, I will not quarrel with it,

Charlotte; for your revenge would serve my purposes too. If we could but get him to commit himself beyond recall, I am his next heir, you know, my dear; and, therefore, the sooner he goes to heaven or Botany Bay, the better for me—don't you think that we could contrive to get up a very well authenticated report of your death in one of the newspapers, with confirmations of all kinds, so as to leave no doubts in his mind?"

"Moreton, upon my life I believe you are a fool," cried the lady, bitterly; "would he not plead that as his excuse?—no, no, if I could so manage it, and, heaven or the devil send me wit, I care not which, to do it, I would contrive to make him fancy my death certain by small indications, such as none but himself could apply, and which, to the minds of others, would seem but frivolous pretexts if brought forward in his own justification. If you can help me to such a plan, I will thank you; if not, we must trust to fortune."

"Good faith! I see no means to accomplish that," cried Moreton.

"Now then, let us talk no more about it," answered the lady; and sinking back into the chaise, she relapsed into that state of seeming apathy, from which nothing but passion had the power to rouse her.

"By the way," said Captain Moreton, after about a quarter of an hour's consideration, while the chaise rolled rapidly along, "all those things that you had in Paris, clocks and chimney ornaments, and such like things, what has become of them?"

"Oh, they are of little value, Moreton," said the lady; "a thousand francs would buy them all; the worth would not last you ten minutes at roulette."

"No," answered Captain Moreton, taking no notice whatever of the bitterness with which she spoke; "but I was thinking they would be more serviceable at hazard."

"What do you mean?" she asked, abruptly, fixing her eyes upon him.

"I want to know where they are," answered Captain Moreton, in a cool tone.

"Why, you know very well," she answered sharply, "when I left Paris two years ago with you, I told the girl, Jeanette, to take care of them till I came back. I dare say she has pawned or sold them long ago."

"That is the very thing," cried Moreton, rubbing his hands. "We will away to Paris with all speed; you will keep quite close; I will find out Mamselle Jeanette, and give her intimation that she may sell the things to pay her own arrears of wages; for that her poor dear lady will never come back to claim them."

"I see the plan," replied the lady, "but I fear it will not answer, Moreton; I had been living, as you know, in seclusion for a year before, and the very means that I took to make him think me dead, will now frustrate your scheme for that purpose."

"I don't know that, Charlotte," answered her companion. "He has been making inquiries in Paris, I know; you were traced thither distinctly, and whether all clue was lost of your proceedings, neither I nor you can tell. But I'll tell you a story. When I was living at my father's place, he had a particularly fine breed of pheasants, which regularly every year disappeared about the 8th or 9th of October, without the possibility of proving that any one had been in the copses. One day, however, when I was out early in the morning, I saw a fine old cock, with his green and gold neck, walking along straight through a field toward the ground of a neighboring farmer. Every two or three seconds down went the pheasant's head, and on he walked again. I watched him for a few minutes over a hedge, then made my way through, put up the bird, and examined the spot where he had been. There I found a regular pheasant's footpath, and nicely strewed along it a line of barleycorns leading straight on to the farmer's ground, in the first hedge of which I found another portly bird fast by the neck in a springe. Now, my dear Charlotte, we'll strew some barleycorns, and perhaps we may catch your bird in the springe; I mean, we'll throw out such pieces of information as will lead to the certainty that you were in the Rue St. Jaques two years ago; we will get Jeanette to sell the things to pay her own wages, with the best reason to believe you are dead; and if what I have heard is true, all that you have so long aimed at will be accomplished before two months are over."

"I see, I see," answered the lady, and the chaise stopped to change horses.

CHAPTER XXI.

The quiet little town of Tarningham was more quiet than ever about the hour of twelve each day; for, according to good old primeval habits, noon was the period for feeding. Men ate, beasts ate, and birds ate, and we all know that eating is a silent process. It is the greatest mistake in the world for doctors to tell you to talk while you are eating, or else it is the bitterest sarcasm. They must either mean that your digestion should be spoiled, or else that you are in the habit of talking without thinking. But we will make a sort of corollary of it. "Man should not think when he is eating, man should not talk without thinking; *ergo*, man should not talk at his dinner." Therefore the people of Tarningham were wise; for never was there such a silent town at the hour of twelve o'clock, when they were eating. Doctor Miles could hear his own footfall with the most perfect distinctness, as he walked along the High-street; and a good broad foot it was, with a square-toed shoe and a buckle in it.

But Doctor Miles did not attend to the sound of his footfall; he was, indeed, busily thinking of something else, with his eyes bent down—but not his head—he rarely bent his head—holding it upright and straight, and a little stiff, by the natural effect of mind on body. His meditations were very deep, so much so, that it required an extraordinary apparition to rouse him from his reverie. The sight, however, of a human being in the streets of Tarningham a little after twelve, was quite enough to produce that effect; and at the distance of about two hundred yards from the door of the White Hart, he was startled by beholding the diminutive form and somewhat contorted person, of the poor little potboy, Billy Lamb, coming toward him with an

empty jug in his hand. Nobody attended to Billy's meals. He got them how he could, where he could, and when he could. When all the rest were eating, he was sent with a jug of beer here, or a pint of gin there, and came back to feed upon the cold remnants of what the rest had eaten warm, if, indeed, they left him anything; but yet the fat landlord, ostlers, stable-boys, and barmaids, all thought that Billy was very well off. The landlord thought so, because he declared he had taken the boy in from charity; and the ostlers, and the postboys, and the barmaids believed it. O, charity! charity! thou perverted and misused term. Since the first words that were uttered by Adam in his garden, down to the moment when one of the world's great men declared that language was intended to conceal men's thoughts, no word in the whole dictionary has ever been applied to cover so many sins as thou hast. Thou art the robe of vanity every day; tricking it out in subscription lists, almshouses, hospitals; thou art the cloak of pride and haughtiness, the pretext of every petty tyrant who seeks a slave, the excuse of avarice, and greed, and narrow-mindedness—ever, ever coupled with a lie! In what human heart art thou ever found pure and unadulterated? The foul-mouthed slanderer of a neighbor's fame, who gives a sixpence to a beggar or a pound to an infirmary, is a charitable person. The scoffing sneerer at virtue he cannot imitate, who flings away money profusely for the sole gratification of a loose habit, is called charitable. The hard-hearted man who denies others their rights, or he who cheats his followers of their due reward, or he who grinds the faces of his workmen with excessive toil, or he who is harsh and stern in his own household, fierce and censorious to others, a despot with his wife, a tyrant with his children, dies, and, in a pompous will, bequeaths a portion of his ill-gotten wealth to build an asylum, and perpetuate his name, and is praised and honored as a charitable man.

That boy, forced to labor day and night, without consideration, without comfort, without a kind word, fed upon refuse, palleted on straw, yet doing more than the whole household altogether, was taken in from charity! Believe it, reader, if you can. For my part, I don't believe a word of it. I am quite sure that worthy Mr. Groomber wanted somebody particularly, of an active and willing disposition, to carry out the beer, and to attend to all those little matters which Mr. Groomber could not do himself, and which his servants did not choose to do, and that in taking in Billy Lamb for his own convenience, he persuaded himself, and tried to persuade the public too, that he was doing an act of charity. It is an extraordinary thing to consider how often in the great tragic farce of the world we are our own spectators; or, in other words, how continually, when we act a part, we consider ourselves one of the audience, and strive to deceive that individual the very first.

However that might be, there was Billy Lamb, the potboy, just before Doctor Miles, with an empty tankard in his hand; and the good doctor no sooner beheld him, than he stopped, and, in a kindly tone, asked him how the world went with him. Now Doctor Miles was a great man in the neighborhood; he had property of his own of not very great extent, but which rendered the living that he held but an accessory to his principal means of subsistence. He did not live by the altar, but for the altar; and there are no such keen drawers of distinctions as the lower classes. Of this thing all clergymen may be sure, that he who makes a trade of his profession, who exacts the uttermost penny which he has a right to, and something more, who increases burial fees, and makes broad the borders of all his dues, will always be held in contempt. Of the butcher, the baker, and the grocer, the lower orders expect such things. The exaction of a farthing on half-a-pound, more than is really just, they know is a part of the privileges of the knife, the oven, and the scales and weights. But with the ministers of a pure and holy religion, whose grand and fundamental principle is charity and abnegation of self, they expect a higher and a wider sense of benevolence, a more large and disinterested view of the relations of a pastor and flock. Thick must be the veil that covers from the eyes of the humble and the needy that greedy and grasping spirit which too frequently, like the ghoul of Eastern fable, preys among the sepulchres of the dead, and takes advantage of the moment of overwhelming distress and agony of mind, to urge the coarse claims of priestly avarice; claims, but too frequently, untenable in law and always barbarous, even when not illegal—dues which should be swept away forever, which should no longer exist as a constant source of heart-burning and complaint between pastor and people, making the one derive a portion of his living by laying a tax most onerous and hard to be borne, either upon the joys or the sorrows of his parishioners, and the others to look upon their teacher as one who sets at defiance the first principles of the Gospel that he preaches, following "avarice which is idolatry," and forgetting charity, "which covers a multitude of sins."

Luckily, both by position and inclination, Doctor Miles was exempt from all such reproaches. His necessities did not force him into meannesses, and his natural disposition would never have suffered him to fall into them, whatever his circumstances might have been. One heard nothing in his parish of enormous charges for a brick grave, swollen surplice-fees, that would make a cholera, a plague, or a pestilence so rich a harvest, that the minister who would pray in his desk against plague, pestilence, and famine, would be the grossest of hypocrites. He did not look upon his church-yard as the most valuable and productive part of his glebe, to be manured by the corpses of his parishioners, and bear a cent-per-cent. crop in monuments and grave-stones. The consecration of the bishop he did not look upon as fertilizing the land for his own enrichment, but contented himself with the bare amount of the moderate fee awarded by the law, and neither asked nor received a penny more. Many of the neighboring clergy called him a weak and prejudiced man, and exclaimed loudly against him for neglecting the interests, or, as they called them, "the rights of the church." But, somehow, his parishioners loved him, though he was rather an austere man, too, and never spared invective

or exhortation in case of error and misconduct. The secret, perhaps, was, that they were convinced of his disinterestedness. He took from no man more than was his due; he required of no man more than he had the warrant of Scripture for requiring. His private fortune gave him the means of charity, and to that object all his private fortune was devoted. Every one in the neighborhood knew that Doctor Miles could have a finer house, could keep a better table, could maintain a smarter equipage; but at the same time, they were aware of two things, first, that his income was not as large as it might have been had he chosen to exact the uttermost farthing; and, secondly, that it was not for the purpose of hoarding his money that he did not spend it upon himself.

Thus Dr. Miles, as well may be conceived, was very much reverenced in the neighborhood; his rebukes were listened to, and sometimes taken to heart; his advice was sought and sometimes followed; his opinions were always respected, if his injunctions were not always obeyed; and his severity of manner was very well understood not to imply any real harshness of heart.

The cap was off Billy Lamb's head in a moment, when he approached Dr. Miles; but he did not venture to speak to him till the doctor, after gazing at him for a moment in a fit of absence, exclaimed, "Ah, William, how goes it with you? and how is your poor mother?"

"Oh, quite well," replied the youth, in his peculiarly sweet, low voice; "mother's better than she was, though she has never been so well since poor Mary's death."

"How should she, how should she?" exclaimed Doctor Miles; "these things, my man, affect young people but little, old people but little; for young people are full of their own life, and with them that consideration supersedes all thoughts connected with death; and old people are so full of the conviction of life's brevity, that the matter of a few years more or less is to them insignificant. It is to the middle-aged that the death of the young is terrible; it clouds the past with regrets, and the future with apprehensions. But I want to speak to your mother, Bill; she must forgive Stephen Gimlet, and try and help him, and be a comfort to him."

"I wish she would," said the boy, looking down; "I am sure Stephen is not so bad as people call him, and never would have taken poor Mary away, if mother had not been so strict."

"I must talk to her," answered Doctor Miles; "but you may tell her, if you see her before I do, that Stephen is a changed man, and Sir John Slingsby has taken him for a gamekeeper. Tell her, will you," he continued, after a moment's thought, "that the cottage on the moor has been burnt down, and the poor little boy, Charley, would have been burnt in it, because there was no mother, nor other relation of any kind to help him, had it not been for a gentleman who is staying up at the Hall coming by at the time and rescuing the boy from the flames."

"Ah, I am sure that was the gentleman that was down here," exclaimed the pot-boy; "Captain Hayward they called him; for he was a kind, good gentleman as ever lived, and gave me enough for mother to put something by against the winter."

"That is no reason why he should be walking on the moor," said Doctor Miles, quickly. "However, I must talk to her, for the boy must not be left alone any more; and we must see what can be done. But now tell me, Bill, what wages do you get?"

"A shilling a week and my victuals," replied the boy, in an unrepining tone; "it is very kind of Mr. Groomber, I am sure; and I do what I can, but that's not much."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles, with not the most affirmative tone in the world; "well, I'll come by and by, and see your mother; can you go down and tell her that I am coming?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the boy; "they give me a quarter of an hour to eat my dinner, so I can go very well; but I must go first to Mr. Slattery's, the doctor; for Mrs. Billiter told me to bid him come up quietly to Mr. Wittingham, as if just for a call; for the old gentleman came home ill last night, and has taken to his bed."

"Mr. Slattery is out," replied Doctor Miles. "I met him on the road; but leave the message, Bill, leave the message, and I will go up and see Mr. Wittingham myself."

Thus saying, he bade the boy adieu, and walked on to the smart white gates of Mr. Wittingham's highly-cultivated place, and, passing through the garden, rang the bell at the door, which was opened to him by a servant in a straight-cut blue coat, black and yellow striped waistcoat, and black plush breeches with drab gaiters.

In answer to Doctor Miles's inquiry, the servant informed him that Mr. Wittingham was in bed, and could see no one; but the worthy clergyman pressed for admission, saying that his business was of importance. A consultation then took place between the man-servant and the housekeeper, and, after some hesitation, Mrs. Billiter went up to her master to inform him of Doctor Miles's visit, with a particular injunction to impress upon the mind of the sick man that the clergyman's business was of moment. She came down the next minute and begged the visitor to walk up, with as low a courtesy as her long stiff stays would permit her to make; and, she leading the way, Doctor Miles followed with a slow and meditative step.

The room door was gently unclosed, and the clergyman, entering, fixed his eyes upon the figure of Mr. Wittingham as he lay in bed, and a sad sight it was. Terrible was the effect that one night of sickness had wrought upon him. The long, thin, bony limbs were plainly visible through the bed-clothes, and so far, Mr. Wittingham well, or Mr. Wittingham ill, showed no difference; but there was the face upon the pillow, and there were to be seen traces enough, more of suffering than sickness. The features had suddenly grown sharp, and the cheeks hollow; the eye was bright and wandering, the brow furrowed, and the hue of the complexion, partly from the light-brown moreen curtain of the bed—the most detestable curtains in the world—partly from a sleepless, anxious, suffering night, had grown yellow, if not cadaverous. Patches of short-cut gray hair, usually concealed by the wig, were now suffered by the night-cap to show themselves upon the temples. The

large front teeth, the high nose, and the protuberant chin, were all more prominent than usual; and, certainly, Mr. Wittingham, in cotton night-cap and clean linen sheets, was not the most prepossessing person that ever the eye rested upon.

Doctor Miles, however, advanced quietly to his bedside, and, sitting down in a chair, opened the conversation in a kindly tone.

"I am sorry to find you ill, my good friend," he said; "you seemed well enough last night."

"Ay, ay, that's another thing, doctor," replied the invalid; "but I got a terrible fright after that, and that has given me quite a turn."

"As to the way you will direct that turn," answered the clergyman, "you will need some good advice, Mr. Wittingham."

"Ay, ay," said the magistrate, somewhat impatiently. "Billiter there has been boring me for an hour to send for that fellow Slattery; but I don't think he could do me any good. He is a humbug, as well as the most of those doctors."

"But not more than most," answered Doctor Miles, "which is a great thing in this part of the country. You may go, Mrs. Billiter; I wish to be alone with Mr. Wittingham."

Mrs. Billiter, who had remained upon the best, the oldest, and most invariable excuse, that of putting the room in order, for the purpose of gaining an insight into all that took place, dropped a courtesy, and withdrew unwillingly.

Mr. Wittingham eyed Doctor Miles with a shrewd, inquiring, but timid glance. It was evident that he would have dispensed with the doctor's coming, that he did not half like it, that he wished to know what he could want, why he came, what was his business, what could be his object, and why his manner was so grave and cautious. Heaven knows that Mr. Wittingham was not an imaginative man; that he was not subject to the sports of fancy, and seldom or ever presented to his mind any image of things, past or future, unless it were in a large parchment-covered volume, in which was inscribed in large letters, upon the last page: "Balance in favor of Mr. Wittingham, sixty-nine thousand odd hundred pounds." Nevertheless, on this occasion the worthy gentleman's imagination ran restive; for, as a weedy old horse, when people endeavor to whip it into anything more than its ordinary pace, turns up its heels, and flings them into the face of its driver; so did Mr. Wittingham's fancy at once assert its predominance over reason, by presenting to him for his choice every possible sort of business upon which Doctor Miles might, could, would, should, or ought have come to Tarningham Lodge. He, therefore, sat in his bed with his night-cap on his head, grinning at him, like Yorick's skull, with a ghastly smile. Courtesy has its agonies, as well as other things; and the politeness of Mr. Wittingham was agonizing. Speak he could not, that was out of the question; but, with a grim contortion of countenance, he motioned the worthy doctor to a chair, and the other took it with provoking deliberation, concealing, under an air of imperturbable coolness, a certain degree of embarrassment, and a considerable degree of feeling.

To tell the truth, he much desired that Mr. Wittingham should begin first; but he soon saw that there was no hope of such being the case, and his profession had accustomed him to the initiative. Wherefore, after three preliminary hums, he went on to say, "My dear sir, I thought it better to come down to you to-day, to speak to you on a somewhat painful subject, but one which had better be grappled with at once; and that rather in conversation with me, a minister of peace and good-will toward men, than with others, who, though equally bound by the injunctions of the religion which I unworthily teach and they believe, have what they consider duties apart, which might interfere with an unlimited exercise of Christian charity."

Excellent, Doctor Miles; you are keeping the poor man in a state of torture. Why will you preach, when you are not in the pulpit? But Doctor Miles was not a prosy man by nature; he was short, brief, and terse in his general conversation, and only preached when he was in embarrassment. That such was evidently the case at present greatly increased the evils of Mr. Wittingham's position; and when the doctor was talking of Christian charity, the sick magistrate was mentally sending him to a place where very little charity of any kind is supposed to be practiced—not that we know anything of the matter; for even in the present day, with steamboats, railroads, and all the appliances of human ingenuity to boot, tourists and travelers have not pushed their researches quite as far as the place alluded to; or, at all events, have not favored the world with an account of their discoveries.

After the above proem, Dr. Miles stumbled for a moment or two, and then recovering himself, continued thus:

"The unfortunate affair which took place last night must doubtless give rise to legal inquiries, which will, depend upon it, be pursued with great energy and determination; for Captain Hayward, I find, followed the unhappy young man at once; and, if I judge rightly, he is not one to abandon his object when it is but half attained."

"Oh, that Captain Hayward, that Captain Hayward!" cried Wittingham, angrily, "he is always meddling with other people's affairs."

"Nay, my dear sir," answered Mr. Miles; "this was his affair, and the affair of everybody in the room. The ball passed within an inch of his friend Mr. Beauchamp's head, and might have been intended for him—at least, so Captain Hayward might have supposed, had not your own exclamation at the moment—"

"My exclamation!" cried Mr. Wittingham, with a look of horror, "what did I exclaim?"

Doctor Miles did not answer him directly at first, replying merely, "You said enough, Mr. Wittingham, to show who it was, in your opinion, that had fired the shot."

Mr. Wittingham clasped his hands together in an agony of despair, and sunk with his head upon the pillow, as if he would fain have hid his face in the bed-clothes, but Dr. Miles went on kindly to say,

"Moreover, my dear sir, your exclamation was sufficient to make me feel for you deeply—to feel for you with sincere compassion, and to desire anxiously to serve and assist you."

Now Mr. Wittingham was not accustomed to be compassionated; he did not like the thing, and he did not like the word; he was a vain man

and a proud man, and compassion was a humiliation which he did not like to undergo; but still anxiety and trouble were the strongest, and he repeated two or three times in a quick, sharp voice,

"What did I say? What did I say?"

"You said that it was your son," answered the clergyman, "and various corroborative circumstances have transpired, which—"

But by this time Mr. Wittingham was in such a state of agitation that it was evident he would hear nothing further that was said to him at the moment, and, therefore, the good doctor stopped short. The magistrate covered his eyes; he wrung his hands hard together; he gazed forth at the sky; he even wept.

"Then it is all over, all over," he cried, at length, "it is all over," by which he meant that all his dreams of importance, his plans of rural grandeur and justice-of-the-peaceism, his "reverence" on the bench and at the quarter sessions, his elevation as a country gentleman, and his oblivion as a small trader, were all frustrated, gone, lost, smothered, and destroyed by his son's violent conduct, and his own indiscreet babbling in the moment of fear and grief.

"Ah, Doctor Miles," he said, "it is a sad business, a sad business. As you know it all, there is no use of my holding my tongue. Harry did do it; and, indeed, he told me before that he would do it, or something like it; for he came here—here, down into Tarningham, and told me on the very bench, that if I pushed that business about Mrs. Clifford's carriage any further, it should go worse with me. It was a threat, my dear doctor, and I was not to be deterred from doing my duty by a threat, and so I told him, and immediately took up the man they call Wolf on suspicion—for Sir John had been down here, swearing at my door, and what could I do, you know."

Now Doctor Miles had seen a great deal of the world, and, though a good and benevolent man, and one not at all inclined to think the worst of one of his fellow-creatures, yet he could not help seeing that there was a great deal of weakness and eagerness to shuffle any burden from himself in Mr. Wittingham's reply. There are certain sorts of knowledge which force themselves upon our understanding, whether we will or not, and among these is discrimination of human character. People long accustomed to the world, find great difficulty even in believing a practiced liar, however much they may wish to do so on certain points. They see through, in spite of themselves, all the little petty artifices with which *self* hides it self from *self*, and still more clearly through the mean policy by which the mean man strives to conceal his meanness from the eyes of his fellow-creatures. Whether it be the pitiful man, in any of the common walks of life, exacting more than his due, and striving to hide his greed under the veil of liberality and disinterestedness, whether it be the candidate on the canvass or on the hustings, escaping from the explanation of his intentions upon the plea of independence and free judgment, or whether it be the minister of the crown evading the fulfillment of obligations, or shrinking from the recognition of support by all the thousand subterfuges in the vast dictionary of political dishonesty, the man *learned in the world's ways*, however willing to be duped, cannot believe and confide, cannot admire and respect. The case with Mr. Wittingham was a very simple one. Doctor Miles saw and understood the whole process of his mind in a moment; but he was sorry for the man; he felt what agony it must be to have such a son, and he hastened as far as possible to relieve him.

"I think, my dear sir," he said, "that you have made some mistakes in this matter; I do not presume to interfere with any man's domestic arrangements, but I will candidly acknowledge that I have thought, in watching the progress of your son's education, that it was not likely to result in good to his character—nay—hear me out, for I am only making this observation as a sort of excuse, not so much for him, as for the advice I am going to give you, which can only be justified by a belief that the young man is not so depraved by nature as by circumstances."

They were hard words, very hard words, that Doctor Miles uttered, but there was a stern impressiveness in his manner, which overawed Mr. Wittingham, kept down his vanity from revolting against the implied accusation, and prevented him from even writhing openly at the plain terms in which his son's conduct was stigmatized.

"Under these circumstances," continued Doctor Miles, "I think it much better that you send your son out of the country as fast as possible, afford him such means as will enable him to live in respectability, without indulging in vice; warn him seriously of the end to which his present courses will lead him, and give him to understand that if he abandons them, and shows an inclination to become a good and useful member of society, the faults of his youth may be forgotten, and their punishment be remitted. On the latter point, I think I may say that, should he at once quit the country, no further steps against him will be taken. You know very well that Sir John Slingsby, though hot and irascible, is a kind and good-natured man at heart."

"Sir John Slingsby! Sir John Slingsby!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham, bustling up with an air of relief, as if something had suddenly turned a screw, or opened a safety-valve, and delivered him from the high pressure of Doctor Miles's grave and weighty manner; "Sir John Slingsby, sir, dare do nothing against me or mine; for there is a balance against him. He may talk, and he may bully and crack his jokes. I have submitted to all that a great deal too long, without requiring a settlement of the account; and there's five thousands pounds against him I can tell you, which he will find it a difficult matter to pay, I have a notion—ah, ah, Doctor Miles, I know what I am about. Five thousand pounds are five thousand pounds, Doctor Miles, and I know all the situation of Sir John's affairs, too; so he had better not meddle with me, he had better not enrage me; for he will risk less in letting all this foolish business pass off quietly without inquiry, than producing inquiry into his own affairs in the county. A good jolly gentleman, I don't mean to say he is not; but I can tell you he is tottering on the verge of ruin, and I don't want to force him over unless he drives me: and so he had better not, that's all."

Doctor Miles had gazed at him as he spoke with a keen, subacid look, and in some degree even of amusement, and this calm supercilious look greatly annoyed and embarrassed Mr. Wittingham toward the end of his tirade. It was evident that Doctor Miles was not in the least taken unprepared, that the intimation of Sir John Slingsby's position in worldly affairs neither surprised nor disappointed him in the least; and when Mr. Wittingham at length stopped in some embarrassment, his reply tended still further to puzzle and confound the worthy magistrate, for he merely said,

"Perhaps so, Mr. Wittingham, but I do not think Sir John Slingsby's pecuniary circumstances will at all prevent him from performing his public duties. If he has reason to believe that your son is in the road to amendment, he is very likely to look over his present offenses, as they are in some degree personal to himself and his family. If he imagines that he will go on from one crime to another, depend upon it he will think it only right to cut his career short at once. The only fear is, that if this debt which you speak of ever crosses his mind, it will only serve as a bar to his lenity; for no man is so likely to be seized with a sudden determination to punish with the utmost rigor, if he were to suspect for one moment that his debt to you, whatever might be the amount, might be assigned as the motive by any one for his forbearance. I would not advise you to urge such a plea, Mr. Wittingham; but, depend upon it, if this debt is considered at all, it will be considered to your disadvantage. Beside all this, you must recollect, that other persons were present; therefore Sir John has not the whole matter in his own hands. However, I have given you the best advice in my power: you can take it, if you like; if not, the consequences be upon your own head; and you must not blame any one for anything that may occur in the due course of law."

And rising from the bedside, he was about to depart, when Mr. Wittingham stopped him.

"Stay, stay, my dear sir," said the magistrate, eagerly; "let us discuss this question a little further; I wish no harm to Sir John Slingsby, and I trust he wishes none to me. But are you sure there were other persons who heard the words I spoke? Very unfortunate, very unfortunate, indeed."

Now the truth was, that Mr. Wittingham was in a state of high irritation. The comments which Doctor Miles had made, or rather the hints which he had thrown out in regard to the education of his son, had greatly exasperated him. He never liked it to be even hinted that he was wrong; it was a sort of accusation which he never could bear; and the worthy doctor would have been permitted in patience to proceed with any other of Mr. Wittingham's friends or enemies without the least interruption; but it was natural that he should take fire in regard to his son. Why natural? it may be asked. For this reason, that the education of his son was associated intimately with Mr. Wittingham's own vanity; and the idea of his faults being owing to education, was a direct reflection upon Mr. Wittingham himself.

Doctor Miles, however, regarded none of these things; and though the worthy magistrate desired him to stay, he declared he had no time, saying,

"Further discussion is out of the question. I have given you advice that I know to be kind, that I believe to be good. Take it if you judge so; leave it if you judge otherwise. Pursue what course you think best in regard to Sir John Slingsby; but, at all events, do not attempt to influence him by pecuniary considerations; for be assured that, although he may, by imprudence, have embarrassed his property, he has not arrived at that pitch of degradation which is only brought on step by step from the pressure of narrow circumstances, and which induces men to forget great principles in order to escape from small difficulties. Good morning, Mr. Wittingham;" and without further pause, Doctor Miles quitted the room, and walked down stairs. In the hall he met Mr. Wharton, the attorney, going up, with a somewhat sour and discontented face; but all that passed between the two gentlemen was a cold bow, and the clergyman left the house in possession of the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXII.

It is a very unpleasant position indeed to be above your neck in the water, with another man holding fast by your collar, especially if it be by both hands. It may be a friend who has so got you, it may be an enemy; but the operation comes to pretty nearly the same thing in both cases; and that the result is not at all an agreeable one, I say it boldly and without fear of contradiction; for, though drowning is said to be accompanied by no real pain, and I have heard many half-drowned persons declare that it is rather pleasant than otherwise, yet that is only a part of the process, not the result; then again Sir Peter Laurie can witness, that there are multitudes of persons, who, after having taken one suffocating dip in Mother Thames, repeat the attempt perseveringly, as if they found it very delightful indeed; but still I contend that they have not come to the end of the thing, and, therefore, can give no real opinion.

"To lie in cold obstruction and to rot," to become the prey of the lean abhorred monster, death, to separate from the warm tenement in which our abode on earth has been made, to part with the companionship of all the senses and sensations, the thrills and feelings, which have been our friends, our guides, our monitors, our servants, our officers in the course of mortal existence—this is the result of that tight pressure upon the cravat or coat-collar which we shrink from, when, with our head under the water, we feel the fingers of friend or enemy approaching too near the organs of respiration. If the gentleman grasps our legs, we can kick him off; if he seizes our hands, we can often shake him away; but the deadly pressure upon the chest and neck; the clinging, grasping energy of those small digits on the throat, when we find that half a second more and life is gone, is perhaps as unpleasant a thing as often falls to the lot of mortal man to feel.

Now Ned Hayward, I have endeavored to impress upon the reader's mind, was a brave,

bold, determined fellow as ever lived. There was no danger he would not have fronted, no fate he would not have risked for a good and worthy object. He was a good swimmer too; but when, after a headlong plunge into the water, he felt himself undermost in the fall, out of his depth, his feet entangled in a weed, and the fingers and thumbs of Captain Moreton tight upon his throat, he was seized with an irresistible propensity to knock him off by any means, even at the risk of losing his prisoner. The first method that suggested itself was a straightforward blow at his adversary, and that taking effect upon his chest was successful with a man half-drowned himself. His antagonist let go his hold, rose as fast as he could, dashed at the other bank, gained the ground, and was off. Poor Ned Hayward, however, soon found that if he had freed himself from one enemy, he was still in the power of another. It is a terrible thing, that a strong, powerful man, instinct with every energy and quality of high animal life, and, moreover, having an immortal soul, to be kept or parted with, should every now and then be completely at the mercy of a thin, pitiful, pulpy weed, which, to all appearances, might be broken or smashed in a moment. But moments are very important things, and the *vis inertiæ* a tremendous power. The weed made no attempt to hold the young gentleman, it neither grasped his legs, nor clasped his knees, but it was carried by the current around the ankles of Ned Hayward, and there, somehow or other, it stuck fast, preventing him from moving; in fact, it was like many a great politician (in the world's opinion), who operate many great changes upon their neighbors by mere *vis inertiæ*, waiting till the tide of circumstances brings them to action, and then holding fast to a particular point till all opposition is drowned.

Such had well-nigh been the case with Ned Hayward; for what little strength he had left was nearly expended in the blow he gave to Captain Moreton; and when he found that his feet were entangled in the weed which would not have snapped a single gut-line with a Mayfly at the end of it, his powers did not suffice to tear himself away. This history, as far as he was concerned, seemed likely to come to a hasty conclusion, when suddenly he found a strong hand grasp his arm just below the shoulder, and give his whole frame a vehement impulse toward the surface of the water. The next instant he saw, heard, breathed, once more; and before he had time to do either of these things above a second, he found his right elbow leaning on the bank, and Mr. Beauchamp, who was not very well aware whether he was dead, alive, or half-drowned, endeavoring to draw him up on the bank. To use the words of the poet, in a very indecent episode of a very chaste and beautiful poem—

"One stupid moment motionless he stood;"

but the next puff of the right element which went into his lungs recalled all his activity, and up he jumped on the bank with a spring which astonished Beauchamp, made Isabella Slingsby draw back, and brought a faint color into Mary Clifford's cheek. The glow was accompanied *by a smile*, however, which showed that this proof of Ned Hayward's still active powers was not unpleasant to her.

The first thing the young officer did, however, was to shake Mr. Beauchamp warmly by the hand, exclaiming,

"Upon my life you were just in time—it was nearly over with me—I could not have stood it half a minute longer. Everything was turning green, and I know that's a bad sign."

The next thing was to pick up his fishing-rod and tackle, crying, as he raised them from the ground,

"He has frightened away that big old trout; I should have had him in another second; I may have to walk half an hour more before I find such another; I could see him eying the fly all ready for a rise."

"But who was the gentleman?"

"What was the quarrel about?"

"Why did you seize him?" demanded Isabella, Mary, and Beauchamp, all together.

Let the reader remark, that each framed the question differently.

"That is the man who fired the shot into the window last night," replied Ned Hayward, looking curiously at the fly upon his hook; and two of his companions instantly turned their eyes in the direction which Captain Moreton had taken, with a look of alarm, as if they feared he would fire another shot from the bushes among which he had disappeared. Beauchamp, for his part, cast down his eyes and said nothing—not a word! Nay more; he shut his teeth close, and drew his lips over them, as if he were afraid he should say something; and then, after a moment's pause, he turned to Ned Hayward, saying,

"Had you not better give up this fishing, come up to the house and change your clothes?"

"Oh dear, no," cried Ned Hayward, "on no account whatever; I'll catch my fish before twelve o'clock yet; and very likely have the very fellow that our plunge scared away from here. Do you know, Beauchamp, it is sometimes not a bad plan to frighten a cunning old speckled gentleman, like this, if you find he is suspicious and won't bite. I have tried it often, and found it succeed very well. He gets into a fuss, dashes up or down, does not know well where to stop, and then, out of mere irritation, bites at the first thing that is thrown in his way. Come along, and we shall see. He went down, I think, for I had an eye upon him till he darted off."

"But you are very wet, too, Mr. Beauchamp," said Isabella. "If Captain Hayward is too much of an old campaigner to change his clothes, I do not see why you should neglect to do so."

"For the best reason in the world, my dear Miss Slingsby," replied Beauchamp, "because I have no clothes here with which to change these I have on."

"But there are plenty at the house," replied Isabella, eagerly.

"But I am afraid they would not fit," replied Beauchamp, laughing; "I am in no fear, however; for I am as old a campaigner as Captain Hayward."

"Let us move about, at all events," said Mary Clifford; and following Ned Hayward down the stream, they watched his progress as

he, intent apparently upon nothing but his sport, went flogging the water, to see what he could obtain. Three or four very large trout, skillfully hooked, artistically played, and successfully landed, soon repaid his labor; but Ned Hayward was not yet satisfied, but, at length, he paused abruptly, and held up his finger to the others as a sign not to approach too near. He was within about twenty yards of a spot where the stream, taking a slight bend, entered into a sort of pass between two low copses, one on either hand, composed of thin and feathery trees, the leaves of which, slightly agitated by the wind, cast a varying and uncertain light and shade upon the water. The river, where he stood, was quite smooth; but ten steps further it fell over two or three small plates of rock, which scattered and disturbed it, as it ran, leaving a bubbling rapid beyond, and then a deep but rippling pool, with two or three sharp whirls in it, just where the shadows of the leaves were dancing on the waters. Ned Hayward deliberately took the fly off the line and put on another, fixing his eye, from time to time, on a particular spot in the pool beyond.

He then threw his line on the side of the rapid next to him, let the fly float down with a tremulous motion, kept it playing up and down on the surface of the foam, with a smile upon his lips, then suffered it to be carried rapidly on into the bubbling pool, as if carried away by the force of the water, and held it for a moment quivering there; the next moment he drew it sharply toward him, but not far. There was an instant rush in the stream, and a sharp snap, which you might almost hear. The slightest possible stroke of the rod was given, and then the wheel ran rapidly off, while the patriarch of the stream dashed away with the hook in his jaws. The instant he paused, he was wound up and drawn gently along, and then he dashed away again, floundered and splashed, and struck the shallow waters with his tail, till, at length, exhausted and half-drowned, he was drawn gradually up to the rocks; and Ned Hayward, wading in, landed him safely on the shore.

"This is the game of life, Miss Clifford," he said, as he put the trout of more than three pounds' weight into the basket. "Rendered cautious and prudent by some sad experiences, we shrink from everything that seems too easy of attainment, then, when we find something that fate's cunning hand plays before our eyes as if to be withdrawn in a moment, we watch it with suspicious but greedy eagerness, till we think a moment more will lose it forever, then dart at it blindly, and feel the hook in our jaws."

Mary Clifford smiled, and then looked grave; and Isabella laughed, exclaiming,

"The moral of fly-fishing! And a good lesson, I suppose, you mean, for all over-cautious mammas—or did you mean it was a part of your own history, Captain Hayward, retrospective and prophetic; or was it a general disquisition upon man?"

"I am afraid man is the trout," said Beauchamp; "and not in one particular pursuit, but all—love, interest, ambition, every one alike. His course and end are generally the same."

"That speech of yours, fair lady, was so like a woman," said Ned Hayward, turning to Miss Slingsby; "if it were not that my hands were wet, I would presume upon knowing you as a child, and give you a good shake. I thought you had been brought up enough with men, to know that they are not always thinking of love and matrimony. You women have but one paramount idea, as to this life's concerns I mean, and you never hear anything without referring it to that. However, after all, perhaps it is natural:

'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart.
'Tis woman's whole existence.'"

"Too sad a truth," replied Mary Clifford, thoughtfully; "perhaps it is of too little importance in man's eyes; of too much in woman's."

"And yet how terribly she sometimes trifles with it," said Beauchamp, in a still gloomier tone.

"Perhaps you think she trifles with everything, Mr. Beauchamp," rejoined Isabella; "but men know so little of women, and see so little of women as they really are, that they judge the many from the few; and we must forgive them; nevertheless, even if it be true that they do trifle with it, it is not the least proof that they do not feel it. All beings are fond of sporting with what is bright and dangerous: the moth round the candle, the child with the penknife, and man with ambition."

"All mankind," said Ned Hayward, "men and women alike, get merrily familiar with that which is frequently presented to their thoughts. Look at the undertaker, or the sexton, how he jests with his fat corpse, and only screws his face into a grim look when he has the world's eye upon him; then jumps upon the horse and canters back, to get drunk and joyous at the next public-house."

"Hush! hush! Captain Hayward," cried Isabella, "I declare your figures of speech are too horrible; we will have no more of such sad conversation; can we not talk of something more pleasant as we go back?"

"I do 't know," said Ned Hayward, "I am in a moralizing mood this morning."

And as Isabella and Mr. Beauchamp walked on a little in advance to pass the narrow path, which only admitted two abreast, he continued in a somewhat lower tone, saying to Mary Clifford,

"I cannot get my spirits up this morning. The dangerous circumstances of my good old friend, Sir John, vex me much. Have you spoken to your cousin about them? She seems wonderfully gay!"

"I have," answered Miss Clifford; "but it would need a heavy weight, Captain Hayward, to sink her light heart. She promised to mention the matter to Mr. Beauchamp, too; but I rather imagine, from what has occurred, that she had not done it."

"Oh, she has done it, depend upon it," replied the young officer; "and that is what makes her so gay. But I must speak with Beauchamp myself, and make the matter sure."

In the mean time, Beauchamp had walked on with Isabella; and there could be little or no doubt, in the minds of any one who came behind them, that he was making love. Not that they heard a word that was said, no, not a single syllable, but there is a peculiar gesture associated with the making of love, by a gentleman at least, which distinguishes it from every

other process. Beauchamp, as we have described him, was above the middle height; but Isabella was not below it; and there was not the slightest occasion for him to bend down his head, in order that she might hear him distinctly, unless he had something to say which he did not wish others to hear likewise. He did bend down his head, however, and said what he had to say in a very low tone; and, although he did not stare her rudely in the face, yet from time to time he looked into her eyes, as if he thought them the crystal windows of the heart. Isabella, on her side, did not bend her head; she held it a little on one side, indeed, so as in the least perceptible degree to turn the fine small ear to the words that were poured into it; generally, however, she looked down, with the long fringes veiling the violet of her eyes, though from time to time she raised them at something he said; and when her look met his, they fell again. They had to cross over a little brook, and Beauchamp took her hand to help her over. He drew it through his arm when he had done, and there it rested for the remainder of the walk.

Involuntarily, and almost unconsciously as they marked this, Mary Clifford and Captain Hayward turned to each other with a smile. The impulse with each was to see if the other had remarked it—a very simple impulse—but when their looks met, it made a more compound phrase; and the anagram of the heart might read thus:

"May we not as well make love too?"

It was a sore temptation; but the next instant Ned Hayward's countenance became exceedingly grave, and the warm healthy glow in his cheek grew a shade paler.

If there was a struggle in his breast, it was brought to an end in about five minutes; for, just as they were climbing the side of the hill again, they were met by joyous old Sir John Slingsby, whose whole face and air generally bore with it an emanation of cheerful content, which is usually supposed, but, alas! mistakenly, to be the peculiar portion of the good and wise. Thoughtlessness, temperament, habit, often possess that which is the coveted possession of wisdom and virtue; and often in this world the sunshine of the heart spreads over the pathway of him who neither sees his own misfortunes lying before him, nor thinks of the sorrows of others scattered around.

"Ah, boys and girls, boys and girls!" cried the baronet, laughing, "whither have you wandered so long? I have done a world of business since you have been gone, thank heaven; and, thank heaven, have left a world undone; so I shall never, like Alexander, that maudlin, drunken rattle-pate of antiquity, have to weep for new worlds to conquer. Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward, I have a quarrel with you. Absent from evening drill and morning parade without leave! We will have you tried by a court-martial, boy; but what news have you brought? did you overtake the enemy? or was he too much for you? whither has he retreated? and last, though not least, who, and what is he?"

"On my life, Sir John, I do not know who he is," answered Ned Hayward. "We have had two engagements, in which, I am fain to confess, he has had the advantage, and has retreated in good order both times. I shall catch him yet, however; but at present I have not time to give full information; for—"

"Not time, not time!" cried the baronet; "what the devil have you done with all your time, not to have half an hour to spare to your old colonel?"

"In the first place, my dear sir, I am wet," replied the young officer, "for I have been in the water, and must change my clothes; but I have won my bet, however; I promised to catch the best trout in the river before noon; and there he is: match him if you can."

"Before noon," exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, taking out his watch; "twenty minutes past twelve, by Jove!"

"Ay, but he has been caught twenty minutes," said Ned Hayward, "I will appeal to all persons present."

"Well, granted, granted," exclaimed the baronet, "the bet's won, the bet's won. You shall change your clothes, make yourself look like a gentleman, and then tell the reverend company your story."

"Impossible," answered Ned Hayward, shaking his head; "I have forty things to do."

"Forty things!" cried Sir John; "why, I have finished two hundred and fifty upon a moderate computation within an hour and ten minutes."

"Ah, my dear sir," said the young gentleman, "but I have got to change my clothes, write a letter, speak two words to Beauchamp, talk for a quarter of an hour to Ste Gimlet about his boy's education, pack up some clothes, and be down at Tarningham in time for the coach to London, as well as to induce your butler to give me some luncheon and a glass of the best old sherry in your cellar."

"Pack up some clothes!—coach to London!" cried Sir John Slingsby, in a more serious tone than he had yet used; "the boy is mad; his head is turned! Ned Hayward, Ned Hayward, what the devil do you mean, Ned Hayward?"

"Simply, my dear Sir John, that some business of importance calls me to London immediately," rejoined his young friend; "but I shall be down again to-morrow, or the next day at the furthest; and, in the mean time, I leave you horse and gun, fishing-tackle and appurtenances, which I give you free leave and license to confiscate if I do not keep my word."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the baronet, "go along, change your clothes, and come and get some luncheon. I always thought you a great donkey, Ned, and now I think so more than ever, when I see you quit comfortable quarters for a dull stage-coach. Go along, I say, go along; there's the door, which is always better said on the outside of a house than in the in."

"Thank you, Sir John; but I must just speak a word with Beauchamp first," replied Captain Hayward; and taking his new friend's arm, he drew him a little on one side, while the baronet and the two ladies entered the house.

"I have got a favor to ask you, Beauchamp," said Captain Hayward: "matters have got into a complication between myself and this young Wittingham, which may require a pistol-shot to unravel it. The fellow, who fired through

the window last night, certainly rode his horse; I walked straight into his room, thinking I might find the man there. I told him the occasion of my coming; he was insolent; and I informed him civilly what I thought of him: he demanded satisfaction; and I replied, that if there was a gentleman in the county that could be found to act as his friend, I would do him the honor of meeting him. Business, which one of the two ladies will give you a hint of, if they have not done so already, calls me immediately to London. I have written to tell him so, but that I shall be down the day after to-morrow. In the mean time, I shall tell the people at the White Hart, if any one comes from him, to refer them to you. Arrange the affair, therefore, for me, should such be the case, and, remember, the earliest possible time and the quietest possible manner—I'll bring my pistols—but we must break off, here comes Sir John Slingsby again; not a word to him on any account, there's a good fellow; and now let us talk of something else."

CHAPTER XXIII.

If you fix your eyes upon a distant hill in the month of April, in some countries, or May in others, there are a thousand chances to one, unless the goddess of the spring be very much out of humor, that you see first a golden gleam warm as the looks of love, and next a deep blue shadow, calm and grand as the thoughts of high intellect when passion has passed away with youth. Perhaps the case may be reversed; the shadow come first and the gleam succeed, just as you happen to time your look; but at all events, you will require no one to tell you—you will not even need to raise your face to the sky to perceive at once that the cause of this beautiful variation of hues is the alternate sunshine and cloud of the spring heavens.

Over the mind and over the face of man, however, what clouds, what sunshine, what gleams, what shadows will not come, without any eye but an All-seeing one being able to trace the causes of the change. Thrice in one morning was the whole demeanor of Mr. Beauchamp totally altered. He descended to breakfast grave and thoughtful; an hour after he was gayer than he had been for years. By the side of Isabella Slingsby he remained cheerful; but before luncheon was over he had plunged again into a fit of deep and gloomy thought, and as soon as Ned Hayward, having taken some food and wine, started up to mount his horse, which was at the door, Beauchamp rose also, saying, "I want one word with you, Hayward, before you go."

"Directly, directly," answered Ned Hayward. "Good-by, Sir John, good-by, Miss Slingsby."

"Mind—day after to-morrow at the latest, Ned," cried the baronet.

"Upon my honor," replied Hayward. "Farewell, Mrs. Clifford, I trust I shall find you here on my return."

"I fear not, Captain Hayward," replied the lady, "but you have promised, you know, to come over, and—"

"Nay, dear mamma, I think you will be here," said Mary Clifford, "I think for once I shall attempt to coax you."

Mrs. Clifford seemed somewhat surprised at her daughter's eagerness to stay; but Sir John exclaimed joyously, "There's a good girl—there's a capital girl, Mary; you are the best little girl in the world; she'll stay, she'll stay. We'll get up a conspiracy against her. There, be off, Ned. No long leave-takings. "You'll find us all here when you come back, just as you left us: me, as solemn and severe as usual, my sister as gay and jovial, Isabella as pensorous, and Mary as merry and madcap as ever."

Ned Hayward, however, did not fail to bid Miss Clifford adieu before he went, and be it remarked, he did it in a somewhat lower tone than usual, and added a few words more than he had spoken to the rest. Beauchamp accompanied him to the door, and then pausing near the horse, inquired in a low tone, "Are you quite certain the man with whom you had the struggle this morning is the same who fired the shot last night?"

"Perfectly," answered Ned Hayward, "for I saw his face quite well in the sand-pit; and I never forget a face. I wish to heaven you could catch him."

"Have you any idea of his name?" asked Beauchamp.

"None in the world," replied Ned Hayward; "but there are two people here who must know, I think. One is young Wittingham, and the other is Ste Gimlet, otherwise Wolf. I have a strong notion this fellow was one of those attacking the carriage the other night. But that puts me in mind, Beauchamp, that I intended to go up and talk to Gimlet, but I have not time now. I wish you would; and just tell him from me, I will pay his boy's schooling if he will send him to learn something better than making bird-traps. You can perhaps find out at the same time who this fellow is, so it may be worth a walk."

"I will, I will," answered Beauchamp, "but you said the young ladies here had something to tell me. What is it?"

"I thought they had done it," replied Ned Hayward, "that is stupid! But I have not time now, you must ask them; good-by;" and touching his horse lightly with his heel, he was soon on his way to Tarningham.

Beauchamp paused for a moment on the steps in deep meditation, and then turned into the house, saying to himself, "This must be inquired into instantly." He found Sir John Slingsby in the luncheon-room, reading the newspaper, but nobody else, for the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, and two of them, at least, were looking somewhat anxiously for his coming. It very rarely happens that any one who is looked anxiously for ever does come; and of course, in the present instance, Beauchamp took the natural course, and disappointed the two ladies.

"I have a message to deliver from Captain Hayward to your new keeper, Sir John," he said, "and therefore I will walk over to his cottage, and see him. An hour I dare say will accomplish it."

"It depends upon legs, my dear sir," answered the baronet, looking up. "It would cost my

two an hour and a half to go and come; so if I might advise, you would take four. You will find plenty of hoofs in the stables, and a groom to show you the way. Thus you will be back the sooner, and the women will have something to talk to; for I must be busy—very busy—devilish busy, indeed. I have not done any business for ten years, the lawyer tells me, so I must work hard to-day. I'll read the papers first, however, if Wharton himself stood at the door; and he is a great deal worse than Satan. I like to hear all the lies that are going about in the world; and as newspapers were certainly invented for the propagation of falsehood, one is sure to find all there. Take a horse, take a horse, Beauchamp. Life is too short to walk three miles and back to speak with a gamekeeper."

"Well, Sir John, I will, with many thanks," answered his guest, and in about a quarter of an hour he was trotting away toward the new cottage of Stephen Gimlet, with a groom to show him the way. That way was a very picturesque one, cutting off an angle of the moor, and then winding through wild lanes rich with all sorts of flowers and shrubs, till at length a small old gray church appeared in view at the side of a little green. The stone, where the thick ivy hid it not, was incrusted in many places with yellow, white, and brown lichens, giving that peculiar rich hue with which nature is so fond of investing old buildings. There was but one other edifice of any kind in the neighborhood, and that was a small cottage of two stories built close against one side of the church. Probably it had originally been the abode of the sexton, and the ivy spreading from the neighboring buttress twined round the chimneys, meeting several lower shoots of the same creeping plant, and enveloped one whole side in a green mantle. The sunshine was streaming from behind the church, between it and the cottage, and that ray made the whole scene look cheerful enough; but yet Beauchamp could not help thinking, "This place, with its solitary house, and lonely church, its little green, and small fields behind, with their close hedge-rows, must look somewhat desolate in dull weather. Still the house seems a comfortable one, and there has been care bestowed upon the garden, with its flowers and herbs. I hope this is Gimlet's cottage; for the very fact of finding such things in preparation may waken in him different tastes from those to which he has been habituated."

"Here's the place, sir," said the groom, riding up and touching his hat, and at the same moment the sound of the horses' feet brought the rosy, curly-headed urchin of the *ci-devant* poacher trotting to the door.

Beauchamp dismounted and went in; and instantly a loud, yelping bark was heard from the other side of the front room, where a terrier dog was tied to the post of a sort of dresser. By the side of the dog was the figure of the newly-constructed gamekeeper himself, stooping down and arranging sundry boxes and cages on the ground.

Now the learned critic has paused on the words "newly-constructed gamekeeper"—let him not deny it—and has caviled thereat, and declared them incorrect. But I will defend them: they are neither there by, and on account of careless writing or careless printing; but well-considered, just, and appropriate, there they stand on the author's responsibility. I contend he was a newly-constructed gamekeeper, and out of very curious materials was he constructed, too.

As soon as he heard Beauchamp's step, Sir Gimlet raised himself, and recognizing his visitor at once, a well-pleased smile spread over his face, which the gentleman thought gave great promise for the future. It is something, as this world goes, to be glad to see one from whom we have received a benefit. The opposite emotion is more general unless we expect new favors; a fact of which Beauchamp had been made aware by some some sad experience, and as the man's pleased look was instantaneous, without a touch of affectation in it, he augured well for some of the feelings of his heart.

"Well, Gimlet," said the visitor, "I am happy to see that some of your stock has been saved, even if all your furniture has perished."

"Thank you, sir," replied the other, "my furniture was not worth a groat. I made most of it myself; but I lost a good many things I won't be easy to get again. All the dogs that were in the house, but this one, were burned or choked. He broke his cord and got away. All my ferrets, too, went, but three that were in the shed; and the tame badger, poor fellow, I found a bit of his skin this morning. I thank you very much, sir, for what you gave me, and if you wait five minutes you'll see what I've done with it. I think it will give you pleasure, sir; for I've contrived to get quite enough to set the place out comfortably, and have something over in case anything is forgotten."

Beauchamp liked the man's way of expressing his gratitude by showing that he appreciated the feelings in which the benefit was conferred. It was worth a thousand hyperboles.

"I shall stay some little time, Gimlet," he said, "for I have one or two things to talk to you about, if you can spare a minute."

"Certainly, sir," answered the man in a respectful tone, "but I can't ask you to sit down, because you see there is no chair."

"Never mind that," replied Beauchamp, "but what I wished principally to say is this: my friend, Captain Hayward, takes a good deal of interest in you and in your boy; and, as he was going to London to-day, he asked me to see you and tell you, that if you like to let the poor little fellow attend any good school in the neighborhood he will pay the expenses. He wished me to point out to you what an advantage it will be to him to have a good education, and also how much better and more safe it is for him to be at school while you are absent on your duty, than shut up alone in your house."

"Whatever that gentleman wishes, sir, I will do," Gimlet replied; "I never knew me like him before—I wish I had—but, however, I am bound to do what he tells me; and even if I did not see and know that what he says in this matter is good and right, I would do it all the same. But as for paying, sir, I hope he won't ask me to let him do that, for I have now got quite enough and to spare; and although

el it a pleasure to be grateful to such a gentle-an, yet he can do good elsewhere with the oney."

"You can settle that with him afterward, imlet," replied Mr. Beauchamp, "for he is oming back in a day or two; but I now want ask you a question, which you must answer r not as you think fit. You were with Captain ayward, it seems, when he came up with the an who fired into the window of the Hall, and ou saw his face, I think?"

Gimlet nodded his head, saying, "I did, r."

"Do you know the man?" asked Beauchamp, xing his eyes upon him.

"Yes, sir," replied the other at once, with the olor coming up into his face, "but before you go on, just let me say a word. That person and I ere in some sort companions together once, a matter we had better have let alone, and I hould not like to 'peach."

"In regard to the attack upon the carriage—to hich I know you allude—I am not about to in-uire," replied Beauchamp, "but I will ask ou only one other question, and I promise you pon my honor, not to use anything you tell e against the person. Was his name More-n?"

"I won't tell you a lie, sir," answered Gimlet. It was, though how you have found it out I an't guess, for he has been away from this part f the country for many a year."

"It matters not," answered Beauchamp, how I found it out; I know he has been absent any a year. Can you tell me how long he has tarned?"

"That I can't say, I'm sure, sir," replied the an; "but I did hear that he and the lady have een lodging at Buxton's inn for a day or two, ut not more. It's a great pity to see how he as gone on, and to sell that fine old place that as been theirs for so many hundred years! I hould think, that if one had anything worth having that had been one's father's, one's grand-father's, and one's great grandfather's, for such a long while, it would keep one straight. It's mostly when a man has got nothing to pride him-self upon that he goes wrong."

"Not always," answered Beauchamp; "un-bridled passion, my good friend, youth, inexpe-rience, sometimes accident, lead a man to com-mit a false step, and that is very difficult to re-trieve in this life."

"Ay, ay, I know that, I know that, sir," answered Gimlet, "but I hope not impossible;" and he looked up in Beauchamp's face with an expression of doubt and inquiry.

"By no means impossible," replied the gen-tleman, "and the man who has the courage and strength of mind to retrieve a false step, gives a better assurance to society for his future con-duct than perhaps a man who has never com-mitted one can do."

Gimlet looked down and meditated for a minute or two, and though he did not distinctly express the subject of his contemplation, his reverie ended with the words, "Well, I will try." The next moment he added, "I don't think, however, that this Captain Moreton will ever make much of it; for he has been going on now a long while in the same way, from a boy to a lad, and from a lad to a man. He broke his father's heart, they say, after having ruined him to pay his debts; but the worst of it all is, he was always trying to make others as bad as himself. He did me no good; for when I was a boy and used to go out and carry his game-bag, he put me up to all manner of things, and that was the beginning of my liking to what people call poaching. Then, too, he had a great hand in ruining this young Harry Wittingham. He taught him to gamble and drink, and a great deal more, when he was a mere child, I may say."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Beauchamp, "then the young man is to be pitied more than blamed."

"I don't know sir, I don't know," answered the gamekeeper; "he's a bad-hearted fellow. He set fire to my cottage, that's clear enough, and he knew the boy was in it too; but this busi-ness of firing in at the window I can't make out at all; I should have thought it had been an accident if he had not afterward taken a shot at Captain Hayward."

"I wish to heaven I could think it was an accident," answered Beauchamp; "but that is out of the question. They say there are thoughts of pulling down the old house, if the place is not sold again very soon. How far is it?"

"Oh, not three quarters of a mile from this," replied the gamekeeper. "Have you never seen it, sir? It's a fine old place."

"Yes, I have seen it in former years," said Beauchamp. "Is it in this parish then?"

"Oh yes, sir, this is the parish church here. They all lie buried in a vault here, and their monuments are in the aisle; would you like to see them? The key is always left in this cot-tage. There they lie, more than twenty of them—the Moretons, I mean—for you know the man's father was not a Moreton; he was a brother of the Lord Viscount Lenham; but, when he married the heiress, he took the name of Moreton, according to her father's will. His tomb is in there, and I think it runs, 'The Hon-orable Henry John St. Leger Moreton.' It is a plain enough tomb for such a fine gentleman as he was; but those of the Moretons are very handsome, with great figures cut in stone as big as life."

"I should like to see them," said Beauchamp, rousing himself from a reverie.

"That's easily done," answered the game-keeper, taking a large key from a nail driven into the wall, and leading the way to a small side-door of the church.

"You tell me he was down here with the lady," said Beauchamp, as the man was open-ing the door. "Do you know if he is mar-ried?"

"That I can't say, sir," answered the man. "He had a lady with him, and a strange-looking lady, too, with all manner of colors in her clothes. I saw her three days ago. She must have been a handsome-looking woman, too, when she was young; but she looks, I don't know how now."

Beauchamp tried to make him explain him-self; but the man could give no better descrip-tion; and walking on into the church, they passed along from monument to monument, pausing to read the different inscriptions, the greater part of which were more intelligible to Beauchamp than his companion, as many were

written in Latin. At length they came to a small and very plain tablet of modern erection, which bore the name of the last possessor of the Moreton property; and Beauchamp paused and gazed at it long, with a very sad and gloomy air.

There is always something melancholy in contemplating the final resting-place of the last of a long line. The mind naturally sums up the hopes gone by, the cherished expectations frustrated, the grandeur and the brightness passed away; the picture of many generations in infancy, manhood, decrepitude, with a long train of sports and joys, and pangs and sufferings, rises like a moving pageant to the eye of imagination; and the heart draws its own homily from the fate and history of others. But there seemed something more than this in the young gentleman's breast. His countenance was stern, as well as sad; it expressed a bitter gloom, rather than melancholy; and, folding his arms upon his chest, with a knitted brow, and teeth hard-set together, he gazed upon the tablet in deep silence, till a step in the aisle behind him startled him; and, turning round, he beheld good Doctor Miles slowly pacing up the aisle toward him.

Stephen Gimlet bowed low to the rector, and took a step back; but Beauchamp did not change his place, though he welcomed his reverend friend with a smile.

"I want to speak with you, Stephen," said Doctor Miles, as he approached; and then turning toward Beauchamp, he added, "How are you, my dear sir? There are some fine monuments here."

Beauchamp laid his hand upon the clergyman's arm, and, pointing to the tablet before him, murmured in a low voice, "I have something to say to you about that, my good friend; I will walk back with you; for I have long intended to talk to you on several subjects which had better not be delayed any longer;—I will leave you to speak with this good man here, if you will join me before the cottage."

"Oh, you need not go, you need not go," said Doctor Miles, "I have nothing to say you may not hear. I wanted to tell you, Stephen," he continued, turning to the *ci-devant* poacher, "that I have been down to-day to Tarningham, and have seen old Mrs. Lamb and her son William."

"He's a dear good boy, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, gazing in the rector's face, "and he was kind to me and used to come up and see his poor sister Mary when nobody else would come near her. That poor little fellow, all crooked and deformed as he is, has more heart and soul in him than the whole town of Tarningham."

"There are more good people in Tarningham and in the world, Stephen, than you know," answered Doctor Miles, with a sharp look; "you have to learn, my good friend, that there are natural consequences attached to every particular line of conduct; and, as you turn a key in a door one way to open it, and another way to shut it; so, if your conduct be good, you open men's hearts toward you; if your conduct be bad, you close them."

Stephen Gimlet rubbed his finger on his temple, and answered in a somewhat bitter, but by no means insolent tone: "It's a very hard lock sir, that of men's hearts; and when once it's shut, the bolt gets mighty rusty—at least, as I've found it."

"Stephen, Stephen!" exclaimed the worthy clergyman, raising his finger with a monitory and reproachful gesture, "can you say so—especially to-day?"

"No, sir—no, sir;" cried Stephen Gimlet, eagerly, "I am wrong; I am very wrong; but just then there came across me the recollection of all the hard usage I have had for twelve long years, and how it had driven me from bad to worse—ay, and killed my poor Mary, too; for her father was very hard; and though he said her marrying me broke his heart, I am sure he broke hers."

"You must not brood upon such things, Gimlet," said Doctor Miles. "It is better, wiser, and more Christian, for every man to think of the share which his own faults have had in shaping his own fate; and if he do so coolly and dispassionately, he will find much less blame to be attributed to others than he is inclined to believe. But do not let us waste time upon such considerations. I went down to talk to Mrs. Lamb about you and your boy; I told her what Sir John had done for you; and the imminent peril of death which the poor child had fallen into, from being left totally alone, when you are absent. The good old woman—and pray remark, Stephen, I don't call people good as the world generally does, without thinking them so—was very much affected, and wept a good deal, and in the end she said she was quite ready to come up and keep house for you, and take care of the child while you are away."

The man seemed troubled; for the offer was one which in many respects was pleasant and convenient to him; but there was a bitter remnant of resentment at the opposition which his unfortunate wife's parents had shown to her marriage with himself, and at the obstinacy with which her father had refused all reconciliation, that struggled against better feelings, and checked any reply upon his lips. Doctor Miles, however, was an experienced reader of the human heart; and when he saw such ulcerations, he generally knew the remedy, and how to apply it. In this instance, he put all evil spirits to flight in a moment by awakening a better one, in whose presence they could not stand.

"The only difficulty with poor Mrs. Lamb seemed to be," he said, after watching the man's countenance during a momentary pause, "that she is so poor. She said that you would have enough to do with your money, and that the little she has, which does not amount to six shillings a week, would not pay her part of your housekeeping."

"Oh, if that's all, doctor," cried Stephen Gimlet, "don't let that stand in the way. If poor Mary's mother shall never want a meal when I can work for it. I'd find her one anyhow, if I had to go without myself. Beside, you know, I am rich now, and I'll take care to keep all straight, so as not to get poor again. That could not be a greater pleasure to me, I can assure you, sir, than to share whatever I've with poor Mary's mother, and that dear

oy Bill. Thanks to this kind gentleman, I've ot together a nice little lot of furniture; and, f the old woman will but bring her bed, we hall do very well, I'll warrant; and the boy will be taken care of, and go to the school; and we'll all lead a different sort of life and be quite appy, I dare say—No, not quite happy! I can never be quite happy any more, since my poor girl left me; but she is happy, I am sure; and hat's one comfort."

"The greatest," said Doctor Miles, whose spirit of philanthrophy in a peculiar way was very easily roused, "the greatest Stephen; and s it is by no means impossible, nor, I will say, mprobable, both from the light of natural reaon and many passages of Scripture, that the pirits of the dead are permitted to see the onduct and actions of those they loved on arth, after the long separation has occurred, hink what a satisfaction it will be to your poor rife, if she can behold you acting as a son to er mother—mind, I don't say that such a hing is by any means certain; I only hint that t is not impossible, nor altogether improbable, hat such a power may exist in disembodied pirits."

"I am quite sure it does," said Stephen Gimlet, with calm earnestness; "I have seen her many a time sitting by the side of the water under the willow trees, and watching me when I was putting in my night-lines."

"I think you are mistaken, Stephen," said Doctor Miles, shaking his head; "but at all events, if such a thing be possible, she will now watch you with more satisfaction, when you are supplying her place in affection to her mother."

"I will do my best, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, "if it be only on that account."

"I am sure you will, Stephen," answered the worthy clergyman; "and so the first spare moment you have, you had better go down and talk with Mrs. Lamb. Now, Mr. Beauchamp, I am ready."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Well, well, sit down and cheer yourself, Goody Lamb," said Stephen Gimlet, after an interval of thirty hours—for I must pass over for the present those other events affecting more important characters in this tale, which filled up the intervening time in the neighborhood of Tarningham—"let bygones be bygones, as they say in the country where you have lived so much. Here you are, in as comfortable a cottage as any in the country. I have plenty, and to spare; and, forgetting all that's past and gone, I will try to be a son to you and a brother to poor Bill."

"Thank you, Stephen, thank you," said the old woman, to whom he spoke—a quiet, resigned-looking person, with fine features, and large dark eyes, undimmed by time, though the hair was as white as snow, the skin exceedingly wrinkled, and the frame, apparently, enfeebled and bowed down with sickness, cares, or years; "I am sure you will do what you can, my poor lad; but still I cannot help feeling a little odd at having to move again at my time of life. I thought, when I and my poor husband, Davie Lamb, came up here to Tarningham, out of Scotland, it was the last time I should have to change. But we can never tell what may happen to us. I fancied, when I went to Scotland with stiff old Miss Moreton, that I was to be settled there for life. There I married Lamb, and thought it less likely than ever that I should change, when, suddenly, he takes it into his head to come up here to the place where I was born and brought up, and never told me why or wherefore."

"Ay, he was a close, hard man," said Stephen Gimlet; "he was not likely to give reasons to any one; he never did to me, but just said two or three words, and flung away."

"He was a kind husband and a kind father," said the widow, "though he said less than most men, I will acknowledge."

"He was not kind to his poor, dear girl," muttered Stephen Gimlet, in a tone which rendered his words scarcely audible; but yet the widow caught, or divined their sense clearly enough; and she answered:

"Well, Stephen, don't let us talk about it. There are some things that you and I cannot well agree upon, and it is better not to speak of them. Poor Davie's temper was soured by a great many things. People did not behave to him as well as they ought; and, although I have a notion they persuaded him to come here, they did not do for him all they promised."

"That's likely," answered the *ci-devant* poacher; "though I have no occasion to say so, either; for people have done much more for me than they ever promised, and more than I ever expected. See what good Sir John Slingsby has done, after I have been taking his game for this many a year; and Mr. Beauchamp, too—why, it was a twenty-pound note he gave me, just because he heard that my cottage had been burnt down, and all the things in it destroyed—but it was all owing to Captain Hayward, who began it by saving the dear boy's life, that lies sleeping there in t'other room, and spoke well of me—which nobody ever took the trouble to do before—and said I was not so bad as I seemed; and, please God, I'll not give his promises the lie, anyhow."

"God bless him for a good man," said Widow Lamb; "he is one of the few, Stephen, whose heart and soul are in doing good."

"Ay, that he is," answered the gamekeeper; "but I did not know you knew him, goody."

"No, I do not know much of him," answered the old lady, "but I know he has been very kind to my boy Bill; and before he went off for London t'other day, had a long talk to him, which is better, to my thinking, than the money he gave him. But who is this Mr. Beauchamp, you say is such a kind man, too?" I've heard Bill talk of him, and he tells me the same; but I can't well make out about him"

"Why, he is a friend of Captain Hayward's" rejoined the gamekeeper; "he has been staying a long while at the White Hart, and just the same sort of man as the other, though a sadder-looking man, and not so frank and free."

"But what looking man is he?" asked the old woman. "You can tell one what a dog's like, or what a ferret's like, Stephen, well enough; and I should like to hear about him; for I have a curiosity, somehow."

"Why, he is a tall man and a strong man," answered Stephen Gimlet, "with a good deal of darkish hair, not what one would say curling, but yet not straight, either; and large eyes, in which you can see little or no white; very bright and sparkling, too. Then he's somewhat pale and sunburnt; and very plain in his dress, always in dark clothes; but yet, when one looks at him, one would not like to say a saucy thing to him, for there is something, I don't know what, in his way and his look, that, though he is as kind as possible when he speaks, seems to tell everybody, 'I am not an ordinary sort of person.' He never wears any gloves, that I saw; but, for all that, his hands are as clean as if they had been washed the minute before, and the wristbands of his shirts are as white as snow."

Goody Lamb paused, thoughtfully, and rubbed her forehead once or twice, under the gray hair.

"I have seen him, then," she said at length, in a very peculiar tone; "he has passed my little window more than once—and his name is Beauchamp, is it?"

"So they say," answered Stephen Gimlet, in some surprise; "why should it not?"

"Oh! I don't know," answered the widow; and there she ceased.

"Well, you are very droll to-night, goody," said Stephen Gimlet; "but I should like a cup of tea before I go out upon my rounds; so I'll just get some sticks to make the fire burn; for that kettle does nothing but simmer."

Thus saying, he went into the little passage, and out into a small yard, whence he brought a faggot or two. He then laid them on the hot embers, blew up a flame, made the kettle boil; and, all this time, not a word passed between him and Goody Lamb; for both seemed very busy with thoughts of their own. At length, when a teapot and some cups had been produced, and a small packet of tea, wrapped up in a brown paper, the old lady sat down to prepare the beverage for her son-in-law, as the first act of kindly service she rendered him since she had undertaken to keep his house. To say the truth, it was more for herself than for him that the tea was made; for Stephen Gimlet did not like the infusion, and was not accustomed to it; but he knew the good dame's tastes, and was anxious to make her as comfortable as he could.

While she was making the tea after her own peculiar fashion—and almost every one has a mode of his own—Gimlet stood on the other side of the little deal table, and watched her proceedings. At length he said, somewhat suddenly, "Yes, Mr. Beauchamp was up here yesterday, just when Doctor Miles was talking to me, and he asked me a great many questions about——" and here he paused, thinking he might be violating some confidence if he mentioned the subject of his visitor's inquiries. The next instant he concluded his sentence in a different way from that which he first intended, saying—"about a good many things; and then he went into the church with me and looked at all the tombs of the Moretons, and especially that of the last gentleman."

"Ay, well he might," answered Goody Lamb.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stephen Gimlet, with a slight laugh; "then you seem to know more of him than I do."

Goody Lamb nodded her head; and her son-in-law proceeded, with some warmth: "Then I am sure you know no harm of him."

"No, Stephen, no," she said; "I do not! I saw him as a young lad, and I have not seen him since; but I have not forgotten him; for he came down to my house—what is called the Grieves-house in Scotland—on the morning of a day that turned out the heaviest day of his life; and he was a gay young lad then; and he saw my poor boy, who was then a little fellow of four years old, that all the folks there used to gibe at on account of his misfortunes; but this gentleman took him on his knee and patted his head, and was kind to him, and said he was a clever boy, and gave him a couple of shillings to buy himself a little flute, because the poor fellow was fond of music even then, and used to whistle so sweetly, it was enough to break one's heart to hear such sounds come from such a poor body. The gentleman has never thought of me or mine since then, I'll warrant; but I have thought of him often enough; and I'll ask him a question or two some day, please God."

"The heaviest day in his life," repeated Stephen Gimlet, who had marked every word she uttered with strong attention; "how was that, goody?"

"Ay," answered Widow Lamb, shaking her head, "as they say in that country, it is no good talking of all that; so ask me no more questions, Stephen; but sit down and take your tea, my man, and then go about your work."

Stephen Gimlet sat down, and, with not the greatest pleasure in the world, took a cup of the beverage she had prepared; but still he was very thoughtful; for there was something in Mr. Beauchamp, even in the grave sadness of his ordinary manner, which created a kind of interest in a man of a peculiarly imaginative character; and he would have given a good deal to know all that Widow Lamb could tell, but would not. He did not choose to question her, however; and, after having finished a large slice of brown bread, he rose and unfastened the only dog he had remaining, in order to go out upon his night's round.

Just at that moment, however, some one tried the latch of the cottage, and then knocked for admission; and the dog, springing forward, growled, barked, and snarled furiously.

The gamekeeper chid him back, and then opened the door, when, to his surprise, he saw the figure of young Harry Wittingham before him. The dog sprang forward again, as if he would have torn the visitor to pieces; and, to say the truth, Stephen Gimlet felt a great inclination to let the beast have his way; but, after a moment's thought, he drove it back again, saying, with a bitter laugh,

"The beast knows the danger of letting you in. What do you want with me, sir?"

"I want you to do me a great service, Ste," said Harry Wittingham, with a familiar and friendly air; "and I am sure you will, if——"

"No, I won't," answered Stephen Gimlet, "if it were to save you from hanging, I would not put my foot over that door-step. It is no

use talking, Mr. Wittingham; I will have nothing more to do with any of your tricks. I don't wish ever to see you again; I am in a new way of life, and it won't do, I can tell you."

"Oh, I have heard all about that," answered the young man, in a light tone; "and, moreover, that you have taken a silly fancy into your head, that I set fire to your cottage. It is all nonsense, upon my word. Your boy must have done it, playing with the fire that was on the hearth."

Stephen Gimlet's face turned somewhat pale with the effort to keep down the anger that was in his heart; but he replied shortly and quickly, for fear it should burst forth:

"The boy had no fire to play with — you knew well he was locked up in the bedroom, and there he was found, when you burned the place down."

"Well, if I had any hand in it," said young Wittingham, "it must have been a mere accident."

"Ay, when you knew there was a poor helpless child in the house," said Stephen Gimlet, bitterly, "it was a sort of accident which well nigh deserved hanging."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my good fellow," said the young man, "you are angry about nothing; and though you have got a good place, I dare say you are not a man to refuse a couple of guineas when they are offered to you."

"If you offer them," cried Stephen Gimlet, furiously, "I'll throw them in your face—an accident, indeed! to burn my cottage, and nearly my poor child! I suppose it was by accident that you stopped the carriage in the lane! and by accident that you set a man to fire at your own father through the window!"

"Hush, hush, Stephen," cried Widow Lamb, catching hold of his coat and attempting to keep him back, as he took a step toward Harry Wittingham, who turned very pale.

The young man recovered his audacity the next moment, however, and exclaimed:

"Pooh! let him alone, good woman; if he thinks to bully me, he is mistaken."

"Get out of this house," cried Stephen Gimlet, advancing close to him. "Get out of this house, without another word, or I'll break your neck!"

"You are a fool," answered young Wittingham, "and, if you don't mind, I'll send you to Botany Bay."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when Stephen Gimlet aimed a straight blow at him with his right hand, which was immediately parried; for the young vagabond was not unskillful in the science of defence; but, the next instant, the gamekeeper's left told with stunning effect in the midst of his face, and he fell prostrate, with his head out of the doorway, and his feet within. Stephen Gimlet looked at him for a moment, then, stooping down, lifted him in his strong arms, pitched him headlong out, and shut the door.

"There!" said Gimlet; "now I'll sit down for a minute and get cool."

CHAPTER XXV.

We will go back, if it pleases the reader; for, fortunately, it happens, that, in a work of this character, one can go back. Oh, how often in human life is it to be wished that we could do the same! What deeds, done amiss, would then be rectified! What mistakes in thought, in conduct, in language, would then be corrected! What evils for the future avoided! What false steps would be turned back! What moral bonds, shackling our whole being, would not then be broken! I do believe, that, if any man would take any hour out of any period of his life, and look at it with a calm, impartial, unprejudiced eye, he would feel a longing to turn back and change something therein; he would wish to say more, than he had said—or less—to say it in a different tone—with a different look—or he would have acted differently—he would have yielded—or resisted—or listened—or refused to listen—he would wish to have exerted himself energetically—or to have remained passive—or to have meditated ere he acted—or considered something he had forgotten—or attended to the small, still voice in his heart, when he had shut his ears. Something, something, he ever would have altered in the past! But, alas! the past is the only reality of life, unchangeable, irretrievable, indestructible; we can neither mold it, nor recall it, nor wipe it out. There it stands forever: the rock of adamant, up whose steep side we can hew no backward path.

We will turn back to where we left Doctor Miles and Beauchamp. Issuing forth from the church, and passing round Stephen Gimlet's cottage, they found the worthy clergyman's little phaeton standing by the two horses which Beauchamp had brought from Tarningham Park. Orders were given for the four-wheeled and four-footed things to follow slowly; and the two gentlemen walked forward on foot, the younger putting his hand lightly through the arm of the elder, as a man does when he wishes to bespeak attention to what he is going to say.

"I have been looking at those monuments with some interest, my dear doctor," said Beauchamp, after they had taken about twenty steps in advance; "and now I am going to make you, in some degree, what, I dare say, as a good Protestant divine, you never expected to become—my father-confessor. There are several things, upon which I much wish to consult you, as I have great need of a good and fair opinion and advice."

"The best that it is in my power to give you shall have, my young friend," answered Doctor Miles; "not that I expect you to take my advice, either; for I never yet, in the course of a long life, knew above two men, who did take advice, when it was given. But that is not always the fault of the giver; and, therefore, mine is ever ready, when it is asked. What is it you have to say?"

"More, I fear, than can be well said in one conversation," answered Beauchamp; "but I had better begin and tell a part, premising that it is under the seal of confession, and therefore—"

"Shall be as much your own secret, as if it had not been given to me," said Doctor Miles; "go on."

"Well, then, for one part of the story," said Beauchamp, with a smile at his old companion's abruptness; "in the first place, my dear doctor, I am, in some sort, an impostor; and

our mutual friend, Stanhope, has aided the cheat."

Doctor Miles turned round sharply, and looked in his face for a moment; then nodded his head, as he saw there was no appearance of shame in the expression, and gazed straightforward again, without saying a word.

"To make the matter short, my good friend," continued his companion, "my name is not Beauchamp at all, nor anything the least like it."

"*Nom de guerre*," said Doctor Miles; "pray, what may the war be about?"

"Of that hereafter," said Beauchamp, for I shall still continue to call him by the name which he repudiated. "You have seen that I have been somewhat anxious to purchase this Moreton Hall property, and am still anxious to do so, though I have received a little bit of news on that subject to-day, which may make me very cautious about the examination of titles, &c. This intelligence is, that the ostensible proprietor is not the real one; your acquaintance, Mr. Wharton, having become virtually possessed of the property, perhaps, by not the fairest means."

"Humph!" said Doctor Miles; but he added nothing further, and Beauchamp went on.

"Poor Mr. St. Leger Moreton," he said, "was by no means a man of business, an easy, kind-hearted, somewhat too sensitive person."

"I know, I know," answered Doctor Miles, "I was well acquainted with him; and if ever man died of a broken heart, which is by no means so unusual an occurrence as people suppose, he did so."

"I believe it," answered Beauchamp; "but, at all events, he was not a man, as you must know, to ascertain, that he was dealt fairly by. His son, I am sorry to say, was willing to do anything for ready money—I say anything, for I do not know that act to which he would not have recourse for any object that he sought to gain."

"You seem to know them all thoroughly," said Doctor Miles, drily; and he then added in a warmer tone, "I will tell you what, my dear sir, this Captain Moreton is one of those men who make us ashamed of human nature. Born to a fine estate, the son of an excellent woman and amiable man, though a weak one, he went on corrupting himself and every one else, from boyhood to youth, and from youth to manhood. He is the only man I have ever known without one principle of any kind, or one redeeming point. There is but one thing to be said in his excuse, namely, that his great aunt, old Miss Moreton, who went to Scotland, and left him a small property there of about a thousand a year, which he dissipated totally in eleven weeks after he got it, spoiled him from his infancy, pampered, indulged, encouraged him in the most frightful manner. Even his vices became virtues in her eyes; so that there is not much marvel that he became a gambler, a *débauchée*, a duelist, and a scoundrel. People may consider that his courage and his talents were redeeming qualities, but I look upon them as none. They were only energies, which carried him on to deeper wickedness and infamy. He is now, I believe, a common sharper and swindler."

"I have let you go on, doctor," said Beauchamp, "because you have not said one word that is not just; but yet I must tell you, that this gentleman is my first cousin, and, unfortunately, heir to my estates and name."

Doctor Miles halted suddenly, and looked at his companion with some surprise.

"This takes me unprepared," he said; "I never heard of his having more than one cousin, namely, the present Lord Lenham; and he, I understood, was traveling in India for pleasure—a curious place to go for pleasure—but all men have their whims."

"It was not exactly a whim that led me thither, my dear doctor," said Beauchamp; "from the time I was twenty-one years of age up to the present hour, I have been a wanderer over the face of the earth, expiating in bitterness of heart one early error. I have not time now, and, I may say also, I have not spirits at the present moment to enter into the long detail of my past history. Let it suffice for the present to say, that a species of persecution, very difficult to avoid or bear, made me for many years a stranger to my native country. I visited every part of Europe and America, and then thought I would travel in the East, visiting scenes full of interest both from their novelty, in some respects, and from the vast antiquity to which their history and many of their monuments go back. As I found that all my movements were watched for the purpose of subjecting me to annoyance, I thought my residence in India a favorable opportunity for dropping my title and assuming another name, and have ever since gone by that of Beauchamp. During these wanderings my income has far exceeded my expenditure; a large sum of money has accumulated, and, on my return to England, I was advised to invest it in land. My attention was first directed to this estate, which I am desirous of purchasing, by finding a letter at my agents from my cousin Captain Moreton, expressing great penitence for all that has passed, professing a desire to retrieve his errors, lamenting the loss of the family property, and asking for a loan of five thousand pounds."

"I hope you did not give it him," cried Doctor Miles. "His penitence is all feigned; his reformation false; the money would go at the gambling-table in a week. I am not uncharitable in saying so, for I have had the opportunity of ascertaining, within this month, that the man is the same as ever."

"So I found on making inquiries," rejoined Beauchamp, "and consequently I refused decidedly. This refusal brought a most insolent and abusive letter, of which I took no notice; but having received intimation that the man is married, I made up my mind to the following course; to purchase this property, and if he have any children, to make it the condition of my giving him pecuniary assistance, that he shall give up one of them to be educated entirely by myself. Having insured that all shall be done to make that child a worthy member of society, I would settle the Moreton estate upon it, and thus, at all events, leave one of my name in a situation to do honor to it."

"A kind plan, and a good one," said Doctor Miles; "but yet people will call it a whimsical one, and wonder that you do not marry your-

self, and transmit your property and name to children of your own."

A bright and cheerful smile came upon Beauchamp's face.

"Hitherto, my dear doctor," he said "that has been impossible. The obstacles, however, are now removed, at least I believe so; and, perhaps, some day I may follow the course you suggest, but that will make no difference in regard to my intention. If I have children of my own, they will have more than enough for happiness, and having conceived a scheme of this kind, I never like to abandon it. I will therefore purchase this property, if it can be ascertained that Mr. Wharton's title is perfectly clear; but perhaps you, as the clergyman of two parishes here, can obtain proofs for me, that all the collateral heirs to the estate, under the entail made by Sir Charles Moreton, are extinct beyond all doubt. Under those circumstances, the sale by my uncle and his son would be valid."

"Wharton would not have bought it without he was sure," said Doctor Miles.

"The sum actually paid was very small," replied Beauchamp, in a peculiar tone, "all the rest went to cover a debt, real or pretended, of Mr. Wharton's own. But here we are at the gates of the park, and so I must bring our conference to an end. To-morrow or the next day I will tell you more of my personal history, for there are other subjects on which I must consult you. Do you know who this is, riding up so fast?"

"A fool," said Doctor Miles; and almost as he spoke, a young, fresh-colored man, dressed in a green coat and leather breeches, and mounted on a splendid horse, with a servant behind him, cantered up, and sprang to the ground.

"I don't know—ah—whether I have the honor of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp—ah," he said, in a self-sufficient tone.

Beauchamp bowed his head, saying, "The same, sir."

"Then, sir—ah—my name is Granty—ah—and you see—ah—I have been referred to you—ah—as the friend of a certain Captain Hayward—ah—in reference to a little affair—ah—between him and my friend Harry Wittingham—ah—whom he threatened to horsewhip—ah."

"If he threatened," answered Beauchamp, in a calm tone, "he is a very likely man to fulfill his words—but I think, sir, we had better speak upon this subject alone, as Captain Hayward has put me in possession of his views. This is my friend, Doctor Miles, a clergyman."

"Oh, yes, I know Doctor Miles—ah," said Mr. Granty, "a very good fellow, aren't you, Miles—ah?"

"No, sir, I am not," answered Doctor Miles; "but now, Mr. Beauchamp, I will leave you, as you seem to have some pleasant conversation before you;" and, shaking Mr. Beauchamp by the hand without any further apparent notice of what he had heard, Doctor Miles walked to the side of his carriage and got in, honoring Mr. Granty with the sort of cold, stiff bow that a poker might be supposed to make if it were taught to dance a minuet. But Doctor Miles had noticed all that had passed, and did not forget it.

And now, dear reader, we will put our horses into a quicker pace, leap over all the further conversation between Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Granty, and also an intervening space of two days, merely premising that, during that period, from a great number of knots on the tangled string of events, neither Mary Clifford nor Isabella Slingsby had any opportunity of speaking to Mr. Beauchamp for more than two minutes in private. Those two minutes were employed by Miss Clifford, to whose lot they fell, in telling him, with a hesitating and varying color, that she very much wished for a short conversation with him. Beauchamp was surprised, but he answered with courtesy and kindness, and wished her to proceed at once. Sir John Slingsby was upon them the next moment, however, and the matter was deferred.

Thus went the two days I have mentioned, but on the morning of the third, just about half-past five, when everybody but skylarks are supposed to be asleep, Mr. Beauchamp and our friend Ned Hayward entered the small meadow just under the trees by the palings of Tarningham Park, on the side next to Tarningham, near the spot where the river issued forth into the fields on its onward progress. They were followed by a man, carrying a mahogany case, bound with brass, and a gentleman in a black coat, with a surgical air about him; for strange human nature seldom goes out to make a hole in another piece of human nature, without taking precautions for mending it as soon as made.

Beauchamp took out his watch and satisfied himself that they were to their time, spoke a few words to the surgeon, unlocked the mahogany box, looked at some of the things it contained, and then walked up and down the field with Ned Hayward for a quarter of an hour.

"This is too bad, Hayward," he said, at length; "I think we might very well now retire."

"No, no," said Hayward, "give him law enough; one can never tell what may stop a man. He shall have another quarter of an hour. Then, if he does not come, he shall have the horsewhipping."

Ten minutes more passed, and then two other gentlemen entered the field, with a follower, coming up at a quick pace, and with heated brows.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen—ah," said Mr. Granty, advancing; "but we have had the devil's own work—ah—to get the tools—ah. My friend Wittingham was knocked down by a fellow—ah—that he was sending for cash, so that I had to furnish—ah—"

"Never mind all this," said Beauchamp, "you are now here, though you have kept my friend waiting. We had better proceed to business at once, as I have had a hint that, from a slight indiscretion on your part, sir, in mentioning this matter before a clergyman, inquiries have been made which may produce inconvenient results."

Mr. Granty was somewhat nettled; but neither Beauchamp nor Hayward attended to any of his "ahs;" the ground was measured, the pistols loaded, the two gentlemen placed on their ground, and then came the unpleasant "one—two—three." Both fired instantly, and the next moment Harry Wittingham reeled and dropped. Beauchamp thought he saw Ned

Hayward waver slightly, more as if the pistol had recoiled violently in his hand than anything else; but, as soon as his antagonist fell, the young officer ran up to him, stooped and raised his head.

The surgeon came up directly and opened the wounded man's coat and waistcoat, as he lay with his face as pale as ashes. At the same moment, however, there was a cry of "Hie, hie," and turning round, Beauchamp saw the poor little pot-boy, Billy Lamb, scampering across the field as hard as he could go.

"Run, run," cried the boy; "there are the magistrates and the constables all coming up—run over by the stile there; I brought the chaise to the end of the lane."

"I can't go," said Ned Hayward, "till I hear what is to come of this."

"You had better go," said the surgeon, looking up; "it does not seem to me to be dangerous, but you may get into prison if you stay. No, it has shattered the rib, but passed round. He will do well, I think. Run, run; I can see the people coming."

Beauchamp took Ned Hayward's arm and drew him away. In two minutes they had reached the chaise and were rolling on; but then Ned Hayward leaned back somewhat languidly, and said,

"I wish, Beauchamp, you would just tie your handkerchief tight round my shoulder here, for it is bleeding more than I thought, and I feel sickish."

"Good Heavens! are you hurt?" exclaimed Beauchamp, and opening his waistcoat, he saw that the whole right side of his shirt was steeped in blood.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I DO believe, from my very heart and soul, that there is not the slightest possible good in attempting to write a book regularly. I say, with prime ministers and maid-servants, with philosophers and fools, "I've tried it, and surely I ought to know." It may be objected, that the result entirely depends upon the way in which a thing is tried, and that a very simple experiment would fail, or might fail, in the hands of a fool or a maid-servant, which would succeed in those of a prime minister or a philosopher. Nevertheless, it is true that critics make rules which life will not conform to. Art says one thing, nature another; and, in such a case, a fig for art! Art may teach us how to embellish nature, or show us what to portray.

"Do not be continually changing the scene," says the critic; "do not run from character to character; introduce no personage who does not tend to bring about some result;" but in the course of human events the scene is always shifting; the characters which pass before our eyes, cross and return at every instant, and innumerable personages flit before us like shadows over a glass, leaving no trace of their having been. Others, indeed, appear for an instant, not only on the limited stage of domestic life, but often on the great scene of the world, act their appointed part, produce some particular *effect*, and then, like those strange visitants of *our system*, the comets, rush back into the depths from which they emerged but for a hour.

All this has been written to prove that it is perfectly right and judicious that I should introduce my beloved reader into the study of Mr. Wharton, or, rather, Abraham Wharton, Esq., solicitor, and attorney-at-law. Mr. Wharton was a small, spare, narrow man, of a tolerably gentlemanlike figure; and, to look at his back, one of those prepossessions which lead us all by the nose, made one believe that his face must be a thin, sharp, foxlike face, probably with a dark black beard, closely shaved, making the muzzle look blue.

On getting round in front, however, the surprise of the new acquaintance was great to see a red and blotchy countenance, with sharp black eyes, and very little beard at all. There was generally a secret simper upon his lips intended to be courteous; but that simper, like an exchequer bill, was very easily convertible, and a poor client, an inferior solicitor on the opposite side, or an unready debtor, soon found that it would be changed into heavy frowns or sarcastic grins.

Mr. Wharton was very proper and accurate in his dress. His coat was always black—even when he went out to hunt, which was not a rare occurrence, he never sported the red jacket. In riding, he would occasionally indulge in leather, elsewhere than from the knee downward; but the habiliment of the lower man was, upon all ordinary occasions, a pair of dark gray pantaloons. He was now so habited in his study, as he called the room behind that where seven clerks were seated, for the business he was engaged in was one in the ordinary course, though of extraordinary interest to Mr. Wharton. It was, in short, the consummation of plucking a poor bird which had been entrapped long before. Now it was not intended to leave him a feather, and yet Mr. Wharton was inclined to do the thing as decorously as possible. By decorously I do not mean tenderly—such an unnecessary delicacy never entered into Mr. Wharton's head. The decorum that he thought of was merely *the seeming in the world's eyes*, as a great deal of other decorum is, both male and female. He was about to be as hard, as relentless, as iron-hearted as a cannon-ball, but all with infinite professions of kindness and good feeling, and sorrow for the painful necessity, &c. &c. &c.; for Mr. Wharton followed Dr. Kitchener's barbarous recipe for devouring oysters, and "tickled his little favorites before he ate them."

The lawyer was standing at a table, with some papers before him—not too many—for he was not like those bankrupt attorneys of the capital, who fill their rooms with brown tin cases, marked in large white letters "House of Lords," be preferred as little show of business as possible. His object now-a-days was not to get practice, but to make money. Practice enough he had, too much for the common weal.

A clerk—a sort of private secretary, indeed—was sitting at the other end of the table, and the two had discussed one or two less important affairs, affecting a few hundred pounds, when Mr. Wharton at length observed, "I think to-morrow is the last day with Sir John Slingsby, Mr. Pilkington, is it not?"

He knew quite well that it was; but it would seem he wished to hear his clerk's opinion upon the subject.

"Yes, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington, "I don't see a chance for him."

"Nor I either," answered Mr. Wharton; "I am afraid he is quite run out, poor man. The six months' notice of foreclosure was all right, and the interest now amounts to a large sum."

"A very large sum, indeed, sir, with the costs," answered Mr. Pilkington; "you don't think, sir, he'll attempt to revise the costs or haggle about the interest."

"He can't, Mr. Pilkington," replied Mr. Wharton, dryly, "the costs are all secured by bond and accounts passed, and it was a client of mine who advanced him the money at seven and a half to pay the interest every six months on my mortgage. I had nothing to do with the transaction."

Mr. Pilkington smiled, and Mr. Wharton proceeded.

"Why you know quite well, Pilkington, that it was Dyer who advanced the money, and his bankruptcy brought the bonds into my hands."

"I thought there was only one bond, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington. "You told me to have a fresh bond every six months for the running interest and the arrears, and the interest upon former advances, to guard against loss."

Mr. Wharton now smiled and nodded his head, saying, for he was vain of his shrewdness, and vanity is a weak passion, "True, true, Pilkington; but last half-year I saw that things were coming to a close, and therefore thought it better to have two bonds. It looks more regular, though the other is the most convenient mode."

"And, beside, it secures the interest on the last half-year's interest," said Pilkington; but to this observation Mr. Wharton made no reply, turning to another part of the same subject.

"Just bid Raymond to step down to Mr. Wittingham's," said the lawyer, "and tell him, with my compliments, I should be glad to speak with him for a minute. I must give him a hint of what is going on."

"Why, sir," said Mr. Pilkington, hesitating, "you know he has a bond, too, out on the same day, and he'll be sure to go before you, having also a bill of sale."

"I know, I know," answered Mr. Wharton; "but I should like him to be the first, Pilkington."

"Will there be enough to cover all?" asked the clerk, doubtfully.

"Ample," answered his great man; "beside, the whole sum coming thundering down at once will insure that no one will be fool enough to help. I have heard, indeed, something about a friend who would advance money to pay Wittingham's bond. Let him!—all the better, that cannot supersede my debt. Wittingham will get his money, and Sir John won't easily find much more on any security he has to offer. Beside, when some one begins, it gives the very best reason for others going on, and Wittingham won't be slow, depend upon it. Tell Mr. Raymond to fetch him."

The clerk retired, not venturing to urge any more objections; but when he returned again, Mr. Wharton himself continued the conversation thus:

"Wittingham is a curious person to deal with; one does not always know what can be his objects."

Mr. Wharton had always an object himself, and, therefore, he fancied that no man could act without one. He never took the impulse of passion, or the misdirection of folly, or the pigheadedness of obstinacy, into account. However, with Mr. Wittingham he was in some degree right, as to his generally having an object; but he was in some degree wrong also; for all the other causes of human wrong-going, passion, folly, and pigheadedness, had their share in the modes, methods, and contrivances by which the worthy magistrate sought his ends.

"Now, what can be the meaning," continued Mr. Wharton, "of his opposing so strongly all steps against this Mr. Beauchamp and that Captain Hayward, who were engaged in the duel with his son?"

"They say he had quarreled with Harry Wittingham, and disinherited him," replied the clerk; "and old Mrs. Billiter, the housekeeper, is quite furious about it. She declares that it is all old Wittingham's fault; that if it had not been for him, nothing of the kind would have happened; and that he murdered the young man. I do not know what it all means; but they say she will nurse Harry Wittingham through it after all."

Mr. Wharton mused for a minute or two, and then said,

"You do not mean he is out of danger?"

"Oh dear, no, sir," answered Mr. Pilkington, who perceived a slightly dissatisfied twang in his superior's question; "Mr. Slattery, the surgeon, said he might sink at any time for the next ten days."

"Humph, said Mr. Wharton, "that is all right. It will keep the others out of the way for some time to come; and a very good thing, too, for Mr. Beauchamp himself. He it is who is treating for the Moreton Hall estate; there is a little hitch in the business, which will be soon removed; but he seems to me just the sort of man who would take Sir John Slingsby's mortgage as an investment, as soon as the other. At all events, he might create difficulties in a business which had better be settled as soon as possible for all parties, and might burn his own fingers, poor man, into the bargain. You had the bills posted up, Pilkington?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the clerk, "for twenty miles round, offering a reward. There is no fear, sir. They are safe enough—most likely in France by this time."

Mr. Wharton seemed satisfied; and, after a few minutes, worthy Mr. Wittingham entered the office, and was thence ushered into the study; but, alas! it was no longer the Mr. Wittingham of former days. The somewhat fresh complexion; the stiff, consequential carriage; the vulgar swagger, were all gone; and Mr. Wittingham looked a very sick old gentleman, indeed; weak in the knees, bent in the back, and sallow in the face. The wig was ill-adjusted, the Melton coat a world too wide; you could have put a finger between the knee-bands of the breeches and the stockings; and the top-boots slipped down almost to the ancles. It was marvelous how one who had been so tall and thin before could have become, to the eye, so

much taller and thinner. The great Prince of Parma wrote dispatches, reviewed troops, and conducted a negotiation within one hour before a long and lingering malady terminated in death. He knew he was dying, and yet went through all his ordinary business, as if he had only to dress and go out to a party instead of into his grave. This was a wonderful instance of the persistence of character under bodily infirmity, or rather of its triumph over corporeal decay. But that of Mr. Wittingham was more remarkable. The external Wittingham was wofully changed: his oldest friend would not have known him; but the internal Wittingham was still the same; there was not a tittle of difference. He was not in the least softened, he was not in the least brightened; his was one of those granite natures, hard to cut and impossible to polish. Although he had very little of the diamond in him, yet, as the diamond can only be shaped by the powder of the diamond, nothing but Wittingham could touch Wittingham. His own selfishness was the only means by which he was accessible.

"Ah, Mr. Wharton," he said, "you sent for me; what is in the wind now? Not about these two young men any more, I trust. That account is closed. I will have nothing to do with it. Henry Wittingham called out this Captain Hayward; Captain Hayward was fool enough to go out with Henry Wittingham. They each had a shot, and the balance struck was a pistol-ball against Henry Wittingham. Perhaps, if all the items had been reckoned, the account might have been heavier; but I am not going to open the books again, I should not find anything to the credit of my son, depend upon it."

"Oh, no, my good friend," said Mr. Wharton, in the most amiable tone possible; "I knew the subject was disagreeable to you, and therefore never returned to the business again. The other magistrates did what they thought their duty required, in offering a reward, &c.; but as you had a delicacy in meddling where your son was concerned, the matter was not pressed upon you."

"Delicacy! fiddlesticks' ends!" retorted Mr. Wittingham. "I never had a delicacy in my life! I did not choose! That is the proper word. But if it was not about this, why did you send for me?"

"Why, my dear sir," said Mr. Wharton, "I thought it due in honor to give you a hint—as I know you are a large creditor of Sir John Slingsby—that matters are not going altogether well there."

"I have known that these six years," answered the magistrate; "honor, indeed! You have a great deal to do with honor, and delicacy, and all that; but I am a man of business, and look to things as matters of business. Speak more plainly, Wharton! what is there going worse than usual at the Park! Does he want to borrow more money?"

"He did a fortnight ago, and could not get it," replied Mr. Wharton, drily; for the most impudent rogue in the world does not like to feel himself thoroughly understood. "But the short and the long of the matter is this, my good sir: Sir John can go on no longer. Six months' notice of foreclosure is out to-morrow; *other steps must* be taken immediately; large *arrears of interest* are due; two or three bonds with judgment are hanging over our poor friend; and you had better look after yourself."

"Well, well, there is time enough yet," said Mr. Wittingham, in a much less business-like tone than Mr. Wharton expected; "the preliminaries of the law are somewhat lengthy, Mr. Wharton! *fi-fas* and *ca-sas* take some time; and I will think of the matter."

"As you please, my good friend," answered Wharton; "only just let me hint, that all the preliminaries have been already gone through. An execution will be put in early to-morrow; there are a good many creditors, and there may be a sort of scramble, as the school-boys have it, where the quickest runner gets the biggest nut. I thought it but kind and fair to *tell you*, as a neighbor and a friend, especially as your debt is no trifle, I think."

"An execution early to-morrow!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham; "won't the estate pay all?"

"About two thirds, I imagine," said Wharton, telling, as was his wont, a great lie with the coolest face possible.

"And what will Sir John do?" said the magistrate, "and poor Miss Slingsby?"

"I am afraid we must touch Sir John's person," replied the lawyer, with a sneer; "and as to poor Miss Slingsby, I see nothing for it, but that she should go out as a governess. But do not let us talk nonsense, Wittingham. You are a man of sense and of business. I have given you a caution, and you will act upon it. That is all I have to do with the matter."

To Mr. Wharton's surprise, however, he did not find Mr. Wittingham so ready to act in the way he hinted as had been anticipated. The old gentleman hesitated, and doubted, and seemed so uneasy that the solicitor began to fear he had mistaken his character totally, to apprehend that, after all, he might be a kind-hearted, benevolent old gentleman. The reader, however, who has duly remarked the conversation between the magistrate on his sick-bed and worthy Dr. Miles, may, perhaps, perceive other causes for Mr. Wittingham's hesitation. He had found that Sir John Slingsby possessed a secret which might hang his son. Now, although I do not mean at all to say that Mr. Wittingham wished his son to die, in any way, or that he would not have been somewhat sorry for his death, by any means, yet he would have much preferred that the means were not those of strangulation. To have his son hanged, would be to have his own consideration hanged. In short, he did not at all wish to be the father of a man who had been hanged; and consequently he was somewhat afraid of driving Sir John Slingsby into a corner. But each man, as Pope well knew, has some ruling passion, which is strong even in death. Sir John Slingsby owed Mr. Wittingham five thousand pounds; and Mr. Wittingham could not forget that fact. As he thought of it, it increased, swelled out, grew heavy, like a nightmare. To lose five thousand pounds at one blow! What was any other consideration to that! What was the whole Newgate-calendar, arranged as a genealogical tree and appended to his name either as ancestry or posterity? Nothing, nothing! Dust in the balance! A feather in an air-pump! Mr. Wittingham grew exceedingly civil to his kind friend, Mr. Wharton; he compassionated poor Sir John

Slingsby very much; he was sorry for Miss Slingsby; but he did not in the least see why, when other people were about to help themselves, he should not have his just right. He chatted over the matter with Mr. Wharton, and obtained an opinion from him, without a fee, as to the best mode of proceeding—and Mr. Wharton's opinions on such points were very sound; but in this case particularly careful. Then Mr. Wittingham went home, sent for his worthy solicitor, Mr. Bacon, whom he had employed for many years, as cheaper and safer than Mr. Wharton, and gave him instructions, which set the poor little attorney's hair on end.

Mr. Bacon knew Mr. Wittingham, however; he had been accustomed to manage him at petty sessions; and he was well aware that it was necessary to set Mr. Wittingham in opposition to Mr. Wittingham, before he could hope that any one's opinion would be listened to. When those two respectable persons had a dispute together, there was some chance of a third being attended to who stepped in as an umpire.

But, in the present case, Mr. Bacon was mistaken. He did not say one word of the pity, and the shame, and the disgrace of taking Sir John Slingsby quite by surprise; but he started various legal difficulties; and, indeed, some formidable obstacles to the very summary proceedings which Mr. Wittingham contemplated. But that gentleman was as a gun loaded with excellent powder and well-crammed down shot, by Mr. Wharton; and the priming was dry and fresh. Mr. Bacon's difficulties were swept away in a moment; his obstacles leaped over; and the solicitor was astonished at the amount of technical knowledge which his client had obtained in a few hours.

There was nothing to be done but obey. Mr. Wittingham was too good a card to throw out; Sir John Slingsby was evidently ruined beyond redemption; and with a sorrowful heart—for Mr. Bacon was, at bottom, a kind and well-disposed man—he took his way to his office with his eyes roaming from one side of the street to the other, as if he were looking for some means of escaping from a disagreeable task. As they thus roamed, they fell upon Billy Lamb, the little deformed pot-boy. The lawyer eyed him for a minute or so as he walked along, compared him in imagination with one of his own clerks—a tall, handsome-looking fellow, with a simpering face—thought that Billy would do best, though he was much more like a wet capon than a human being; and, beckoning the boy into his office, retired with him into an inner room, where Mr. Bacon proceeded so cautiously and diffidently, that, had not Billy Lamb's wits been as sharp as his face, he would have been puzzled to know what the solicitor wanted him to do.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was a dark, cold, cheerless night, though the season was summer, and the preceding week had been very warm—one of those nights when a cold cutting north-east wind has suddenly broken through the sweet dream of bright days, and checked the blood in the trees and plants, withering them with the presage of winter. From noon till eventide that wind had blown; and although it had died away toward night, it had left the sky dark and the air chilly. Not a star was to be seen in the expanse above; and, though the moon was up, yet the light she gave only served to show that heavy clouds were floating over the heavens, the rounded edges of the vapors becoming every now and then of a dim white, without the face of the bright orb ever being visible for a moment. A dull, damp moist hung about the ground; and there was a faint smell, not altogether unpleasant, but sickly and oppressive, rose up, resembling that which is given forth by some kinds of water-plants, and burdened the cold air.

In the little church-yard, at the back of Stephen Gimlet's cottage, there was a light burning, though ten o'clock had struck some quarter of an hour before; and an elderly man, dressed, notwithstanding the chilliness of the night, merely in a waistcoat with striped sleeves, might have been seen by that light, which was nested in a horse-lantern, and perched upon a fresh-turned heap of earth. His head and shoulders were above the ground, and part of his rounded back, with ever and anon the rise and fall of a heavy pickaxe, appeared among the nettles and long hemlocks which overrun the church-yard. His legs and feet were buried in a pit which he was digging; and busily the sexton labored away to hollow out the grave, muttering to himself, from time to time, and sometimes even singing, at his gloomy work. He was an old man, but he had no one to help him, and in truth he needed it not, for he was hale and hearty, and he put such a good-will to his task, that it went on rapidly. The digging of a grave was to him a sort of festival. He held brotherhood with the worm, and gladly prepared the board for his kindred's banquet.

The grave-digger had gone on for some time when, about the hour I have mentioned, some one paused at the side of the low mossy wall, about a hundred yards from the cottage of the new gamekeeper, and looked over toward the lantern. Whoever the visitor was, he seemed either to hesitate or to consider, for he remained with his arms leaning on the coping for full five minutes before he opened the little wooden-gate close by, and, walking in, went up to the side of the grave. The sexton heard him well enough; but I never saw a sexton who was not a humorist, and he took not the least notice, working away as before.

"Why, what are you about, old gentleman?" said a man's voice, at length.

"Don't you see!" rejoined the sexton, looking up. "Practicing the oldest trade in the world but one—digging to be sure—aye, and grave-digging, too, which is a very ancient profession likewise, though when first it began men lived so long, the sextons must have been but poor craftsmen for want of practice."

"And whose grave is it you are digging!" asked the visitor. "I have been here some days and have not heard of any deaths."

"One would think you were a doctor," answered the sexton, "for you seem to fancy that you must have a hand in every death in the parish—but you want to know whose grave it is—well, I can't tell you, for I don't know myself."

"But who ordered you to dig it, then?" demanded the stranger.

"No one," said the sexton; "it will fit somebody, I warrant, and I shall get paid for it; and why should not I keep a ready-made grave as a town-cobbler keeps ready-made shoes? I am digging it out of my own fancy. There will be death somewhere before the week is out, I am sure; for I dreamed last night that I saw a wedding come to this church, and the bride and the bridegroom stepped on each of the grave-hillocks as they walked—so there will be a death, that's certain, and, may be, two."

"And so you are digging the grave on speculation, old fellow?" exclaimed the other, "but I dare say you have a shrewd guess of whom it is for. There is some poor fellow ill in the neighborhood—or some woman in a bad way, ha?"

"It may be for the young man lying wounded up at Buxton's inn," answered the sexton. "They say he is better; but I should not wonder if it served his turn, after all. But I don't know, there is never any telling who may go next. I've seen funny things in my day. Those who thought they had a long lease find it was a short one; those who were wishing for other people's deaths, that they might get their money, die first themselves."

The sexton paused, and the stranger did not make any answer, looking gloomily down into the pit, as if he did not much like the last reflections that rose up from the bottom of the grave.

"Aye, funny things enough I have seen," continued the sexton, after giving a stroke or two with the pickaxe; "but the funniest of all is, to see how folks take on at first for those who are gone, and how soon they get over it. Lord, what a lot of tears I have seen shed on this little bit of ground! and how soon they were dried up, like a shower in the sunshine. I recollect now there was a young lady sent down here for change of air by the London doctors, after they had poisoned her with their stuff, I dare say. A pretty creature she was as ever I set eyes on, and did not seem ill, only a bit of a cough. Her mother came with her, and then her lover, who was to be married to her when she got well. But at six months' end she died—there she lies, close on your left—and he lover, wasn't he terrible downcast? and he said to me when we had put her comfortably in the ground, 'I shan't be long after her, sexton; keep me that place beside her—there's a guinea for you.' He did not come back, however, for five years, and then I saw him one day go along the road in a chaise-and-four, with a fine lady by his side, as gay as a lark."

"Well, you would not have the man go on whimpering all his life?" said the other. "How old are you, sexton?"

"Sixty and eight last January," answered the other, "and I have dug these graves forty years come St. John."

"Have you many old men in the parish?" asked the stranger.

"The oldest is eighty-two," replied the sexton, "and she is a woman."

"Six from eighty-two," said the stranger, in a contemplative tone, "that leaves seventy-six. That will do very well."

"Will it?" said the sexton. "Well, you know best; but I should like to see a bit more of your face;" and as he spoke the old man suddenly raised his lantern toward the stranger, and then burst out into a laugh. "Ay, I thought I knew the voice!" he said; "and so you've come back again, captain? Well now, this is droll enough! That bone you've got your foot upon belongs to your old wet-nurse, Sally Loames, if I know this ground; and she had as great a hand in damaging you as any one of the rest. She was a bad one! But what has brought you down, now that all the money's gone, and the property too?"

"Why, I'll tell you," answered Captain Moreton—"I'll tell you, my good old Grindley. I want to see into the vaults where the coffins are, and just to have a look at the register. Can't you help me? You used always to have the keys."

"No, no, captain," rejoined the sexton, shaking his head—"no tricks! no tricks! I'm not going to put my head into a noose for nothing."

"Nobody wants you to put your head in a noose, Grindley," answered the other: "all I want is just to take a look at the coffins for a minute, and another at the register; for I have had a hint that I have been terribly cheated, and that people have put my great-grandfather's death six years too early, which makes all the difference to me; for if my mother was born while he was living, she could not break the entail, do you see?"

"Well, then," said the sexton, "you can come to-morrow, captain; and I'll tell the doctor any hour you like."

"That won't do, Grindley," replied Moreton; "the parson is with the enemy; and, beside, I must not let anybody know that I have seen the register and the coffins till I have everything prepared to upset their roguery. You would not have me lose my own, would you, old boy? Then as to your doing it for nothing, if you will swear not to tell that I have seen the things at all till I am ready and give you leave, you shall have a ten-pound note."

It is a strange and terrible thing, that the value of that which has no value except as it affects us in this world and this life, increases enormously in our eyes as we are leaving it. The sexton had always been more or less a covetous man, as Captain Moreton well knew; but the passion had increased upon him with years, and the bait of the ten-pound note was not to be resisted. He took up the lantern, he got out of the grave, and looked carefully round. It was late at night—all was quiet—nothing seemed stirring; and approaching close to Moreton's side, he said, in a whisper,

"No one knew that you were coming here, eh, captain?"

"Nobody in the world," replied the other "I called at your house an hour ago, and the girl told me you were down here; but I said I would call on you again to-morrow."

"And you only want to look at the coffins and the book?" continued the sexton.

"Nothing else in the world," said Moreton, in an easy tone; "perhaps I may take a memorandum in my pocket-book, that's all."

"Well, then, give us the note, and come along," replied the sexton; "there can be no harm in that."

Moreton slipped something into his hand, and they moved toward a little door in the side of the church, opposite to that on which stood the cottage of Stephen Gimlet. Here the sexton drew a large bunch of keys out of his pocket and opened the door, holding up the lantern to let his companion see the way in.

Moreton whistled a bit of an opera air; but the old man put his hand on his arm, saying, in a low tone, "Hush! hush! what's the use of such noise?" and leading the way to the opposite corner, he chose one of the smallest of the keys on his bunch, and stooped down, kneeling on one knee, by the side of a large stone in the pavement, marked with a cross and a star, and having a keyhole in it covered with a brass plate made to play in the stone. The old man put in the key and turned it; but when he attempted to lift the slab, it resisted.

"There, you must get it up for yourself," he said, rising, "I can't; take hold of the key, and with your young arm you'll soon get it up, I dare say."

Moreton did as the other directed, and raised the slab without difficulty. When he had done, he quietly put the keys in his pocket, saying, "Give me the lantern!"

But Mr. Grindley did not like the keys being in Captain Moreton's pocket, and though he did not think it worth while to make a piece of work about it, yet he kept the lantern and went down first. A damp close smell met them on the flight of narrow stone steps, which the old lords of the manor had built down in their place of long repose; and the air was so dark, that it seemed as if the blackness of all the many long nights which had passed since the vault was last opened had accumulated and thickened there.

For some moments the faint light of the lantern had no effect upon the solid gloom; but, as soon as it began to melt, the old man walked on, saying, "This way, captain. I think it used to stand hereabout, upon the trestles to the right. That is your father's to the left, and then there's your mother's; and next there's your little sister, who died when she was a baby, all lying snug together. The Moretons, that is, the old Moretons, are over here. Here is your grandfather—a jolly old dog; I recollect him well, with his large stomach and his purple face—and then his lady; I did not know her; and then two or three youngsters. You see, young and old, they all come here one time or another. This should be your great grandfather," and he held up the lantern to the top of one of the coffins. "No," he said, after a brief examination, "that is the colonel, who was killed in '45. Why they put him here I don't know, for he died long before your great grandfather. But here the old gentleman is. He lived to a great age, I know."

"Let me see," said Captain Moreton; and, approaching the side of the coffin, he made the old man hold the lantern close to the plate upon the top. The greater part of the light was shed upon the coffin lid, though some rays stole upward and cast a sickly glare upon the two faces that hung over the last resting-place of the old baronet. Captain Moreton put his hand in his pocket, at the same time pointing with the other to a brass plate, gilt, which bore a short inscription upon it, somewhat obscure from dust and verdigris.

"There! it is quite plain," he said, "1766!"

The old sexton had been fumbling for a pair of spectacles, and now he mounted them on his nose and looked closer, saying, "No, captain, 1760."

"Nonsense!" said the other, sharply; "it is the dust covers the tail of the six. I'll show you in a minute;" and as quick as light he drew the other hand from his pocket, armed with a sharp steel instrument of a very peculiar shape. It was like a stamp for cutting pastry, only much smaller, with a sharp edge formed like a broken sickle. Before the old man could see what he was about to do, he pressed his hand, and the instrument it contained, tight upon the plate, gave it a slight turn, and withdrew it.

"Lord 'a mercy! what have you done?" exclaimed the sexton.

"Nothing, but taken off the dust," answered Moreton, with a laugh; "look at it now. Is it not 66 plain enough?"

"Ay, that it is," said Grindley. "But this won't do, captain, this won't do."

"By —— it shall do," replied the other, fiercely; "and if you say one word, you will not only lose the money, but get hanged into the bargain; for the moment I hear you've 'peached I'll make a full confession, and say you put me up to the trick. So now, my old boy, you are in for it, and had better go through with it like a man. If we both hold our tongues nothing can happen. We slip out together, and no one knows a syllable; but, if we are fools, and chatter, and don't help each other, we shall both get into an infernal scrape. You will suffer most, however, I'll take care of that. Then, on the contrary, if I get back what they have cheated me and my father out of, you shall have £100 for your pains."

At first the sexton was inclined to exclaim and protest; but Captain Moreton went on so long that he had time to reflect—and, being a man of quick perceptions, to make up his mind. At first, too, he looked angrily in his companion's face, through his spectacles, holding up the lantern to see him well; but gradually he dropped the light and his eyes together to the coffin-lid, examined it thoughtfully, and in the end said, in a low, quiet, significant voice, "I think, captain, the tail of that six looks somewhat bright and sharp, considering how old it is."

The compact was signed and sealed by those words; and Moreton replied, "I have thought of all that, old gentleman. It shall be as green as the rest by to-morrow morning."

Thus saying, he took out a small vial of a white liquid, dropped a few drops on the plate, and rubbed them into the deep mark he had made. Then, turning gayly to his companion, he exclaimed, "Now for the register."

Grindley made no reply; and they walked up into the church again, put down the slab of stone, locked it, and advanced toward the vestry. There, however, the old man paused at the door, saying, in a low shaking voice, "I can't, captain! I can't! It is forgery, nothing else. I'll stay here; you go and do what you like; you've the keys."

"Where are the books kept?" asked the other, speaking low.

"In the great chest," said the sexton; "it must be the second book from the top."

"Can I find pen and ink?" inquired Moreton.

"On the table, on the table," answered Grindley. "Matthew Lomax had a child christened two days ago. But it won't never look like the old ink."

"Never you fear," said the other worthy, "I am provided;" and taking the lantern, he opened the vestry-door and went in.

Captain Moreton set down the lantern on a little table covered with green cloth, and proceeded about his work quietly and deliberately. He was no new offender, though this was a new offence. He had none of the young timidity of incipient crime about him. He had done a great many unpleasant things on great inducements; pigeoned confiding friends; made friendships for the sake of pigeoning; robbed Begums, as was the custom in those days; shot two or three intimate acquaintances who did not like being wronged, and was, moreover, a man of a hardy constitution, so that his nerves were strong and unshaken. He tried two or three keys before he found the one which fitted the lock of the chest. He took out two volumes of registers, and examined the contents, soon found the passage he was looking for, and then searched for the pen and ink, which, after all, were not upon the table. Then he tried the pen upon his thumb-nail, and took out his little bottle again, for it would seem that within that vent was some fluid which had a double operation, namely, that of corroding brass and rendering ink palid. The register was laid open before him, a stool drawn to the table, his hand pressed tight upon the important page, and the pen between his fingers and thumb to keep all steady in the process of converting 1760 into 1766, when an unfortunate fact struck him, namely, that there were a great many insertions between the two periods. He paused to consider how this was to be overcome, when suddenly he heard an exclamation from without, and the sound of running steps in the church, as if some one was scampering away in great haste. He had forgotten—it was the only thing he had forgotten—to turn his face to the door, and he was in the act of attempting to remedy this piece of neglect, by twisting his head over his shoulder, when he received a blow upon the cheek which knocked him off his stool, and stretched him on the pavement of the vestry. He started up instantly; but before he could see anything or anybody, the lantern was knocked over, and the door of the vestry shut and bolted, leaving him a prisoner in the dark.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Tarningham Park was exceedingly quiet; for Sir John Slingsby was out at dinner some five miles off, and his merry activity being removed, every living thing seemed to think itself entitled to take some repose. Mrs. Clifford, who had been far from well for several days, and had not quitted her room during the whole morning, had gone to bed; Mary and Isabella were conversing quietly—perhaps sadly—in the drawing-room, the butler snored in the pantry, the ladies' maids and footmen were enjoying a temporary calm in their several spheres, and cook, scullions, and housemaids were all taxing their energies to do nothing, with the most meritorious perseverance. Even the hare hopped more deliberately upon the lawns, and the cock-pheasants strutted with more tranquil grandeur. Every one seemed to know that Sir John Slingsby was absent, and that there was no need to laugh, or talk, or dance, or sing, or eat, or drink, more than was agreeable. The very air seemed to participate in the general feeling, for, whereas it had been somewhat boisterous and keen during the day, it sunk into a calm, heavy, chilly sleep toward night, and the leaves rested motionless upon the trees, as if weary of battling with the wind.

"We will have a fire, Mary," said Isabella; "though it be summer in the calendar, it is winter in the field, and I do not see why we should regulate our comfort by the almanac. Papa will not be home till twelve, and though he will be warm enough, I dare say, that will do nothing for us."

As she spoke she rose to ring the bell; but at the same moment another bell rang, being that of the chief entrance, and both Miss Slingsby and her cousin looked aghast at the idea of a visitor. Some time elapsed before their apprehensions were either confirmed or removed; for there was a good deal of talking at the glass door; but at first the servant did not choose to come in with any explanation. At length, however, a footman appeared in very white stockings and laced kneebands, saying, with a grin, "If you please, ma'am, there is little Billy Lamb at the door wishes to see you. He asked for Sir John first. I told him he couldn't, for you were engaged; but he said he was sure you would, and teased me just to tell you he was here."

"Billy Lamb!" said Isabella. "Who is that? Oh, I remember: is not that the poor boy at the White Hart?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the footman, "the little humpback that you gave half-a-crown to one day, when he was whistling so beautiful."

"Oh, I will see him, of course," said Isabella, much to the footman's amazement, who could not see the "of course;" "I will come out and speak with him."

"Have him brought in here, Bella," said Mary; "I know the poor boy well, and his mother, too. The poor daughter is dead; she married badly, I believe, and died two or three years ago."

"Bring him in," said Miss Slingsby to the servant, and the man retired to fulfill her commands. As Billy Lamb entered the room, the two fair girls, both so beautiful, yet so unlike each other, advanced toward the door to meet him, and stood before the poor deformed boy leaning slightly toward each other, with their arms linked together. The boy remained near the entrance, and the footman held the door open behind him till Miss Slingsby nodded her head as an intimation that his presence was not required.

"Well, William," said Isabella, as the man departed, "how are you, and what is it you want?"

"And your poor mother, William," said Mary Clifford, "I have not seen her a long while; how is she?"

"She is much better, thank you, ma'am," replied the boy. "She is reconciled with Stephen now, and has gone to be with him up in the cottage, and take care of his little boy, my poor sister's orphan, and so she is much better." Then turning to Isabella, he went on; "I am quite well, thank you, miss; but, somehow, my heart is very down just now, for I came up to tell Sir John something very terrible and very bad."

"Is it magistrate's business, William? or can I give you any help?" asked Isabella.

"Oh dear no, Miss Slingsby," replied the boy; "it is not about myself at all, but about Sir John;" and he looked up in her face with his clear, bright, intelligent eyes, as if beseeching her to understand him without forcing him to further explanations.

But Isabella did not understand him at all; and she inquired, "What do you mean, my good lad? I am sure my father will be glad to do anything he can for you; and I do not think that you would yourself do anything very terrible and very bad, such as you speak of."

"Hush, Isabella," said her cousin, whose heart was a more apprehensive one than her cousin's, and who had some glimmering of dangers or sorrows hidden under the boy's obscure words: "Let him explain himself. Tell us, William, exactly what you mean. If wrong has been done you, we will try to make it right; but you spoke of my uncle: has anything happened to Sir John?"

"No, Miss Mary," replied Billy Lamb; "but I fear evil may happen to him if something is not done to stop it."

"But of what kind?" asked Isabella, anxiously: "tell us all about it. What is it you fear? Where did you get your information?"

"From Mr. Bacon," answered the boy, simply, "the little lawyer at Tarningham, ma'am. He's not a bad man, nor an unkind man either, like Mr. Wharton; and, though he did not just bid me come up and tell Sir John, yet he said he very much wished he knew what was going to happen. Then he said he could not write about it, for it was no business of his, as he was but acting for others, and he did not like to send a message, because—"

"But what is it?" exclaimed Mary Clifford and Isabella together. "In pity's name, my good boy, do not keep us in suspense."

"Why, ma'am, he said," continued the boy, in a sad tone, and casting down his eyes, "that to-morrow there would be an execution put in here—that means that they will seize everything. I know that, for they did so six months after my father died. Then he said that very likely Sir John would be arrested, unless he could pay five thousand pounds down at once."

Isabella sunk down in a chair overwhelmed, exclaiming, "Good Heaven!"

"This is what Captain Hayward told us of!" said Mary Clifford, putting her hand to her brow, and speaking rather to herself than to her cousin. "How unfortunate that he should be absent now. This duel, depend upon it, has prevented him from taking the means he proposed for averting this blow. I feel sure he could and would have done so as he promised."

"Oh, whatever Ned Hayward promised he was able to perform," answered Isabella; "nothing but some unfortunate circumstance, such as this duel, has prevented him. He is as true and open as the day, Mary. What would I not give for but five minutes' conversation with him now."

"Would you? Would you?" said the musical voice of the poor boy. "I think, if you want them, you can have them very soon."

"Oh, you dear good boy!" cried Isabella, starting up, "send him here directly, if you know where he is. Tell him that my father's safety depends entirely upon him: tell him we are ruined if he does not come."

"I do not think I can send him," said the boy, in a disappointed tone. "I don't think he can come; but if you like to go and see him, I will venture to take you where he is; for I am sure you would not do him a great injury, and say anything of where he is hid."

"Go to him?" exclaimed Isabella; "why, it is growing quite dark, my good William. How can I go? But this is folly and weakness," she exclaimed the next moment, "when my father's liberty and character are at stake, shall I hesitate to go anywhere? I will go, William. Where is it? Is it far?"

"Stay, dear Isabella," said her cousin, "if needful, I will go with you. This is a case which I think may justify what would be otherwise improper. But let me ask one or two questions. You say Mr. Bacon told you this, William. If he wished my uncle to know the facts, why did he not send one of his clerks?"

"Why, he said, Miss Mary, that he had no right," answered the boy; "he seemed in a great flurry, and as if he did not well know what to do; but he asked if I had seen Sir John in town; for he generally comes to the White Hart, you know; and told me to let him know if I chanced to meet with him in town, because he wanted to speak with him exceedingly. And then he went on that he did not know that he ought to tell him either; for he had got an execution to take to-morrow, here, and to have a writ against him the first thing to-morrow, and a great deal more that I forget. But he said he was very sorry, and would almost give one of his hands not to have it to do. At last he said I was not to tell anybody in the town what he had said, but that I might tell Sir John if I saw him, so I came away here, miss, as soon as I could."

"But where is Captain Hayward to be found, then?" asked Miss Clifford. "You must tell us that before we can make up our minds, William."

"I may as well tell you as take you," replied the boy, "but I must go on before to say you are coming. He is at Ste Gimlet's, with him and my mother, and has been there ever since he shot Mr. Wittingham."

"Oh, I shall not mind going there," cried Isabella, "it will not call for observation from the servants; but if he had been at an inn, it would have been terrible."

Mary Clifford smiled; for she was one of those who valued proprieties *nearly* at their right worth, if not quite. She never violated them rashly; for no pleasure, or amusement, or

mere personal gratification, would she transgress rules which society had framed, even though she might think them wrong or foolish; but with a great object, a good purpose, and a clear heart, she was ready to set them at naught. "I will go very willingly with you, dear Bella," she said. "Captain Hayward went to London, I know, for the express purpose of providing the means of averting this calamity; but, from some words which he let drop, I fancy he believed that it was not likely to fall upon us so soon. There is no way that I see of aiding your father but by seeing and consulting with this old friend. You said all this would happen early to-morrow, William?" she continued, turning again to the boy.

"As soon as it was light, Miss Mary," replied poor Billy Lamb.

"Oh, Heaven, I will order the carriage directly," said Isabella; "run on, there's a good lad, and tell Captain Hayward I am coming. You can tell him why, and all about it."

The boy retired, and sped away by the shortest paths toward his brother-in-law's cottage. In the mean while the carriage was ordered; but Sir John had got the chariot with him; the barouche had not been out for some time, and the coachman thought fit to dust it. Three quarters of an hour passed ere the lamps were lighted and all was ready, and then a footman, with gold-laced hat in hand, stood by the side of the vehicle, to hand the ladies in and accompany them. Isabella, however, told him that he would not be wanted, and gave the order to drive to Stephen Gimlet's cottage.

"Ay!" said the footman, as he turned into the house again, "Billy Lamb's mother is there. Now they'll do the young ladies out of a guinea or two, I'll warrant. What fools women are, to be sure!"

While he thus moralized, the carriage rolled slowly on in the dark night, drawn by two tall pursy horses, and driven by a coachman of the same qualities, neither of whom at all approved of being unexpectedly taken out at that hour of the night; for dinner parties were rare in the neighborhood of Tarningham Park, balls were rarer still, and Sir John Slingsby was much fonder of seeing what he called a set of jolly fellows at his own house, than of going out to find them, so that none of his horses were at all accustomed to trot by candle-light. Nearly half an hour more elapsed before the carriage entered the quiet lane unaccustomed to the sound of any wheels but those of a wagon, or a taxed-cart, and at length the reins were drawn in at the door of the cottage. The house looked unpromising, not a light was to be seen, for, strange to say, window-shutters had been put up to every casement of Stephen Gimlet's dwelling, though one would not have supposed him a man addicted to such luxuries. The coachman felt his dignity hurt at having to descend from the box and open the carriage-door: the respectability of the whole family seemed to suffer in his eyes; but, nevertheless, he did it, and as he did so the horses moved on two or three yards, of which Isabella was glad, for she reflected that if the coachman saw into the cottage, he might see the inmates also. Ere she went in, she told him to drive back to the stile some two hundred yards down the lane, and if the boy Billy Lamb came over—it was his way from Tarningham Park—to keep him with the carriage. Then, with two hearts which it must be confessed fluttered sadly, Isabella and Mary knocked at the cottage-door, and, scarcely waiting for reply, opened it in haste, and went in. Mary's heart fluttered at the thought of seeing Ned Hayward, as well as at the feeling of taking a somewhat unusual step; but Isabella's flutter was solely on the latter account till the door was open, and then it became worse than ever on another score.

The first object she saw straight before her was Mr. Beauchamp, who was standing in the midst of the little parlor of the cottage, talking to the poor boy, Billy Lamb, while Mrs. Lamb and Stephen Gimlet were placed near the wide cottage hearth.

The moment that Miss Slingsby's face appeared, Beauchamp turned from the boy, saying,

"Here are the ladies themselves. Now go home, my good boy; and if your master is angry at your absence, tell him I will explain all to him. My dear Miss Slingsby, I am delighted to see you and your fair cousin. The boy says you wish to speak with Captain Hayward. He is in the room above. I will tell him immediately;" and, after shaking hands with both of the ladies, he turned away and went up stairs.

Mary whispered eagerly with Isabella; and Stephen Gimlet touched his mother-in-law's arm, as he saw that there was evidently a good deal of agitation in their fair visitors' manner, saying,

"Come, goody, it won't give you cold, I dare say, to walk out for a bit with me. They'll want to talk together," he added, in a low voice, "and if it's cold we'll go into the little vestry of the church."

The old woman looked toward the back-room, where the child was sleeping; but Stephen answered her ere she spoke, whispering,

"No, no, we should hear it all there."

Goody Lamb put her shawl over her head, while he took down the key of the church; and Mary's eye catching their movements, she said,

"Only for a few minutes, Mrs. Lamb. I should like to speak with you when we have said a few words to Captain Hayward."

Mrs. Lamb dropped a courtesy, and went out with her son-in-law; and the next moment, a slow step was heard coming down the stairs.

"Good Heaven, you are ill, Captain Hayward," cried Isabella, as her father's friend presented himself, followed by Beauchamp. Mary Clifford said nothing, but she felt more.

"Oh, I shall soon be well again, my dear Miss Slingsby," answered Ned Hayward; "the ball is out, and I am recovering quite fast—only a little weak."

"Hayward tells me I shall not be one too many," said Beauchamp; "but if I am, Miss Slingsby, send me away, remembering, however, that you may command me in any other way as well as that."

What a difference there is between enterprise and execution! How the difficulties grow upon us at every step of the mountain

path, and how faint the heart feels at the early obstacles which we had altogether overlooked. Isabella Slingsby had thought it would be the easiest thing in the world to enter upon the state of her father's affairs with Ned Hayward. He was so old a friend; he had known her father since he was himself sixteen years of age; he had himself given the first warning, had opened the way. It had seemed to her, indeed, that there would not be the slightest difficulty, that there could not be any obstacle; but now, when she had to speak of all, her heart sank, her courage failed her; and she strove to turn the conversation to any other subject—only for a moment, till she recovered thought and breath.

"Oh, no! Do not go, Mr. Beauchamp," she said. "But how ill Captain Hayward looks. We had no idea he had been wounded. They said that Mr. Wittingham was the only sufferer."

"I can assure you, it is nothing," replied Ned Hayward; "but you must sit down, my dear young lady;" and, with his left arm, he put a seat for Miss Slingsby, while Beauchamp did the same good office for Mary Clifford. "I am sure that you have something important to say, and I guess what it is," the young officer continued. "Miss Clifford, you told your cousin a very painful communication I made to you ten or twelve days ago. Is it not so? and she has come to speak upon that subject?"

"I did, Captain Hayward," answered Mary Clifford; "I told her all you had said—and your generous and noble offer to assist Sir John in the most pressing emergency. Her own knowledge confirmed, in a great degree, the fact of great danger; but we feared that this unfortunate duel might have interfered with your plans, and knew not where to find you, or communicate with you."

"I did not forget what I had undertaken," answered Ned Hayward; "but like a thoughtless fool, as I am, I forgot I might be wounded, Miss Clifford, or that I might be forced to run for it. Well may the good people call me thoughtless Ned Hayward; for I remembered that I might be killed, and provided against it; but I did not recollect anything else, and ordered the money to be remitted to the bank here at Tarningham. The ball went into my shoulder, however, and I have been unable to write ever since; otherwise I would have sent the check long ago, to be used whenever it was needed. I hope to be able to write as well as ever in a few days; so put your mind quite at ease upon that score. As for the mortgage, which is, I suppose, in train for immediate foreclosure, we must think what can be done some other way; for I am a poor man, as you know, and have not the means of lending the amount;" and, as he spoke, he turned his eyes toward Beauchamp.

Ned Hayward calculated that there would be plenty of time to make all his arrangements; but such fancies were dissipated in a moment by Isabella's reply:—

"Did not the boy tell you," she asked, "that everything you feared, is to take place to-morrow? He came up to warn us. That good little man, Bacon, the attorney, sent him."

"No, Isabella," said Mary Clifford, "he did not exactly send him; but he told him the facts, evidently that they might reach my uncle's ears; and the boy came up to tell us. I was sure, Captain Hayward," she added, with a glowing cheek, "that you would do what you could to aid, and that, if you could not aid, you would advise us how to act. We therefore came on here, without hesitation; for no time is to be lost, and Sir John is unfortunately out at dinner."

"Very luckily, rather," said Ned Hayward. "No time, indeed, is to be lost, if such be the state of things. I must write the check at once, some way or another. There is a pen and ink in my little room; I will go and get it."

"But can you write?" asked Mary, anxiously; "can you, without injury to yourself?"

"Nay, stay, Hayward, stay," said Beauchamp; "you mentioned the subject of the mortgage to me the other day. What is the amount, can you tell?"

"About fifty thousand pounds, and the devil himself knows how much interest," answered Ned Hayward; "for I do not think Sir John has any idea."

"Nay, then, I fear you must write the check," said Beauchamp, gravely; "for I must not diminish the amount in the bank; but I will get the pen and ink. We are a sort of prisoners here, Miss Slingsby, and dare not show ourselves till Mr. Wittingham's state is better ascertained, or we should long ago have endeavored to put your mind at rest upon these subjects. However, we hear the young man is better, and therefore I trust we shall not be obliged to play at hide and seek much longer."

Thus saying, he went up the stairs again, but was several minutes ere he returned, during which time, though occasionally falling into fits of grave thought, Ned Hayward laughed and talked gayly; from time to time stealing a quiet look at the fair face of Mary Clifford as she leaned her arm upon the table, and gazed somewhat sadly at the embers of the gamekeeper's fire.

At length Mr. Beauchamp made his appearance once more, and sitting down to the table with a check-book before him, Ned Hayward, with a laugh, took the pen in his hand, saying,

"I must dash it off in haste, or it will be pronounced a forgery. So here is for it," and, with a rapid stroke or two, he filled up the check for the sum of twelve thousand pounds, and signed his name. His cheek turned pale as he wrote, and Mary Clifford saw it; but that was the only sign of pain that he suffered to appear. Then, throwing down the pen, he took the paper with his left hand and gave it to Miss Slingsby.

"There," he said, "I have had you on my knee twelve years ago, and called you dear little Bella; but I never thought you would give me so much pleasure as you do now."

"Well, Ned Hayward," exclaimed Isabella, with her eyes running over, "you are certainly the best and noblest creature in the world."

Mary Clifford's lips murmured something very like "He is."

Beauchamp loooked on with an expression of grave pleasure; but scarcely was the check signed and given, when the door of the cottage opened suddenly, and Stephen Gimlet took a step over the threshold, saying,

"I have caught him, gentlemen, I have caught him like a rat in a trap."

"Whom have you caught?" asked Beauchamp, turning quickly toward him.

"Why, the fellow who fired the shot in at the window," answered Stephen Gimlet.

"That is glorious!" exclaimed Ned Hayward. "Where is he? What have you done with him?"

"I should not have meddled with him, perhaps," said the gamekeeper, "if I had not found him meddling with the registers in the church, which I know he has no right to do. I and Goody Lamb went out for a bit into the church-yard, and, as she found the wind cold, we opened the little door at this side of the church, and went in; I had not been in a minute, when I heard some one talking plain enough, but I could not see anybody for the life of me. I told Goody Lamb to stand behind the pillar by the pulpit, while I went to see; but before I could take a step, up out of the Moreton vault came two men with a lantern. One of them was this fellow; and the other was the old sexton; and they walked straight across toward the vestry; but, just a little way from the door, the old sexton stopped and said, 'I can't, captain; it is nothing better than forgery;' or something like that; and the other fellow took the lantern and went into the vestry. So I said to Goody Lamb, in a whisper: Those rascals are up to no good;' and she answered: 'One of them never was, all his life.' So, then I said: 'You get forward and scare the old sexton; I'll be close behind you.' The old woman did it in a minute, walking on without any noise, till she was right between him and the light, coming out of the vestry door. However, he had heard us whisper, I fancy; for he was staring about him, as if he was looking for a ghost; and, as soon as he saw something stand there, off he set, as if the devil were behind him; and I jumped into the vestry, where the other fellow was sitting, with one of the great books open before him, and a pen in his hand. I did not give him much time to think, but knocked him over, upset the lantern, and locked the door. So there he is in a cage, just like one of my ferrets."

"That's capital," cried Ned Hayward; but Beauchamp looked very grave, and, turning to Gimlet, he said,

"We'll consider what is to be done with him by and by. You can bring your good mother-in-law back now, Stephen; for our business is nearly over, and then you can see these two ladies safe to the carriage. Miss Slingsby," he continued, as soon as the gamekeeper was gone, "I wish to speak two words with you regarding this little note," and he held one up before her. "I took advantage of the pen and ink before I brought it down, and so kept you waiting, I'm afraid; but it was not without a purpose."

Isabella hesitated for a moment; but Beauchamp added, laughing,

"Nay, surely, you will trust yourself with me as far as the door."

"Oh, yes," replied Isabella, with a gay toss of her head; "I am doing all kinds of odd things to-night, and see no reason for stopping in mid course."

Thus saying, she walked toward the door, with Beauchamp following; and they went out into the little garden, where Beauchamp put the note in her hand, saying,

"This is addressed to Dr. Miles, my dear young lady. We are not very well aware of what has taken place regarding this mortgage, which Hayward has mentioned to me; but I fear there is some foul play going on. Should any sudden inconvenience arise regarding it, or the interest upon it, send that note instantly to Dr. Miles, and, at the time, take means to let me know."

"But how, my kind friend," asked Isabella, "how can I let you know, without discovering your place of concealment to others? You are, doubtless, aware that there are placards all over the place offering a reward for the apprehension of yourself and Captain Hayward."

"We must not mind that," answered Beauchamp; "but, at all events, it may be as well to send a note to me, inclosed to good old Widow Lamb; and I must take my measures afterward, as I find best. In the mean time, Dr. Miles will insure that your father is put to no inconvenience; for it so luckily happens that I have a large sum unemployed at the present moment, which could not be better applied than by saving you from distress and annoyance."

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp," cried Isabella, greatly moved, "what right have I to so much kindness and generosity?"

"Every right, that a fine and noble heart can give," answered Beauchamp; "and, oh, let me add, every right that can be bestowed by the most sincere affection that ever woman inspired in man; but I will not agitate you more to-night. This is not a moment when I can press such a topic upon you. There is only one thing you must promise, that you will suffer no consideration whatever to prevent you from availing yourself of the means of freeing your father from his difficulties—no, not even the rash words I have just spoken."

Isabella was silent for a moment; but then she replied, in a low voice,

"Those words would have quite the contrary effect. They would give me confidence and hope;" and she put her hand in his.

Beauchamp raised it to his lips warmly, fully understanding all that her reply implied.

The devil is in a country apothecary. There is an awkward fatality about them which always brings them on the ground at the wrong moment.

"Good night, good night, Mr. Beauchamp," said Mr. Slattery of Tarningham, slowly walking his horse down the sandy lane. "I thought I would just step in to see Captain Hayward, and tell you that Harry Wittingham is much better to-night;" and Mr. Slattery was dismounting from his horse, not in the slightest degree with the intention of seeing whose hand Mr. Beauchamp had been kissing, but merely in the exercise of his professional avocations. As misfortune would have it, Beauchamp had left the cottage door open behind him, so that the surgeon had a fair view of the act by which that gentleman had sealed his tacit contract with Isabella, by the light which streamed forth from within But that which was unfortunate on one side was fortunate on another; for no sooner was the first monosyllable out of Mr. Slattery's mouth

than Isabella darted in and closed the door, so that the surgeon, though he thought the figure strangely like Sir John's daughter, could not swear to the fact.

Beauchamp at the same time hastened to prevent his obtaining any more precise knowledge, saying, "Thank you for your information, Mr. Slattery. Hayward is better, and cannot see you to-night, being particularly engaged at present. Good night;" and he also retired into the house and shut the door.

"Ho, ho!" said Mr. Slattery, "so they do not choose me to see! Well, let them take the consequences. When people trust me, I can be as silent as the grave; but if they show a want of confidence, I know how to match them. Did I whisper one word to any one of where the two gentlemen were? No, not a word! and now they think to blind me. Well, well, we shall see."

And Mr. Slattery did see; for while this soliloquy had been going on, he had been going on too, and when it came to a conclusion, he came upon the lamps of the large comfortable barouche of Sir John Slingsby.

"Good evening, Jenkins," said Mr. Slattery to the tall, fat coachman. "Is Sir John in this part, that you are out so late?"

"No, sir," replied Jenkins, "he's got the charitt over at Meadowfield. I brought over my young lady to see Widow Lamb, at Gimlet's, the new keeper's."

"Ho, ho," said Mr. Slattery again, but he had not time to make reflections; for at the very moment, he heard a pair of human feet running hard, and the next instant a figure shot across the glare of the carriage-lamps. Mr. Slattery had a quick eye, and he instantly called after the runner, "Hie! hie! captain, I want to speak with you."

But the person whom he addressed ran on; and as Mr. Slattery did not choose to be so evaded, he struck his plated spurs into his horse's side, and overtook him at the distance of a quarter of a mile; for once past the stile where the carriage stood, there was no possible means of getting out of the high-banked lane.

"Hie, captain! Captain Moreton!" cried Mr. Slattery, as he came near; and Moreton, not at all liking to have his name shouted all over the country, slackened his pace.

"What the devil do you want, Slattery?" he asked; "do you not see I'm in a hurry?"

"There's my little account, you know, captain," said Mr. Slattery, "four years' standing, and you'd really oblige me very much if—"

"Devil fly away with your account," said the worthy captain, "do you think I'm going to pay for all the physic you drugged the maid-servants with at the Hall?"

"Have you heard the news, captain?" exclaimed Mr. Slattery, coming abruptly to the real point, as he perceived the other was going to run again.

"No; what news?" asked Moreton, pausing.

"Why that Miss Slingsby is going to be married immediately to Mr. Beauchamp, who has been staying down here so long," answered Mr. Slattery; and then added, "as soon as young Wittingham's out of all danger, they say."

"Is she, by ——!" exclaimed the captain. "Well, doctor, I shall take the short cut through that gate—good night; and do not say to any one you saw me here. I know you can be trusted with a secret."

"To be sure!" said Mr. Slattery; and while Captain Moreton vaulted over the gate, the surgeon pursued his way toward Tarningham.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Sir John Slingsby returned to Tarningham Park at about the hour of "dark midnight;" but he found both daughter and niece still up to receive him. That Sir John Slingsby had imbibed a portion of wine more abundant than most men could carry discreetly was evident from the increased depth of the rose in his complexion, and from a certain watery luster in his eyes; but it must not thence be inferred that the baronet was even in the least degree drunk. How many he had left drunk behind him matters not to this history; but he himself, though gay as usual, was perfectly sober, quite gentlemanly and at his ease; for he had not even arrived at that pitch where a consciousness of wine makes one careful of not showing its effects.

"Well, young ladies," he said, seating himself in his arm-chair for a moment, and sticking his thumb into his white waistcoat, "you have passed a dull night, I dare say, with the old gentleman out, and the two young gentlemen Lord knows where. Well, how are we to wear away to-morrow?"

"I shall wear away the morning, my dear uncle," said Mary Clifford, who had held long councils with her cousin, "in going to Tarningham; and I will ask you to lend me the carriage for an hour at eight o'clock."

"Certainly, dear Mary," said the baronet; "but Tarningham? what takes your pretty little self to Tarningham?"

"Why, the truth is, I want some money," answered Miss Clifford, "I think the bank opens at half-past eight."

"Money in the bank!" cried Sir John Slingsby. "Was there ever such a girl? She has money in the bank! Well, take the carriage, Mary, when you like, and be back to breakfast at half-past nine, otherwise you shall have cold tea, and not a bit of pasty. Now to bed, to bed; for if people have to go to Tarningham early in the morning, they must go to bed at night."

The breakfast table was laid as usual, by nine o'clock in the morning; but before that hour Isabella Slingsby had been down, and had wandered about in the drawing-room and in the library with a nervous sort of unsettledness in her manner, which struck even the servants who happened to pass. She looked out of almost every window in the house which was accessible to her; she gazed down every road that wound through the park; she scanned every moving figure that was within the range of sight; and she felt every moment a terror of what the next would bring, which she had never experienced in life before. She wished that Mary had not left her, that they had sent some one for the money; and she conjured up difficulties and distresses, obstacles that she would not know how to meet, questions of law and form of which she was unaware, to trouble herself and agitate her mind still more. At

length, with a bold resolution, she rang the bell, and ordered the servant who appeared to go down to Doctor Miles's, with her compliments, and say she would be glad to see him. The moment after, her father entered the room as gay, as bustling, as jovial as ever; his face resplendent with small red veins; his eyes sparkling like the wine of the night before; his ample stomach rolling unrepressed under an easy waistcoat; and his stout legs and neat foot carrying him about with the light step of one-and twenty. To have looked at him one would have thought that there was not such a thing as care or sorrow in the whole world, much less in his own house.

"Ah, Bella!" he cried, kissing her, "how have you slept, my love? Where's Mary?—not come back? How's your aunt?—pining, pining, eh? See what comes of a melancholy constitution—too much bile and twenty years' trial of a puritanical husband! Well, what's o'clock?—five-and-twenty minutes after nine—come along, we'll have breakfast. Mary shall have a fresh cup of tea when she comes;" and in went Sir John Slingsby to the breakfast-room, ringing the bell as if he would have pulled it down the moment he got it.

"Breakfast," he exclaimed, when the butler appeared. "Has not the post-bag come?"

"No, Sir John," replied the man.

"Very late," said the baronet; and, marching to the window, he looked out upon the sunshiny park, with his hands behind him, for want of better occupation.

To poor Isabella Slingsby, her father's lively unconsciousness was terrible, and it was with trembling hands that she made the tea and poured out the coffee, giving a sharp look round every time the door opened, as if in expectation of some grim bailiff's face appearing. Such, indeed, would have been the case, had it not been that good Mr. Bacon had contrived to delay what he could not prevent; and at length, much to the joy and satisfaction of Isabella, the grating sound of carriage-wheels was heard from the park. That sound was still distant and indistinct, however, when the butler came in with a very peculiar and significant expression of countenance, saying, "Please, Sir John, there's a man wants to speak with you."

"Well, he must wait," said Sir John Slingsby. "Tell him I am at breakfast. Has not the post-bag come yet?"

"Please, Sir John, the man says he must speak with you directly."

"Tell him to go to the devil," said Sir John Slingsby, "and speak with him;" but the words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the door opened behind the butler, and not one man, but two, appeared.

Isabella's face had been very pale from the first announcement made by the servant; but Sir John had remained perfectly unconscious till he saw those two strange faces. They were anything but pleasant faces in the abstract; for, though well washed and shaved, there was a ruffianly dirt of expression which no soap could get rid of. There are certain professions which stamp themselves upon the outer man in indellible lines. The bailiff—the man who makes his bread or his fortune by inflicting the most poignant misery the law knows upon his fellow-creatures—the step in society still lower than the hangman—is never to be mistaken; and Sir John Slingsby recognized at once the errand of his intrusive visitors in their aspect. His face became very pale, the red veins turned blue, and he sat at the table without uttering a word. He well knew that these men's appearance, though bad enough in itself, was but the commencement of evil; that the long-delayed hour was come; that the thin worn line which upheld his whole fortunes had snapped, and that he was now to fall into the gulf of ruin which had so long yawned beneath him. Arrested and carried from his house, every creditor would pour in with his claims, every debt be swelled by law expenses, till naught would be left for him and for his child but a prison and a life of labor.

His careless heart sank with the weight suddenly cast upon it; and his brain was overpowered with the multitude of thoughts it had resisted too long.

But Isabella stepped in like an angel of comfort; her heart rose as his fell. The moment of terror passed away, and as the foremost of the two men laid his hand lightly upon Sir John's shoulder, she whispered in his ear, "Do not alarm yourself, my dear father. Mary has gone to Tarningham for the money. We heard of all this last night, and are quite prepared She will be here in a moment—I hear the carriage coming up now."

"At whose suit, and for what amount?" demanded Sir John Slingsby, turning to the bailiff. He could say no more, for some moments were required to collect his thoughts.

"At Mr. Wittingham's, Sir John," replied the man, "for five thousand three hundred and forty-two pounds seven and fourpence."

"Then you may tell Mr. Wittingham for me," said Sir John Slingsby, "that he is a d—d shabby, sneaking scoundrel, to do such a thing as this without giving me some notice."

"Come, come, Sir John," rejoined the bailiff, "you know it is no use talking—you must come along, you know."

"You are somewhat too quick, sir," said Isabella, interposing; "if you mean to say the debt must be paid, that is very well. It shall be paid."

"Ay, miss; but it must be paid immediately, or Sir John must march," answered the man, screwing his eye at his follower; "gammon is gammon, you know."

"I do not understand what you mean," said Isabella, haughtily, "pray, papa, do not touch him (for Sir John had risen with fury in his countenance). The debt shall be paid immediately, as you say."

"And you shall be ducked in the horsepond for your insolence," added the baronet, continuing to the butler, "call in all the men."

"Nay, nay—do not, my dear father!" cried Isabella. "Five thousand three hundred and forty pounds, you said?" she continued, addressing the bailiff. "I will bring the money this moment."

"Forty-two, seven, and four," said the man, sullenly; "but there may be detainers, and as the caption is made, I fancy I cannot—"

"Oh, I'll soon settle that," said Sir John Slingsby. "You see, my good fellow, there are

several windows to this room as well as doors —I do not resist the law—wouldn't resist the law for the world! but as soon as the money is paid, you go out of either windows or doors as you please; but speedily in either case. Get the money, Bella—call the men here," he added, speaking sharply to the butler, "I see we shall want them."

Isabella hastened out of the room; for the carriage had just drawn up, and as she entered the vestibule, she saw Mary stepping lightly out of it with a calm smile. "Have you got it?" cried Isabella, in eager haste; "they are here already."

"Indeed!" said Mary, sadly, "I am sorry for that; but there was some difficulty; for at the bank, as the sum was so large, they wanted proof of Captain Hayward's signature, which they did not well know. I could not tell what to do, and therefore went to Mr. Bacon's, who soon settled the matter."

"Why, the writ was taken out by him," cried Isabella.

"Yes, I know," answered her cousin, "but he told me how sorry he was to be forced by Mr. Wittingham to do it; and explained that it would be much better to pay the money at once in Tarningham, when he would give me a receipt in full, and an order, or something, to these men, so as stop anything unpleasant at once; for he thought I should get back before they arrived. He said there would be a great object gained in paying the money at once, so that the receipt might be dated before what he called the *caption*."

"And did you do it?" asked Isabella, eagerly; "did you do it, dearest Mary?"

"Yes," answered her cousin, half alarmed; "I really believe he is a very honest little man, and he seemed truly distressed at Mr. Wittingham's conduct. He gave me the receipt, and the order too, and took great pains to date them half-past eight, though it was nearly nine. I hope I have not done wrong, Isabella?"

"Oh dear, no. I dare say it is all quite right;" cried Isabella, joyfully. "Give them to me, Mary, and let me run back; for I am afraid of what my father calls 'an affair of posts,' between him and these bailiffs. I left him marvelously pugnacious."

Mary Clifford put into her hand the two papers which she had received in Tarningham; and at the same time drew forth a small bundle of bank-notes, saying, "There is the rest of the twelve thousand pounds—for Heaven's sake, take care of it, Isabella."

Her cousin gazed at the little packet with a gay smile, and then, tossing her head with the joy of a light heart relieved from a heavy load, she ran back into the breakfast-room, while Mary went up stairs to lay aside her shawl and bonnet.

At the door of the room where she had left her father, Isabella resumed a calm and composed air; and entering with a stately step, found five or six men-servants arranged across the end of the chamber, while the two bailiffs stood, looking somewhat crest-fallen and apprehensive, near Sir John, who, for his part, sat beating a tune on the breakfast-table with his fingers, and endeavoring to appear unconcerned. A sharp anxious glance at his daughter's face, however, told that all fear was not at an end; but her confident look reassured him, and he exclaimed, "Well, Bella, have you brought the money?"

"Yes," replied Miss Slingsby; and, approaching the table, she laid down the roll of bank-notes, spread them out, and began to count. "One thousand, two thousand, three, four, five, six thousand!" she said aloud, much to the astonishment and admiration of the servants.

"That is more than enough, madam," said the bailiff, approaching with humble air and smooth tone.

"I know it is," replied Isabella. "Be so good as to keep your hands away, sir; for you are not going to have one penny of that sum. I was only counting to see that the stamp was right. That paper, I think, will be quite enough for you; and that, my dear father, is the receipt for the whole sum and cost to Mr. Wittingham."

"Well, ma'am, well, I've nothing to say," exclaimed the bailiff; "it is all in order. Howsomever, I have only done my duty; and am very glad the matter is so settled."

"Done your duty, you vagabond," cried Sir John Slingsby, "only done your duty, when you ventured to use the word gammon to my daughter—but it does not matter, it does not matter! Get out of my sight as fast as possible, and tell that fellow Wittingham to keep far off me; for, as sure as I am alive, I will horsewhip him the first time I see him. Take care of them, my men, and see them safe off the grounds."

The words certainly did not seem to imply any very formidable menace; but as such the bailiff and his follower seemed to understand them, and made speed toward the door, while the men-servants answered, "That we will, Sir John;" but made way for the two unwelcome visitors to effect their exit easily. Isabella remonstrated earnestly with her father; but the jovial baronet only exclaimed, "Pooh! nonsense, Bella; no harm can happen, I must see what goes on; for, with a fair start and a good run, it would be capital fun. Come into the library—come into the library: we shall have the best view there; and after that we will breakfast."

Isabella Slingsby, however, remained alone in the breakfast-room, gazing down upon the notes spread out on the table. The eagerness, the excitement of the moment was gone. The anxious fear for her father's liberty was over. Something smote her heart—even the little display of the money before the eyes of the servants and the bailiffs she was sorry for. Considerations presented themselves which she had never thought of before; and when her cousin Mary entered the room a few minutes after, Isabella cast her arm round her neck, and bending her head upon her shoulder, said, with a blush on her cheek and tears in her eyes, "Poor Ned Hayward, Mary, I have thought too little of him, and he is not rich, I know."

"Do not be afraid, Isabella," said Mary, in a low tone.

"But I am afraid, Mary," rejoined Isabella. "I know my father is terribly embarrassed —I fear he will never be able to repay this sum."

"Then I will," said Mary Clifford.

CHAPTER XXX.

We must go back to Stephen Gimlet's cottage and the preceding night. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward stood together by the table, when their two fair visitors had left them, waiting for the return of the gamekeeper, and they both remained silent for several minutes. There are times when great things just accomplished, of whatever kind or character, seem to oppress the spirit and keep it down, as it were, under a heavy weight. Nor is it altogether uninteresting to inquire what is the cause of this oppression—the remote, often unseen, even indistinct cause. It is not sorrow—it is not regret; for the weight of thought seems cast upon us as often by a joyful as a sorrowful event; and I speak not at all of the effect of misfortune, but simply of that which is produced upon the mind by a great deed done—great, at least, to the person who has performed it. I am inclined to think, that the sort of load which I speak of may be traced to the consciousness of all the vast multitude of consequences of which every act is the source. Not the slightest thing we do that does not send a thrill vibrating along the endless chains of cause and effect to the utmost limit of time through the whole grand machine of future existence. Man dies; but not one of his acts ever dies—each perpetuated and prolonged forever by interminable results, affecting some beings in every age to come. Ay, even the slightest; but that which is to follow only becomes a question with man when the deed is to his own cognizance important as affecting himself and those around him. The eye of God sees all; but it is merely when the consequences are visible to our own limited ken that we feel the strange involution of our destiny with that of others; and, when what we have just done is in its immediate results likely to affect us and those we love profoundly, that we pause to consider all the wide extent of the future which that act implies; then we feel as if we had plunged headlong into an ocean of endless waves, and the weight of the waters oppresses the heart and spirit. We ask, what next? and then, what will follow? and, in the game of chess that we are playing against Fate, look for the next move of our great adversary, and all the consequences of that which we have ourselves just made.

Both Beauchamp and Hayward had done an important thing that night. The latter had stripped himself, for a friend's benefit, of the treasured resource of after-life. Never rich, he had left himself but a scanty pittance, which was not likely to be increased by any means but his own personal exertions. From that moment he felt that his course of life must be changed—that his views, his feelings, his habits, must undergo a severe scrutiny, and be subjected to a hard discipline; that the careless ease, the light-hearted indifference to the morrow was as at an end; that the small cares he had never yet known, the looking to shillings and to pence, and all the sordid minutiæ of difficult economy were to be his companions for life, as inseparable from his footsteps as his shadow. Honest poverty may be a very fine thing in contemplation; but let its admirers understand that it is a difficult thing in practice; for honesty and poverty are like Adam and the devil in the garden, ill-suited tenants of one house, the latter of whom is always laying out snares to reduce his companion to his own level. If such be the case where the circumstances of birth have made the evils of poverty habitual, and given its temptations no factitious advantages, how much more is it so when a knowledge of, a taste for, and a long education in ease and comfort, have both engendered a habit of expense, and rendered the restraints of poverty privations. It is then that honesty has to struggle with a host of foes, and too often a murder and suicide are committed, honesty killing itself after an attempt to get rid of its comrade.

But Ned Hayward was a very honest man, and his first thought was how to bear his poverty rightly. He gave not one thought to the money he had just given away—for so he believed it to be—he would have performed the same act over and over again a dozen times, if he had had the means and the motives to do so, and would each time have done it willingly; but that did not prevent his feeling the painful situation in which he had left himself; and he contemplated, with deep thought and stern resolution, all that was to issue from the deed he had done.

With Beauchamp the feelings might be different; but the sources from which they sprang were the same. He, too, had taken a step which was to influence the whole of his future life. He had said words to Isabella Slingsby, of which he felt all the import at the moment they were spoken—which he spoke purposely, that there might be no doubt or hesitation on her mind in regard to his sensations or purposes, and yet which, as soon as they were uttered filled him with a vague feeling of apprehension. Yet Beauchamp was a resolute man in character, and had performed acts of persisting resolution, which few men would have had the determination to carry through. He loved Isabella too dearly; and, had the whole world been subject to his choice, would have selected her. He was anxious, likewise, to call her his own; for he was not without the fire of passion, and was very different from those idle triflers, in whom love is a vanity lighted up by the cold *ignis fatuus* of a volatile and fugitive desire. But his previous history furnished materials for doubt and alarm; and when he paused to contemplate all the innumerable consequences of the few words he had spoken, there was a mist over one part of that sea of many waves, and he asked himself, with awe, "What is beneath!" The thought, however, that he was loved in return was consolation and courage; and though, for his part, Ned Hayward did not venture to indulge in any such sweet dream, yet the image of Mary Clifford, like that of the Virgin in the old legend, shed a light which dispelled the darkness along one bright path, through the obscure future, for him also.

The contemplations of both gentlemen, however, were speedily broken through by the return of Ste Gimlet, who, turning to Mr. Beauchamp, inquired,

"Please, sir, what shall we do with the man locked up in the vestry!"

"Oh, have him out," cried Ned Hayward, "and hand him over to a constable."

Beauchamp did not reply so quickly; but at length he said,

"There may be difficulty, Hayward, in finding a constable at this time of night; and not only difficulty, but also danger to ourselves, if we take any part in the business. Is the place where the man is confined secure?" he continued, addressing the gamekeeper.

"Pretty well, sir, I think," answered Gimlet; "there are bars to the windows, and the door is locked tight enough. Then we can lock the church door too."

"I locked it, Stephen," said Mrs. Lamb; "there hangs the key."

"Then let him stay there the night," rejoined Beauchamp. "I will not interfere to screen him; and Gimlet can get a constable early to-morrow morning, without our taking any part in the affair."

This proposal was agreed to by Ned Hayward, though the expression which his friend used, in regard to screening the offender, struck him as somewhat strange. It is wonderful, however, how often in life we do what is vulgarly termed, reckon without our host. The two gentlemen retired to rest in the rooms above, which had been prepared and furnished for them in haste, since the duel with young Wittingham; and Stephen Gimlet and Widow Lamb also sought repose. Early the next morning, however, the gamekeeper rose to seek a constable; but first he thought it expedient to look at the temporary prison in which he had confined Captain Moreton. The doors, both of church and vestry, were still closed and locked; but passing round, toward his own cottage again, by a little grass-grown path, that ran under the church walls Ste Gimlet was surprised and confounded to perceive that three of the bars covering the window of the vestry had been forced out of the old mortar in which they had been socketed; and jumping up on a tombstone to look in, he soon saw that the bird, as he expected, had taken wing from its cage.

Stephen Gimlet, notwithstanding this discovery, did not return to his cottage at once, to communicate the intelligence to those within. He paused and thought; but, to say truth, it was not of the event which he had just ascertained that he meditated. That was done and over: the man was gone, and might never be caught again; but the words which Beauchamp had spoken the night before had made a deeper impression upon his mind than they had upon Ned Hayward's, and naturally, for the young officer had never remarked or heard anything before, which could lead his fancy to perceive any connection between his friend and Captain Moreton. Stephen Gimlet, on the contrary, had observed much that excited his imagination, and it was one of a very active character. He remembered the interest which Beauchamp had displayed in the monuments of the Moreton family; he remembered all the inquiries he had made regarding their former property; and he did not forget either his mother-in-law's ancient connection with one of the members of that house, or the somewhat mysterious expressions she had used in regard to Beauchamp himself. It was a tangled skein, difficult to unravel, but yet he resolved to unravel it; not exactly from curiosity, though curiosity might have some share therein, but rather because, in his wild frenzy, he dreamed that the knowledge which Goody Lamb possessed of his guest's previous history might afford him some means of serving a man he looked upon as his benefactor. He was peculiarly susceptible of kindness or unkindness, of gratitude or its reverse, resentment, and he thought that it would be a happy day for him if he could ever return to Mr. Beauchamp, even in a small degree, the kindness he had received. He pondered upon these things for full five minutes, and then returned to his cottage, where he found the old lady in the inner room, making the little boy repeat a short prayer at his bedside, after having washed and dressed him. It was a sweet and wholesome sight to the father. He contrasted it with former days, and he felt the balmy influence of honest peace pour over his heart. One of the first rewards of a return to virtue from any of man's many deviations, is an appreciation of its excellence. He stood and gazed, and listened, well satisfied, while the words of holy prayer rose up from the sweet tongue of his own child; and if the boy had prayed for his father's confirmation in his return to right, the petition could not have been more fully granted.

When it was done, Ste Gimlet kissed the child and sent him out to play in the little garden. Then, shaking hands with Widow Lamb, he said,

"I wanted to ask you a question or two, goody. Do you know who the man is that rushed into the vestry last night?"

"To be sure I do," answered the widow; "do you think, Stephen, I could forget one I have seen in such times and known in such acts as that man? No, no; I shall remember him to my dying day."

"Well, then," replied her son-in-law, "I want you to tell me, goody, what there is between him and Mr. Beauchamp; for the man has got out and is off, and I have great doubts that he is Mr. Beauchamp's friend."

"I had better hold my tongue, Stephen," said the old woman; "I had better hold my tongue, at least till I see and understand more. One thing at least I may say, and say truly, that the bitterest enemy ever Mr. Beauchamp had was that Captain Moreton."

"Do you think, Widow Lamb," asked the gamekeeper, in a low, stern tone, "that he has any cause to wish Mr. Beauchamp dead?"

The old woman started, and gazed at him, demanding,

"What makes you ask that?"

"I'll tell you, widow," replied the man. "Have you not heard of a shot fired into Sir John Slingsby's dining-room? Well, that shot went within a few inches of Mr. Beauchamp's head, and that is the man who fired it."

The old woman sank down on the stool by the bedside, and clasped her hands together, exclaiming,

"Is it come to that! Ay, I thought it would, sooner or later. He could not stop—no, no, he could not stop!"

She paused for a moment, and rocked herself backward and forward upon the seat, with a pained and bewildered look.

"I see how it is, goody," said Gimlet; "and now I'll tell you. That fellow shan't get off. I'll

never give it up till I've caught him. I'll track him, like a hare, to his form, and he shall be punished. Mr. Beauchamp has been kind to me—one of the first that ever were; and I'll not forget kindness, though I'll try to forget unkindness."

"Take care what you are about, Stephen," answered his mother-in-law, "or you may do harm instead of good. Watch him, if you will, to prevent mischief; and above all, let me know everything that you see and hear. I will talk with Mr. Beauchamp, as you call him, this very day. I wonder if the woman is living!"

"There was one woman with him, at all events," answered Stephen Gimlet, "when he was down here last."

"Ah! what was she like?" inquired Widow Lamb, eagerly; "what was she like?"

"I only saw her for a minute," replied the gamekeeper, "but she seemed a fine, handsome lady as one could wish to see—somewhat reddish in the face; but with fine, dark eyes, and mighty gayly dressed. She was tall, too, for a woman."

"Yes, her eyes were dark enough," said Widow Lamb, "and she was always fond of fine clothes—that was her ruin; but red in the face!—that is strange; she had the finest and the fairest skin I ever saw."

"Well, the redness might come from drink," said Ste Gimlet, "for she seemed to me half drunk then. He called her Charlotte, I recollect."

"Ay, that's her name," exclaimed the widow; "and so they have come together again! It is for no good, I will answer; for two bolder or worse spirits never met to plot mischief."

"You had better tell me all about it, goody," said Stephen Gimlet; "do something to that fellow I will, and it's bad to work in the dark."

"Not till I have spoken to the gentleman up stairs," said the old woman. "Watch the man, Stephen: find out where he is, what he is doing, all about him, and about her too; but do not meddle with him yet. Hark! they are coming down. You go away, and I will talk with him this very day."

"I must tell them he has got out before I go," answered the gamekeeper, going into the other room, and bolting the outer door, to guard against intrusion while the two lodgers were below.

No one, however, appeared but Beauchamp, whose first words were,

"I wish, Stephen, you would send some one down to Tarningham, to tell Mr. Slattery to come up. Captain Hayward is not so well this morning, and says he has not slept all night."

"I will go myself, sir," said Gimlet; "but I just wanted to tell you that Captain Moreton has got out during the night. He has wrenched out three of the bars of the window, and is off."

Beauchamp mused.

"Well, it does not much matter," he said, at length; "but you had better inform Doctor Miles of what you saw in the church, and let him take whatever steps he may think necessary to insure that no fraud has been committed. I can have nothing to do with the affair. Bring up Mr. Slattery as soon as you can, for I am somewhat anxious about Captain Hayward's state this morning."

Gimlet did not reply. He uttered no expression of sorrow or of sympathy; but yet he felt as much grieved and alarmed as if Ned Hayward had been his brother; and his countenance showed it, though his words did not.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Beauchamp was turning to go up stairs again; but Widow Lamb at the moment came out of the inner room, and stopped him, saying,

"I wish to speak a word or two to you, sir."

"Well, my good lady," answered Beauchamp, with a smile, "can I do anything to serve you?"

"No, sir," replied the old woman, "it is not that. But I see you do not recollect me—and, indeed, how should you! It is a long time since we first met."

Beauchamp gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then said,

"I think I do remember having seen you somewhere before I met you here. Your face struck me as familiar to my recollection when first I saw you; but I cannot remember where I saw it long ago. Were you ever in India!"

"Oh! no, my lord, it was not there," answered Widow Lamb; "when first I saw you, you were quite a young gentleman; the Honorable Charles St. Leger, they called you; and you had come down with Captain Moreton, your cousin, to shoot on the grounds of his great-aunt, Miss Moreton."

Beauchamp's face turned somewhat pale, and his fine broad brow contracted; but he did not speak, and the old woman continued,

"Do you not recollect, my lord, Davie Lamb the grave, as they called him, and your coming down with a gay party to the grave's house, one day? It was the eleventh of August, twelve years ago this summer; and the lady was with you, Miss Charlotte Hay, as they called her—"

"Hush! hush!" cried Beauchamp, almost fiercely; "do not mention her name in my hearing. You do not know—you do not know, good woman—"

"Oh yes, my lord, I do," answered Widow Lamb; "I know more than you think—more than you know, perhaps, yourself. I can tell you many things about her."

"Tell me nothing," said Beauchamp, sternly, "you can say nothing of her conduct, infamous and bad, that I do not know or do not guess. I wish never to hear her name again;" and he turned once more toward the stairs.

"Well, I beg your pardon, my lord," said Widow Lamb, with a disappointed look, "I did not mean to vex you; but if ever you should wish to hear more, I can tell you better than any one; for there is nobody now living knows so much as I do, and I think—"

The conclusion of her sentence was wanting, for some one opened the cottage door, which had not been bolted since Stephen Gimlet has gone out. The next moment, the head of Mr Slattery appeared, and entering with an insinuating smile, the worthy surgeon saluted Beauchamp reverentially, saying,

"I met my good friend Wolf, Mr. Beauchamp, and was sorry to hear that Captain Hayward is not so well. But I have got good news for him, and you too. No more need of playing at bo-peep. I found Mr. Wittingham so much better this morning, that I have ventured publicly to pronounce him out of danger."

"Thank God for that!" said Beauchamp; "but we had better go up and see Hayward, who seems to me somewhat feverish."

"I am afraid there is a bit of the wadding, or the coat, or something still in the wound," said Mr. Slattery, following up stairs, "but there is no cause for alarm. It may produce inconvenience and some inflammation; but nature, my dear sir, by the very same process which produces pain and irritation to the patient, often expels any extraneous substance, which, if it remained, might cause more serious results."

Mr. Slattery remained at least an hour and a half; and to say the truth, during that time he put our good friend Ned Hayward to some torture; but in the end, he succeeded in extracting from the wound which that gentleman had received, a portion of his waistcoat, which had been carried in by the ball in its passage. Some hemorrhage followed, which was stopped with difficulty; but at length the good surgeon took his leave, and descended with Beauchamp to the lower room.

Widow Lamb, however, met them at the foot of the stairs, saying, in a low tone,

"There is a servant on horseback, from the Park, sir, just now before the door. He has got a note, which he will give to no one but you; and I did not know what to do."

"There is no necessity for any further concealment," said Beauchamp, advancing to the door; "you have got a note for me," he continued, speaking to the servant, who touched his hat, and delivered a small billet.

Beauchamp tore it open, and read, while good Mr. Slattery paused beside him, in the hope of hearing some news; for, as we have shown, he was not without a laudable portion of curiosity.

"I must go over directly," said Beauchamp, for that note placed before his eyes a very unpleasant state of affairs at Tarningham Park—a mortgage foreclosed, an execution placed in the house, and Sir John Slingsby himself arrested on a heavy bond debt, for long arrears of interest, and interest upon interest, and lawyers' costs. Isabella wrote in a tone of despair; and yet there was a something shining through all her gloomy words—a trust, a confidence in him to whom those words were written, which were very pleasing to him.

"Can I drive you over in my gig, Mr. Beauchamp?" said Mr. Slattery.

"No, I thank you," replied the other; "I dare say, my good fellow, you will not object to let me mount your horse?" he continued, addressing the servant, "I must get over to the Park as speedily as possible."

Under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, the man might have objected; but the events which had just happened at his master's house, were, by the time he set out, known from the housekeeper's room to the pigsty and had excited among the servants too strong a feeling of dismay and distress, for him to hesitate when there was a chance of affording aid, or even consolation, to Sir John Slingsby and his daughter. He instantly acceded, then, and lengthened the stirrups. Beauchamp only stayed to get his hat and speak a few words to Ned Hayward, then sprang into the saddle, and the next moment was going straight across the country toward Tarningham Park.

CHAPTER XXXI.

All was dismay and confusion in the house of Sir John Slingsby, when, after having galloped straight across the park, without heeding bridle-paths or carriage-roads, Beauchamp drew his rein at the door. No servant came to take the horse, for all were busy within, though busy with what, would have been difficult to say. The only thing they had to be busy with was their own consternation; for there was no packing up for departure, no inventories, no arrangements in progress; and yet not an attendant appeared, except through the double glass doors, where a knot was to be seen assembled in the inner vestibule, who never turned a look toward the terrace before the house. One excuse, perhaps, might be that there were so many people arriving that a new comer could attract no attention. It seemed as if a general call had been made upon Tarningham, to attend and witness the disgrace and discomfort of the family. A number of tradesmen were gathered before the doors, conversing together in low tones, and with gloomy faces; and there was a post-chaise, beside a gig, a saddle-horse, and a tax-cart or two. Beauchamp thought the spectacle somewhat odd; for it seemed to him, notwithstanding all he knew of the gossiping propensities of small places, that the news of Sir John Slingsby's misfortunes must have spread with marvelous rapidity. But he knew not Mr. Wharton, nor could conceive the policy which should induce a man, who had chosen his moment for consummating a long prepared scheme for stripping another of all his worldly wealth, to complicate his difficulties by every means, so as to render the bonds he had cast around him indissoluble.

"Here, take my horse," he said, addressing the sullen-looking postillion who stood behind the chaise; and when the man obeyed, civilly enough, Beauchamp approached a hale-looking man, like a grazier, and inquired, "What is all this?"

"Why, sir," replied the man, who had often seen his interrogator in Tarningham, "Mr. Wharton's clerk told me that there was an execution going to be put in, so I came up to see if I could get my bill. But the lawyer was beforehand with us; and the matter is not so much, only forty pound or so, and I did not think it worth while, when I found how matters are going, to trouble the hearty old gentleman, who has spent a deal o' money with us all in his day."

"You seem a very respectable man," said Beauchamp, calmly, but still somewhat moved, "and you shall not lose by your conduct. You, sir," and he turned to another, "I think you are the stationer at Tarningham—is yours the same errand, and on the same information?"

"Yes, sir," answered the person he addressed, "one of Mr. Wharton's young men came down and told me; but I think, with my neighbor Groves, that we should behave handsome."

"I see the whole matter," said Beauchamp,

speaking rather to himself than those around. "You can wait a little, gentlemen. I think Sir John can pay you all without inconvenience, though he is a careless man, and his affairs may not be quite in order."

"They say Mr. Wharton has arrested him, sir," said a little man, with a thin, small voice.

"I will go in and see," replied Beauchamp, with a smile. "If any of you could contrive to go or send down to Tarningham, and say to Mr. Bacon, the attorney, that Lord Lenham would be glad to see him here immediately, you would oblige me. Tell him to lose not a moment."

"I'll go, in a jiffy," cried the stout man, jumping into a tax-cart. "Who did you say, my lord?"

"Lord Lenham," answered Beauchamp; "he will know who you mean;" and turning round, he walked into the house.

The servants grouped themselves differently at his appearance, and bowed low, the butler venturing to say,

"I am glad you have come, sir."

"Where is your master!" asked Beauchamp.

"In the library, sir," replied the man, "with a number of them. It is a sad time, sir, 'specially for my poor young lady."

The man walked on before, and opened the library door; Beauchamp followed quickly; and certainly the sight which that room presented was a painful one. Mrs. Clifford sat near one of the windows, the picture of despair; Isabella was seated near the table, with her eyes buried in her hands, and the rich curls of her beautiful hair falling over her face. Mary was bending down to speak to her; grief in her lovely face, but yet as calm and composed as usual. Old Sir John was a little in advance, with two bailiffs standing near—not the same who had been there earlier in the morning—and his valet behind him, helping him to put on his great coat, while Mr. Wharton stood at the other side of the large library-table, with a smile upon his lip, a frown upon his brow, a sparkling black eye, and a double degree of red in one of the cheeks, though the other looked somewhat pale. Two or three men, whose business there and ordinary functions were not apparent at the moment, made up the rest of the company.

Sir John Slingsby had one arm in the sleeve of his great coat, and was thrusting angrily and ineffectually at the garment, to get the other in also, speaking all the time in a furious tone, with his face turned to Mr. Wharton.

"I tell you, Wharton, you are a d—d scoundrel," he said, "an ungentlemanlike blackguard. You have swindled me out of thousands, and you know it; and now, without giving me a hint, you come upon me in this way."

"You are angry, Sir John, you are angry," said Mr. Wharton, in a sweet tone. "It is as unpleasant to me as to you, I can assure you; but when I heard that Mr. Wittingham had issued process, I was compelled, however unwillingly, to take care of myself and my clients. You know I told you a month ago it could not go on any longer; so you cannot say you had not notice."

The old baronet was about to pour upon him a new volley of objurgations, thrusting manfully at the sleeve of his coat all the time, when suddenly his eye rested upon Beauchamp, and he stopped, turning a little pale, for the presence of that gentleman at such a moment both surprised and pained him. Mary whispered a word to her cousin, however, and Isabella, starting up with the tears in her eyes, and a glow upon her cheeks, held out her hand to him exclaiming, "Oh, thank you, thank you! Dr. Miles was not to be found," she added, in a whisper, "or I would not have sent."

Beauchamp smiled and shook his head half reproachfully, and Sir John, recovering himself, took his hand, saying, "Ah, Beauchamp, you have come at an awkward time. Can't ask you to dinner to-day, my dear sir, for the house is in the hands of the myrmidons of the law, and I must away, they tell me. It's a bad job, I am afraid."

"Nevertheless, I intend to dine with you here, Sir John," answered Beauchamp, laughing and shaking the baronet's hand warmly, "so you had better take off your great coat."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Wharton, taking a step forward, "but I am afraid Sir John Slingsby cannot remain with you at present. Business has been too long delayed already by the folly of the officer who thought fit—"

"To act like a man of some consideration and feeling, I suppose, sir," said Beauchamp, eying him from head to foot with a calm, cold, withering look. "You are Mr. Wharton, the attorney, I imagine, of whom I have heard so much in regard to several transactions soon to be inquired into."

"My name is Wharton, sir; yes, my name is Wharton," answered the solicitor in a sharp, fierce tone, "and I insist that you do not interrupt the operation of the law."

"The operation of the law I shall not interrupt," replied Beauchamp, "but the operations of the lawyer I certainly shall."

"He's a nabob," said Sir John Slingsby to his niece in a low, laughing voice, "yes, you are quite right, Beauchamp, this is Mr. Wharton, the attorney, calling himself esquire, and a greater scoundrel does not live between the four seas. He has cheated me through thick and thin, and now wants, by coming upon me all in a moment, to get possession of my property, as he has done with others before now."

"If such are his intentions he will find himself mistaken," answered Beauchamp. "But now, Sir John, take off your coat again, and we will to business. I think the ladies may as well leave us, however. Be satisfied, my dear madam," he continued, speaking to Mrs. Clifford, who had risen and come a little forward, "be satisfied, Miss Slingsby—all this matter will be easily arranged, and Sir John and I will join you in the drawing-room in an hour."

While Beauchamp had been speaking these few words, Mr. Wharton had been conversing with rapid utterance, but in a low voice, with one of the men present, who seemed to be the superior sheriff's officer; and as soon as the gentleman ceased, he exclaimed, "Well, sir, as

you think the whole matter can be so easily arranged, I shall leave you to arrange it."

"Excuse me, Mr. Wharton," said Beauchamp, coolly, "you will be good enough to stay. We shall want you for certain receipts, and, perhaps," he added, with a smile, "for some good legal advice till my own solicitor comes, whom I expect in about half an hour."

"My receipts can be soon given," said Mr. Wharton, a good deal staggered and alarmed by Mr. Beauchamp's calm tone, and his allusion to his solicitor; "but I can tell you that if you think that is all you will have to do, you are mistaken. The house is filled with creditors."

"Gathered together by Mr. Wharton, the attorney, for the purpose of overwhelming a gentleman whom he sought to ruin," answered Beauchamp. "I am aware of all that, sir. Your proceedings have been watched, and I am informed of almost every step you have taken for the last month. I dare say, however, we shall find means of satisfying all who have any just claims."

Isabella had lingered at the door after her aunt and cousin had passed out, and now hastily turning back, she placed a little packet she had held tight in her hand, in that of Beauchamp, saying, in a low voice, "Here is more than six thousand pounds, left from what kind, good, Ned Hayward gave last night. The other debts are not large, but this man's claim is frightful."

She spoke in a tone of alarm; but Beauchamp hastened to relieve her, replying, "Never fear, never fear! The claim must be investigated, but all that is just shall be paid. Leave us, and make your mind easy, my dear Miss Slingsby."

"I really cannot waste my time here," said Mr. Wharton, as the young lady left the room: "I have important business to attend to, and the magistrates to meet at eleven, Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name, sir, is Charles Beauchamp St. Leger, Viscount Lænham," answered Beauchamp, "and I am afraid the magistrates must dispense with your company to-day, Mr. Wharton. You cannot carry this business through, sir, in the same manner that you did that of my poor uncle, Mr. St. Leger Moreton. So now make up your mind at once, sir, to remain here till the whole of this unpleasant business which you have stirred up against Sir John Slingsby be brought to a conclusion, for depend upon it I will not let you go till such is the case."

Mr. Wharton's face had turned paler and paler, till the carbuncles, of which it did not possess a few, remained alone in their glory; but he was an irritable and fiery man up to a certain point, and he replied in a bold tone, "Oh ho, my lord! Do you think because you happen to be a peer who has been skulking about the country under an alias, that you can come down and browbeat us country gentlemen at your pleasure!"

"I never attempt to browbeat a gentleman at all," replied Beauchamp, laying a particular emphasis on the last word, which called up a very unpleasant grin upon the faces of two or three of the men present, "nor do I browbeat you, Mr. Wharton; but I simply insist upon your staying till the business which brought you here is concluded. You have no right to put Sir John Slingsby in an unpleasant position, and then leave him there when your presence is wanted to relieve him from it."

"He has a ducking in the horse-pond, too, to go through," cried Sir John Slingsby, "such as we gave the other bailiff he sent up this morning. He must wait, he must wait for all the honors," and turning round with a laugh, the worthy baronet whispered a word or two to his valet, who remained in the room.

"I will take care, Sir John," said the man, and was moving toward the door; but Beauchamp interposed, saying,

"No, no, we must have no violence. Only order the servants not to let this man pass out till I have done with him; and now to business. Sir John, if you will take the end of the table, I will sit here. Mr. Wharton will place himself there, and the matter will soon be arranged. Ring that bell, sir."

The bailiff to whom he spoke obeyed in an instant; Sir John Slingsby took a chair at the head of the table, and Mr. Wharton seeing no help for it, seated himself where Beauchamp had pointed, turning his face to the window with an indifferent air, as if the business about to take place was no concern of his.

"Now, sir, what is it you want here?" asked Beauchamp, addressing one of the officers.

"I hold a writ against Sir John Slingsby for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds," said the man, "at the suit of Joseph Wharton, Esq."

"Well, sir, stand back," said Beauchamp, "we will deal with you presently. And you, sir?" he continued, speaking to another stout, broad-set, black-faced man.

This proved to be an officer put in execution upon a second bond for a sum of seven thousand pounds at the suit of the same person. He also was directed to stand back, Beauchamp saying, "Upon these actions we will give bail, as they must be tried. You, sir, there at the end of the table, what do you want?"

"Why, please you, my lord, it's only my bill for a hundred and seventeen pounds, or thereabout, for repairs to the stables and offices. If it had not been Mr. Wharton told me I should not get my money if I did not apply at once, I should never have thought of troubling Sir John."

Beauchamp's eye fixed sternly upon the attorney, who exclaimed with a quivering lip, "Did you not consult me, sir? Was I not bound to give you a just opinion?"

"I never said a word to nobody," replied the man, "till I met you in the street, and you told me Mr. Wittingham was going to arrest Sir John."

"Really, my lord, this is trifling," said Mr. Wharton. "I ask, is Sir John Slingsby ready to discharge his heavy debt to me? If he is, let him do it, and I go. If not, he must, I fear, go to prison."

"He is quite ready, sir, to discharge every just debt this instant," replied Beauchamp, "but we doubt that yours is just, sir, and therefore we will deal first with those that are

certainly honest. Sir John," he continued, pointing to a servant who had come in, "will you order Dr. Miles to be sent for. Now, my good man, you shall have a check for your money," and taking out his check-book, he wrote an order for the amount, taking the builder's name and statement from his own lips.

Another man was then called forward, and the same course pursued, Beauchamp proceeding quietly, although he saw Mr. Wharton rise and enter into eager consultation with the bailiffs.

He was not allowed to go on long without interruption, for after what seemed some urgent remonstrances on the part of Mr. Wharton, and a good deal of resistance on the part of the sheriff's officer, the latter stepped forward, saying, "I really, my lord, cannot wait any longer, and I do not see any good of it; for Sir John being in my custody, and not knowing what detainers may be lodged against him, a bail-bond cannot be drawn till we see."

The man spoke civilly, and with an evident respect for rank, and Beauchamp answered calmly, "Your observation is a very just one, my good friend. I have only to answer, however, that I am ready to give bail to any amount which you may think necessary to secure the sheriff, in which Dr. Miles will join me, I am sure, as soon as he arrives."

"It is a heavy sum, sir," said the bailiff, doubtfully.

"True," answered Beauchamp, "and moreover you do not know, except from my own word, who I am, nor that I am in a position to give an available bond. It is for that very reason that I wish you to delay till my solicitor and Dr. Miles arrive, when I assure you, upon my word of honor, that you shall have every satisfaction. The sum required would be more than met by money of mine in the Tarningham bank, as you will see by that receipt, if I thought fit to pay the debt claimed by Mr. Wharton at once, which I do not. The bond on which the writ has been taken out is, you tell me, for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds. Here you see are sixty-five thousand pounds paid on my account into the Tarningham bank."

"But there is another bond for seven thousand five hundred pounds on which execution has issued," said Mr. Wharton.

"Exactly so," said Beauchamp, whose thoughts were very rapid, "and the way I intend to deal with that matter is as follows: We will pay the amount of that bond under protest as a matter of account, reserving this other claim for twenty-three thousand pounds to try the questions that may arise, such as consideration, usury, etc."

Mr. Wharton bit his lip. He saw that he had made one mistake. He feared that he might have made more; for knowing that Sir John Slingsby had little acquaintance with law, and an invincible objection to lawyers, excepting when he wanted to borrow money, he had gone on with somewhat rash confidence in his own powers of overreaching. However, he put a bold face upon the matter, saying, "That won't *do, sir,* that won't do, my lord. You seem to *have a smattering* of the law, but you will find that all accounts have been examined and passed. No court in Christendom will open that question again."

"We will see," replied Beauchamp, quietly.

"Then there is the mortgage," said Mr. Wharton.

"That will be dealt with as we shall be advised," rejoined the young nobleman; "the matter of the mortgage has nothing to do with the business before us; and, moreover, Mr. Wharton, I will beg you not to interfere here till you are called upon. Though a lawyer, you are exactly in the same position as any other creditor, and in taking out this writ, you have given all power into other hands. If I satisfy the sheriff that he has sufficient security according to law, for the appearance of Sir John Slingsby, that is all that is necessary; and I will tell you, sir, that sooner than see a course, which is certainly unhandsome, and which I suspect to be villainous, successful against my friend, even so far as to remove him from his own house for an hour, I would pay the amount of all claims upon him to the sheriff under protest. I have the means of doing so at command this moment, and, therefore, be very sure that your arts will avail you nothing, sir—I understand you," he added, sternly, "the property upon which you have advanced a pitiful sum of fifty thousand pounds, and by accumulating interest upon interest, and costs upon costs, have raised the debt to nearly eighty thousand, is worth, at least, two hundred. The bait was tempting, sir; but beware, that in snapping at it too eagerly, you have not got the hook in your jaws. There is such a thing, sir, as striking fraudulent attorneys off the roll, and at all events be sure, that however pleasant it might be to possess this estate, you will never have it."

"I do not want it, sir," cried Mr. Wharton, half-mad with rage and vexation, "I would not have it if you would give it to me."

Beauchamp laughed, and Sir John Slingsby shouted; while all the other persons in the room, not excepting bailiffs, tittered, without disguise, to the lawyer's sad discomfort.

"Ah, here comes Miles," exclaimed Sir John, "and Mr. Under-sheriff, too, by Jove. That is lucky; the matter will soon be settled now. How are you, doctor—how are you, Mr. Sheriff! You are the very man we wanted."

"I am very sorry for all this business, Sir John," said a tall, gentlemanlike person, whom he had addressed; "but having business at Tarningham, and hearing of the unfortunate occurrence by the way, I thought it better to come up myself, as I felt sure the action could be bailed."

"And so it can," cried Sir John Slingsby; "here stands bail ready in the person of my friend, Lord Lenham; but the pitiful little snivelling rogue, Wharton, objects."

"Ah, good-day, Wharton," said the sheriff, drily, "why do you object?"

"No, I do not object," replied the attorney; "the men here, Bulstrode and the rest, thought there might be detainers, and the process having—"

"No, no!" cried the officer, "we thought nothing about it, till you told us to refuse the bail till we had searched the office. I've a shrewd guess, Mr. Wharton, that you have got up all the creditors here who could lodge detainers,

and his lordship offers to pay all honest debts at once, and to put in bail against yours."

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed Wharton, furiously; but the sheriff interfered, and at the same time Doctor Miles and Beauchamp, who had been speaking together, turned round, and the clergyman introduced his young friend to the officer of the county by the title of Viscount Lenham.

"This matter, I think, can be settled with you, sir, in a few words," said Beauchamp. "I do not choose to see my friend, Sir John Slingsby, wronged. It so happens, that intending to buy an estate in this neighborhood, I have had a considerable sum lately paid into the Tarningham bank. I am ready to give a bail-bond for any sum you may think necessary to your own security, that Sir John appears to the action of Mr. Wharton, or any one else; or to pay into your hands any sum claimed under protest. I think, in these circumstances, there can be no need of removing Sir John from his own house."

"Not in the least," said the sheriff, "bail will be quite sufficient, and can be given here quite as well as ten miles hence."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed Mr. Wharton, "there may be detainers for aught you know, and to a large amount."

"I will take my chance of that, Wharton," replied the under-sheriff, "there were none when I came away; for I had occasion to examine the books. It is not usual to lodge detainers till caption has been actually effected, I think, my good friend."

"I think your proceeding very rash and irregular, sir," replied the lawyer, nettled, "and I should certainly object, if—"

"Pooh, pooh!" cried the sheriff, "I am the best judge of my own affairs; and you are meddling with what does not concern you, Mr. Wharton. If I take a sufficient bail for Sir John's appearance to your action, that is all you have to do with, and perhaps more; so let us have no more of this; for I will not be meddled with in the discharge of my duties. You tried this once before, sir, and did not find it succeed."

"Well, sir, take your own way, take your own way!" cried Mr. Wharton, in a sharp tone; "the sum is large; if the bail be not good, you are responsible. A gentleman who goes about the country under one false name may very well take another. I do not mean to say it is so; but this gentleman who calls himself Lord Lenham now, and called himself Mr. Beauchamp a few days ago, may be the greatest swindler in England for aught any of us know."

"Swindlers do not usually have large sums at the banker's," said Dr. Miles, drily; "that is to say, Mr. Wharton, not those swindlers whom the law is willing to take hold of, though I have known many rich men who swindled a good deal within the law, especially in your profession. But to set all that at rest, I will join in the bond, if necessary, and I possess means, I trust, sufficient to insure Mr. Undersheriff against all risk. There comes Bacon, trotting up on his little fat horse. Bacon is a very excellent man, considering the temptations of profession and example."

"Well, as my opinion is of no value, my presence can be of no use," said Mr. Wharton; "and I shall therefore go. Good morning, gentlemen—Sir John Slingsby, good morning."

The baronet took a step forward, looking at the lawyer somewhat ominously, while the good stout calf of his leg might be seen to tremble a little, as if agitated by the simultaneous action of antagonist muscles; but then he stopped, saying aloud,

"No, I won't kick him—no, I won't kick anybody any more."

"A very prudent resolution, Sir John," said Dr. Miles, "pray adhere to it; and if you include the horsewhip in your renunciations, you will do well."

Mr. Wharton was suffered to retreat unkicked; the matter of the bail-bond was easily arranged; all the rest of the business passed quietly; the bailiffs and their satellites were withdrawn from the house; the creditors who remained, paid; and the under-sheriff took his leave. Somewhat more time had been expended, indeed, than Beauchamp had expected that the affair would occupy, ere he, Sir John Slingsby, and Doctor Miles were once more left alone in the library; but then the baronet seized his friend's hand, with an unwonted dew in his eyes, saying,

"How can I ever thank you for your noble conduct? I cannot show my gratitude; but you must be secured. You shall have a mortgage for the whole sum: the estate can well bear it, I am sure, notwithstanding all that fellow Wharton says."

"I am quite convinced it can, Sir John," answered Beauchamp, "and I will accept your offer, because, for reasons of my own, I am exceedingly anxious that you should be under no possible obligation to me; and now let us join the ladies, for they will think we are never coming."

Dr. Miles smiled; for though he had never played at the games of love and matrimony, he had been a looker-on all his life, and understood them well. Sir John Slingsby was totally unconscious, and led the way to the drawing-room, marveling a little, perhaps—for he was not a vain man—at the fact of his having so completely won Beauchamp's regard, and created such an interest in his bosom, but never attributing to his daughter any share therein. With parents it is ever the story of the philosopher and his cat; and though they can solve very difficult problems regarding things at a distance, yet they do not always readily see that a kitten can go through the same hole in a door which its mother can pass.

"Here, Isabella," cried the old gentleman, as they entered the room where the three ladies were seated, watching the door as if their fate hung upon its hinges, "shake this gentleman by the hand, as the best friend your father ever had."

"I do thank him, from my heart," said Isabella, giving Beauchamp her hand, with tears in her eyes; "but yet, my dear father," she added, frankly, "Mr. Beauchamp would think me ungenerous if I did not tell you that you have another friend, who has acted in as kind and noble a manner as himself. I mean Captain—no, I will call him by his old name—Ned Hayward; for to him we owed the means of discharging the debt to that man Wittingham."

"The obligation is infinitely greater to him than to me, my dear Miss Slingsby," said Beauchamp; "for I know that Hayward's income is not very large, while, in my case, there is really no obligation at all. This money was lying idle, and it might just as well be invested in one way as another."

"But every one is not so ready to invest money in a friend's relief," said Sir John, "and I shall never forget it. Hang me, my dear girl, if I can tell what he found out in me to like or respect; I never could discover anything of the kind myself."

Isabella colored to the eyes, but answered at once,

"Mr. Beauchamp consulted only his own noble heart."

"Mr. Beauchamp!" cried Sir John Slingsby, with one of his merry laughs; "Mr. Beauchamp had nothing to do with it, Bella. I am not in the least indebted to Mr. Beauchamp."

Isabella, Mrs. Clifford, and Mary, were all alarmed; for they might well fear that the events of that morning had somewhat affected Sir John Slingsby's brain. But he soon relieved them.

"No, Isabella," he continued, "it is to this gentleman I am indebted—let me introduce him to you. Isabella, Lord Lenham! Lord Lenham, my daughter."

Isabella cast her eyes to the ground, and a shade of deep, and, it seemed to Beauchamp, anxious thought, came over her face; but the next moment she looked up, all bright and sparkling again, and exclaimed,

"So, Lord Lenham has thought fit to come upon us in masquerade! That was hardly fair, my lord."

"Some day when Miss Slingsby will let me tell a long story she shall hear the reasons why," answered Beauchamp, "and may then judge whether it was fair or not. If she decides the cause in my favor, she may tell the pleadings to the whole party; if she thinks I have greatly erred, she shall forgive the offender, and conceal his crime under the seal of confession."

Again Isabella blushed deeply; and Sir John Slingsby made the matter worse by exclaiming, "Ho, ho! it is to be a private conference, is it? We are all to be kept in the dark, as, indeed, I have been lately; for all I know is that I have been placed in a very unpleasant and unexpected situation this morning, and as suddenly relieved from it by the affection of two dear girls, and the generosity of our noble friend I have not thanked you yet, my dear Mary; but pray let me hear how all this has been brought about, that I may do so discreetly."

"In the mean time," said Beauchamp, "I who know the whole, will walk back again to my poor friend Hayward, and tell him how all things have gone."

"You promised to dine, you promised to dine!" cried Sir John Slingsby, "no breach of promise, or I will have my action against you."

"I will keep mine to the letter," replied Beauchamp, "and be back in a couple of hours."

"And bring Ned Hayward with you," said the baronet.

Beauchamp explained that such a thing was *impossible*, saying that his friend had become *somewhat* worse in health since the preceding night, but without giving any cause for alarm His eyes turned toward Mary Clifford as he spoke, with a momentary glance, which sufficed, by the paleness that spread over her face, to confirm suspicions which he had entertained since the night before. He was too much a gentleman in heart to keep his eyes there more than that one moment, for he felt that it would not only be a rudeness, but an unkindness.

"I will walk with you, my good lord," said Doctor Miles, "I long to see Captain Hayward He has particularly interested me."

"And you will walk back with Lord Lenham to dinner, doctor," said Sir John, as gaily as ever; "we will have one jolly evening after all this *fracas*, at all events."

"I will come to dinner," replied Dr. Miles, "expressly to keep it from being too jolly, you incorrigible old gentleman."

But Sir John only laughed, and the peer and the priest walked away together.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"You said just now, doctor," observed Beauchamp, as they strolled through the park, "that Ned Hayward particularly interested you. I am glad of it, for he did so with me from the first, without my well knowing why; and we are always glad to find a prepossession which savors, perhaps, a little of weakness, kept in countenance by others for whom we have a respect."

"You mistake altogether, young gentleman," replied the doctor, with the dry spirit upon him. "In my case it is no prepossession; neither did he interest me from the first. I generally can give a reason for what I feel. I am no being of impulses. Indeed," he continued, more discursively, "I was anything but prepossessed in Captain Hayward's favor. I knew he had been brought up in the army, under the judicious auspices of Sir John Slingsby. That dear girl, Isabella, told me that, from what she could remember of him, he was a gay, lively, rattling fellow. Sir John called him the best fellow that ever lived, and I know tolerably well what that means. The reason, then, why he interested me very soon was because he disappointed me. For half an hour after I first saw him, I thought he was just what I expected—a man constitutionally lively, gay from want of thought, good-humored from want of feeling; having some talents, but no judgment; acting right occasionally by impulse, but not by principle."

"You did him great injustice," said Beauchamp, warmly.

"I know I did," replied the clergyman, "but not long. A thousand little traits showed me that, under the shining and rippling surface of the lake, there were deep, still waters. The singular delicacy and judgment with which he treated that business of the scandalous attack upon Mrs. Clifford's carriage; the kindly skill with which he led Sir John away from the subject, when he found that it distressed poor Mary; his conduct toward the poacher and his boy; his moderation and his gentleness in some cases, and his vigor and resolution in others, soon set all preconceived opinions to rights. He has one fault, however, which is both a very great and a very common one—he conceals his

good qualities from the eyes of others. This is a great wrong to society. If all good and honest men would but show themselves as they really are, they would stare vice out of countenance; and if even those who are not altogether what we wish would show the good that is in them, and conceal the bad, they would put vice and folly out of fashion; for I do believe that there are far more good men, and even a greater amount of good qualities among those who are partly bad, than the world knows anything about. So you see I am not a misanthrope."

"I never suspected you of being so, my dear doctor," said Beauchamp; "if I had, I should not have attempted to create an interest for myself in you."

"Ay! then, you had an interested motive in coming up every other day to my little rectory, just at the time that Isabella Slingsby visited her poor and her schools!" cried Dr. Miles, laughing; "but I understand it—I understand it all, my noble lord—there is not such a thing as a purely disinterested man upon earth: the difference is simply the sort of interest men seek to serve—some are filthy interests, such as avarice, ambition, ostentation, even gluttony—how I have seen men fawn upon the givers of good dinners! Then there are maudlin interests, such as love and its et ceteras; and then, again, there are the generous interests; but I am afraid I must class those you sought to serve in such friendly visitations among the maudlin ones—is it not so?"

"Not exactly," answered Beauchamp; "for if you remember, my good friend, you will find that I came up to your house at the same hour, and as often, before I saw Miss Slingsby there, as afterward. Moreover, during the whole time I did so come before I was introduced to her father, I never had a thought of offering her my hand, how much soever I might admire and esteem her."

Dr. Miles turned round, and looked at his companion steadily, for a moment or two.

"I do not know what to make of you," he said at length.

"I will tell you," replied Beauchamp, with a sad smile, "for I do not believe any one could divine the causes which have led me to act a somewhat unusual, if not eccentric part, without knowing events which took place many years ago. I told you once that I wished to make you my father confessor. I had not time then to finish all I had to say; but my intention has been still the same, and it is now necessary, for Miss Slingsby's sake, that I should execute it: we shall have time in going over, and I will make my story short. You are probably aware that I was an only son, my father having never married after my mother's death, my mother having survived my birth only a few hours. My father was a man of very keen sensibilities, proud of his name, his station, and his family—proud of their having been all honorable, and not one spot of reproach having ever rested on his lineage. He was too partially fond of me, too, as the only pledge of love left him by one for whom he sorrowed with a grief that unnerved his mind, and impaired his corporeal health. I was brought up at home, under a careful tutor, for my father had great objections, partly just, partly I believe, unjust, toward schools. At home I was a good deal spoiled, and had too frequently my own way, till I was sent to college, where I first learned something of the world; but, alas! not much, and I have had harder lessons since. The first of these was the most severe. My cousin, Captain Moreton, was ten years older than myself; but he had not yet shown his character fully. My father and myself knew nothing of it; for though he paid us an annual visit for a week or two, the greater part of his time was spent either here or in Scotland, where he had a grand-aunt who doted upon him. One year, when I was just twenty, while he was on a shooting-party at our house, in October, he asked me to go down with him in the following summer, to shoot grouse at old Miss Moreton's. I acceded readily; and my father as willingly gave his consent. We set out on the twenty-fifth of July, and I was received with all sorts of Scotch hospitality at Miss Moreton's house. There were many persons there at dinner, and among the rest a Miss Charlotte Hay—"

"Why do you stop?" asked Dr. Miles.

"A Miss Charlotte Hay," continued Beauchamp, with an evident effort, "a very beautiful person, and highly accomplished. She was some four or five years older than myself, I believe, affecting a romantic style of thought, feeling, and language. She was beautiful, I have said; but hers was not the style of beauty I admired, and at first I took but little notice of her. She sang well, however, and before the first evening was over, we had talked a good deal—the more, perhaps, as I found that most of the ladies present, though of no very high station, nor particularly refined manners, did not seem to love her conversation. It appeared to me that she was superior to them; and when I found that, though of good family, her fortune was extremely limited, and that she had resided with old Miss Moreton for some time, as something between a friend and a companion, I fancied I understood the coldness I observed on the part of more wealthy people. Many days passed over, during which she certainly endeavored to attract and captivate me. I was in general somewhat on my guard; but I was then young, inexperienced, vain, romantic; and though I never dreamed of making her my wife, yet I trifled away many an hour by her side, feeling passion growing upon me—mark, I say passion, not love; for there was much that prevented me from respecting her enough to love her—a display of her person, a carelessness of proprieties, an occasional gleam of perverted principle, that no art could hide. Once or twice, too, I caught a smile passing between her and my cousin Moreton, which I did not like, and whenever that occurred it recalled me to myself; but, with weak facility, I fell back again till the day of my departure approached. Two or three days before—on the eleventh of August, which was my twenty-first birth-day—Miss Moreton declared she would have a party of her neighbors to celebrate the event. None of the higher and more respectable gentry were invited, or, if they were, they did not come. There were a good many deep-drinking lairds, and some of their wives and daughters, somewhat stiff in their graver, and hoydenish in their merrier, moments. It is one of those days that the heart longs for years to blot out forever. I

gave way to the high spirits which were then habitual to me. I drank deep—deeper than I had ever before done. I suffered my brain to be troubled—I know not that there were not unfair means used to effect it—but at all events, I was not myself. I recollect personally little that passed; but I have since heard that I was called upon to choose a wife for the afternoon. I was told it was the custom of the country, on such occasions, so to do in sport; and that I fixed, at once, upon this artful girl—in the presence of many witnesses, I called her wife, and she called me husband. The evening passed over; I drank more wine at supper, and the next morning I found myself married—for the infamous fraud they called a marriage. In horror and dismay, I burst away from the wretched woman who had lent herself to such a base transaction. I sent off my servant at once for horses to my carriage—I cast Moreton from me, who attempted to stop and reason with me, as he called it, representing that what had taken place was a full and sufficient marriage, according to the code of Scotland, for that public consent was all that was required by their law."

"Or by the law of God either," replied Dr. Miles, "but it must be free and intelligent consent."

"I traveled night and day," continued Beauchamp, rapidly, "till I had reached my father's house and thrown myself at his feet. I told him all—I extenuated, concealed nothing; and I shall never forget either his kindness or his distress of mind. Instant steps were taken to ascertain the exact position in which I stood; and the result was fatal to my hopes of happiness and peace: for not only did he find that I was entangled past recall, but that the character of the woman herself was such as might be expected from her having been a party to so disgraceful a scheme. She had been blighted by scandal before she took up her residence in the house where I found her. Miss Moreton, in her dotage, yielded herself blindly to my cousin's guidance; and there was more than a suspicion that he had made his aunt's protection a veil to screen his own paramour."

"What did you do? what did you do?" asked Dr. Miles, with more eagerness than he usually displayed; "it was a hard case, indeed."

"I went abroad immediately," replied Beauchamp, "for my father exacted from me a solemn promise never to live with or to see, if it could be avoided, the woman who had thus become my wife. He used strong and bitter, but just terms in speaking of her. 'He could not survive the thought,' he said, 'that the children of a prostitute should succeed to the title of a family without stain.' My promise was given willingly, for I will confess that hate, and indignation, and disgust rendered her very idea odious to me. My father remained in England for some months, promising to make such arrangements regarding money—the base object of the whole conspiracy—that I should never be troubled any more. He added tenderly and sadly, though gravely and firmly, that farther he could do nothing; for that I must bear the consequences of one great error in a solitary and companionless life. In consideration of a promise on the woman's part never to molest me, nor to take my name, he settled upon her the sum of a thousand a-year per annum. During my father's life I heard no more of her; but when he himself joined me in Italy, I could see but too plainly how grief and bitter disappointment had undermined a constitution already shaken. He did not long survive, and all that I have myself undergone has been little compared with the thought that the consequences of my own folly served to shorten the days of my kind, good parent."

"But what became of the woman?" demanded Dr. Miles. "You surely have had tidings of her since."

"Within a month after my father's death," replied Beauchamp, "I received from her one of the most artful letters that woman ever wrote, claiming to be received as my wife. But I will not trouble you with the details. Threats succeeded to blandishments, and I treated these with contempt, as I had the others with coldness. Then commenced a new system of persecution; she followed me, attempted to fix herself upon me. Once she arrived at an inn in the Tyrol as I was getting into my carriage, and declared before the people round that she was my abandoned wife. I answered not a word, but ordered the door to be closed, and the postillions to drive on. Then came applications for an increased annuity; but I would not yield one step, knowing that it would but lead to others, and in the end, to free myself from everyday annoyance, I took the name of Beauchamp, hurried on to the East, directed my agent to conceal my address from every one, and for several years wandered far and wide. At length the tidings reached me that the annuity, which had at first been punctually demanded, had not been applied for. A report, too, reached my lawyer's ears that she had died in Paris. Still I would not return to claim my rank, lest there should be some deep scheme at work, and I continued in India and Syria for two years longer. The annuity remained unclaimed. I knew that she had expensive habits and no means, and I ventured back. I passed a few months in London without resuming my own name; but the noise and bustle of the great city wearied me, and I came hither. Inquiries in the mean time had been made, somewhat languidly, perhaps, to ascertain the fate of this unhappy woman; but here I saw Isabella Slingsby, and those inquiries have been since pursued rapidly and strictly. Every answer tended to one result, and four days ago I received a letter from my solicitor, informing me that there can be no doubt of her demise. I will show it to you hereafter; but therein he says that her effects in Paris had been publicly sold, as those of a person deceased, to pay the claims of her maid, who had brought forward sufficient proofs to satisfy the police that her mistress had died in Italy. The girl herself could not be found by my agents; but the lawyers consider this fact, coupled with the total cessation of claims for the annuity, as proving the death of Charlotte Hay, and removing all doubt that this bitter bond is canceled forever."

"That is clear, that is clear," said Dr. Miles, who at this moment was pausing with his companion at a stile, "and now; I suppose it is hand and heart for Isabella Slingsby."

"Assuredly," said Beauchamp, "but she

must be informed of all this; and it is not a tale for me to tell."

"Will you have the kindness, sir," said a voice from the other side of the hedge, as Beauchamp put his foot upon the first step of the stile, "to keep on that side and go out by the gate at the corner."

"Oh, is that you in the ditch, Stephen?" said Beauchamp. "Very well, my good man; one way is as good as the other."

"I am watching something here, sir," said the gamekeeper in a low voice, "and if you come over, you'll disturb the thing."

Beauchamp nodded, and went on in the way he directed; and Doctor Miles, who had been meditating, replied to what he had said just before the interruption of the gamekeeper.

"But who else can do it! Sir John is unfit. Me, you would have? Humph! It is not a pleasant story for even an old gentleman to tell to a young lady."

"Yet she must know it," answered Beauchamp; "I will—I can have no concealment from her."

"Assuredly, there you are right," replied Doctor Miles, "and I am sure the dear girl will value your sincerity properly."

"She can but say that I committed a great error," answered Beauchamp; "and for that error I have been punished by long years of bitterness."

"Well, well, I will do my best," answered the rector; "but make your proposal first, and refer her to me for the story of your life. I will deal in generals—I will not go into details. That you can do hereafter, if you like."

Thus conversing they walked on, and soon after reached the cottage of Stephen Gimlet, where they found Ned Hayward beginning to feel relief from the operation which the surgeon had performed in the morning. Beauchamp returned to him the sum which he had received from Miss Slingsby in the morning, saying, that he had found no necessity for using it, and Doctor Miles sat down by him, and talked with cheerful kindness for about a quarter of an hour. Was it tact and a clear perception of people's hearts that led the worthy clergyman to select Mary Clifford for one of the subjects of his discourse, and to enlarge upon her high qualities? At all events he succeeded in raising Captain Hayward's spirits ere he set out again upon his way homeward.

When he descended he found Gimlet, the gamekeeper, seated with Widow Lamb; and the man, as he opened the door, apologized for having stopped the rector and Mr. Beauchamp at the stile, but did not state in what he had been so busily engaged. As soon, however, as Doctor Miles was gone, Ste Gimlet resumed his conversation with Mrs. Lamb, and it was a low-toned and eager one. From time to time the old lady bowed her head, saying, "Yes;" but she added nothing to the monosyllable for some time. At length, however, in answer to something that her son-in-law said, she exclaimed,

"No, Stephen, do not speak with him about it. I tried it this morning, and it had a terrible effect upon him. It seemed to change him altogether, and made him, so kind and gentle as he is, quite fierce and sharp. Speak with his friend, Captain Hayward; for neither you nor I can know what all this may mean. But above all, watch well, for it is clear they are about no good, and tell me always what you hear and see, for I cannot help thinking that I know more of these matters than the young lord does himself—a bitter bond, did he call it? Well, it may be a bond for the annuity you heard him talk of; but then why does she not claim it? There must be some object, Stephen."

The good old lady's consideration of the subject was prevented at that moment from proceeding further by the entrance of her son, Billy Lamb, who came up and kissed her affectionately. The lad was somewhat pale, and there was an air of fatigue in his small, pinched, but intelligent countenance, which made his mother hold him to her heart with a feeling of painful anxiety. Oh, how the affections of a parent twine themselves round a suffering child! Every care, every labor, every painful apprehension that he causes us, seems but a new bond to bind our love the more strongly to him. The attachment that is dewed with tears and hardened with the cold air of sorrow and fear is ever the more hardy plant.

"Sit down, Bill," said Stephen Gimlet, kindly, "you look tired, my lad. I will get you a draught of beer."

"I cannot wait, Ste," answered the pot-boy, "for I must be back as quick as I can; but I can look in to see mother for a minute every day now. The gentleman who has got the little lone cottage on the edge of Chandleigh Heath gives me half-a-crown a week to bring up his letters and newspapers, and I take the time when all the folks are at dinner in our house."

"And get no dinner yourself, poor Bill," said Stephen Simlet; "cut him a slice of the cold bacon, mother, and a hunch of bread. He can eat it as he goes. I'll run and draw him a draught of beer. It won't keep you a minute, Bill, and it will help you on, too."

He waited for no reply, but ran with a jug in his hand to the outhouse where his beer-barrel stood. When he came back the boy drank eagerly, kissed the old lady again, and then set out with the bread and bacon in his hand; but Stephen Gimlet walked out with him, and after they had taken a few steps, he asked,

"Who is it, Bill, has got the cottage?"

"I don't know," answered the lad. "A tall, strong man he is, with large whiskers all the way under his chin, a little grayish. He met me last night when I took up a parcel from Mr. —— to Burton's inn, and asked if I came that way every day. I said I did not, but could come if he wanted anything."

"But you must know his name if you get his letters, Bill?" said Gimlet.

"No, I do not, but I soon can," answered the deformed youth. "He took me into the cottage, and made the lady give him some paper and a pen and ink, and wrote a note to the postmaster, and gave me a half-crown, and said I should have the same every week. The postmaster wrapped up the letters and things in a bit of paper, and I did not think to look at it; but I can soon find out if you want to know."

"No," answered Stephen Gimlet, drily, "I know already. Well, Bill, good-bye, I must go about my work," and so they parted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I BEG Captain Moreton's pardon; I left him running across a field in not the brightest possible night that ever shone. I should, at least, have taken him safely home before now, wherever that home might be, which would be indeed difficult to say; for the home of Captain Moreton was what people who pore over long lines of figures call a *variable quantity*. However, there was once, at least there is reported to have been once—for I do not take upon myself to answer for the fact—a certain young person called Galanthis. She was a maid-of-all-work in a very reputable Greek family, and was called as a witness in the famous *crim. con.* case of Amphitryon *versus* Jupiter. She proved herself very skilful in puzzling an examining counsel, and there is an old nonsensical story of her having been changed into a weasel to commemorate the various turnings and windings of her prevarications. Nevertheless, not this convenient Abigail, nor any of her pliant race, ever took more turnings and windings than did Captain Moreton on the night after his escape from his prison in the vestry. Every step of the country round he knew well, and up one narrow lane, through this small field, along that wood-path, by another short cut, he went, sometimes walking and sometimes running, till at length he came to a common of no very great extent, lying half-way, or nearly so, between the town of Tarningham and the house called Burton's Inn. The common was called Chandleigh Heath; and on the side next to the inn was the village of Chandleigh, while between the heath and Tarningham lay about two miles of well cultivated but not very populous fields and meadows. At an angle of the common a retired hosier of Chandleigh had built himself a cottage—a cottage suited to himself and his state—consisting of six rooms, all of minute size, and he had, moreover, planted himself a garden, in which roses strove with apple-trees and cherries. The hosier—as retired hosiers will very often do—died one day, and left the cottage to his nephew, a minor. The guardians strove to let the cottage furnished, but for upward of a year they strove in vain; its extremely retired situation was against it, till one day it was suddenly tenanted, and right glad were they to get a guinea a week, and ask no questions. It was to this retired cottage, then, of the retired hosier, that Captain Moreton's steps were ultimately bent, and as it had windows down to the ground on the garden side, he chose that side, and went in at the window, where, I forgot to remark, there were lights shining.

At a table in the room, with a foot upon a footstool, and a pillow behind her back, sat a lady whom we have before described; and certainly, to look at her face, handsome as it was, no one would have fancied there was a fierce and fiery spirit beneath, so weak and, I may venture to call it, lack-a-daisical was the expression.

"Heaven, Moreton, how you startled me!" cried the lady: "where have you been such a long time? You know I want society at night. It is only at night I am half-alive."

"Well," said Captain Moreton, with a laugh, "*I have* been half-dead and half-buried; for I have been down into a vault, and shut up in a vestry as a close prisoner. I only got out by wrenching off the bars. Nobody could see my face, however, so that is lucky; for they can but say I was looking at a register by candle-light, and the old sexton will not peach for his own sake."

"Still at those rash tricks, Moreton," said the lady; "it will end in your getting hanged, depend upon it. I have been writing a poem called 'The Rash Man' and I was just hanging him when you came in and startled me."

"My rash tricks, as you call them, got you a thousand a-year once," answered Moreton, sharply, "so, in pity, leave your stupid poetry, Charlotte, and listen to what I have to say."

"Stupid poetry!" exclaimed the lady, angrily "There was a time when you did not call it so; and as for the thousand a-year, it was more to save yourself than to serve me that you fancied that scheme. You know that I hated the pedantic boy, as virtuous as a young kid, and as pious as his grandmother's prayer-book. Nothing would have induced me to marry him if you had not represented—"

"Well, never mind all that," answered Moreton, interrupting her. "We have something else to think of now, Charlotte. I don't know that it would not be better for me to be off, after all."

"Well, I am ready to go whenever you like," replied the lady. "I am sure it is not very pleasant to stay in this place, seeing nobody and hearing nothing; without opera, or concert, or coffee-house, or any thing. I shall be very glad to go."

"Ay, ay, but that is a different matter," said Captain Moreton, considerately. "I said it would be perhaps better for me to be off; but I am quite sure it will be better for you to stay."

The lady looked at him for a moment or two with the eyes of a tiger. If she had had a striped or spotted skin upon her back one would have expected her to spring at his throat the next minute; but she had acquired a habit of commanding her passions to a certain point, beyond which, they indeed became totally ungovernable, but which was not yet attained; and she contented herself with giving Captain Moreton one of those *coups de patte* with which she sometimes treated him. "So, Moreton," she said, "you think that you can go away and leave me to take care of myself, as you did some time ago; but you are mistaken, my good friend. I have become wiser now, and I certainly shall not suffer you."

"How will you stop me?" asked her companion, turning sharply upon her.

"As to stopping you," she replied, with a sneer, "I do not know that I can. You are a strong man and I am a weak woman, and in a tussle you will get the better; but I could bring you back, Moreton, you know, if I did not stop you."

"How!" demanded he again, looking fiercely at her.

"By a magistrate's warrant, and half-a-dozen constables," answered the lady. "You do not think I have had so much experience of your amiable ways for nothing, or that I have not taken care to have proofs of a good many little

things that would make you very scarce in any, country but one of outlaws and pirates."

"Do you mean to say that you will destroy me, woman!" exclaimed Captain Moreton.

"Not exactly destroy you," replied his fair companion, "though you would make a fine criminal under the beam. I have not seen an execution for I do not know how long, and it is a fine sight, after all—better than all the tragedies that ever were written. It is no fun seeing men kill each other in jest: one knows that they come to life again as soon as the curtain falls; but once hanging over the drop, or lying on the guillotine, there's no coming to life any more. I should like to see you hanging, Moreton, when you are hanged. You would hang very well, I dare say."

She spoke in the quietest, most sugary tone possible, with a slight smile upon her lip, and amused herself while she did so in sketching with the pen and ink a man under a beam with a noose round his neck. Captain Moreton gazed at her meanwhile, with his teeth hard shut, and not the most placable countenance in the world, as she brought vividly up before his imagination all those things which crime is too much accustomed and too willing to forget.

"And you, Charlotte, you would do this!" he exclaimed, at length: "but it is all nonsense; and how you ever can talk of such things I cannot imagine, when I merely spoke of going myself and leaving you for a short time, for your own good."

"For my own good! Oh, yes; I have heard all that before, more than twelve years ago," replied the lady. "I yielded to your notions of my own good, then, and much good has come of it, to me, at least. So do not talk of ever separating your fate from mine again, Moreton; for were you to attempt it, I would do as I have said, depend upon it."

"It was your own good I thought about," replied Captain Moreton, bitterly, "and that you will soon see when you hear the whole. Do you not think if Lenham were to find out that you are living here with me there would soon be suits in the ecclesiastical courts for divorce and all the rest?"

"Oh, you know, we talked about all that before," replied the lady, "and took our precautions. You are here as my earliest friend, assisting me to regain my rights, nothing more. All that was settled long ago, and I see no reason for beginning it all over again."

"But there is a reason," answered Captain Moreton, "as you would have heard before now if you would have let me speak; but you are so diabolically hasty and violent. I brought you the best news you could have, if you would but listen."

"Indeed!" said the lady, looking up from the pleasant sketch she was finishing with an expression of greater interest, "what may that be?"

"Why, simply, that Lenham has proposed to Miss Slingsby," replied Captain Moreton, "and they are to be married directly—as soon as that fellow, Wittingham, is out of all danger."

Her eyes flashed at the intelligence, and her lip curled with a triumphant smile as she inquired, "Where did you hear it? Who told you? Are you sure?"

"Quite," answered Moreton, "I had it from old Slattery, the apothecary, who knows the secrets of all the houses round. He told it to me as a thing quite certain."

"Then I have him! Then I have him!" exclaimed his companion, joyfully; "Oh, I will make him drink the very dregs of a bitterer cup than ever he has held to my lips."

"But you must be very careful," said Captain Moreton, "not the slightest indiscretion — not the slightest hint, remember, or all is lost."

"I will be careful," she replied, "but yet all cannot be lost even if he were to discover that I am alive. He has made the proposal to one woman when he is already married to another That would be disgrace enough to blast and wither him like a leaf in the winter. I know him well enough for that. For the first time he has given me the power of torturing him, and I will work that engine till his cold heart cracks, let him do what he will."

"Well, this was the reason I thought it would be better for me to be off for a short time," said Captain Moreton, "though you must remain here."

"I don't see that," cried the lady, "I won't have it."

Her companion had fallen into a fit of thought, however, as soon as he had uttered the last words, and he did not seem to attend to her. His thoughts, indeed, were busy with a former part of their conversation. He felt that he was, as she said, in her power, and he saw very well how sweetly and delicately she was inclined to use power when she did possess it. He therefore asked himself if it might not be as well to put some check upon her violence before it hurried her into anything that could not be repaired; for although Captain Moreton was fond of a little vengeance himself, yet he loved security better, and thought it would be poor consolation for being hanged that he had spoiled all her fine schemes. He was still debating this point in his own mind, when finding that he did not answer, she said,

"Do you hear! I say I will not have it, and you had better not talk of it any more, for if I take it into my head that you are trying to get off and leave me here, I will take very good care that your first walk shall be into jail."

"In which case," said Captain Moreton, coldly, "I would, by one word, break the bond between you and Lenham, and send you to prison too. You think that I am totally in your power, madam; but let me tell you that you are in mine also. Our confidence, it is true, has not been mutual, but our secrets are so."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the lady, turning deadly pale.

"I will tell you," replied her companion. "What I mean may be soon hinted, so that you can understand. When I first became acquainted with you, my fair friend, you were twenty years of age. There were events which happened when you were eighteen that you have always thought comfortably hidden in your own bosom and that of one other. Let me now tell you that they have never been concealed from me. You understand me, I see by your face, so no more of this. I shall not go, because you do not wish it, and I proposed it only for your good; but now let us have some brandy-and-

water, for the night is wonderfully cold for the season."

The lady made no reply, but sat looking down at the table with her cheek still white, and Moreton got up and rang the bell. A woman-servant appeared, received his orders, and went away, and then turning to his companion, he pulled her cheek familiarly, saying,

"Come, Charlotte, let us have no more of all this; we had better get on well together. Have any of the servants been into the room to-night since I left you?"

The lady looked up with a sort of bewildered and absent air, saying,

"No, I think not — let me see. No, no. I have been sitting writing and sleeping. I fell asleep for an hour, and then I wrote till you came back. No one has been in, I am very sure."

"While you were asleep they might," said Moreton, thoughtfully.

"No, no," she answered, "I should have heard them instantly; I wake in a moment, you know, with the least sound. Nobody has been in the room I will swear."

"Then you can swear, too, that I never left it," answered Moreton, laughing; "I mean that I have been here or hereabout all night, in case it should be needed."

The lady did not seem at all shocked at the proposal, for she had no great opinion of the sanctity of oaths, and when the servant returned with all that Captain Moreton had demanded, he asked her sharply,

"Where were you, Kitty, when I rang about an hour ago?"

"Lord, sir," replied the woman, "I have only run across to ask why they had not sent my beer."

"Well, I wish you would take some other time for going on such errands," pettishly replied Captain Moreton, and there the subject dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Beauchamp took care to be back at Tarningham Park a full hour and a half before dinner-time; but schemes and purposes of making love or a declaration at a certain place and time are never successful. Continually they are put off, and very often they are forced on by circumstances, and although there is no event of life perhaps in which the happy moment is more important, it is seldom met with or chosen. Such was the case in the present instance: Sir John Slingsby played third on one occasion, Mrs. Clifford on another, and when Mary, dear considerate girl, after breaking in for a moment, made a very reasonable excuse to retire, the dressing-bell rang as she closed the door, and Beauchamp, knowing that he could not detain Miss Slingsby more than five minutes, would not attempt to crowd all he had to say into so short a space. He was resolved to say something, however, and as Isabella was about to leave him he stopped her, asking if she knew *that* her father had invited him to pass the *night* there.

"Oh, of course," answered his fair companion in a gay tone, "you do not think he would let you go to pass the hours of darkness among the Goths and Vandals of Tarningham. He would be afraid of your life being attempted You do not think of going?"

"I have accepted his invitation," answered her lover, "because I have several things to talk over with Sir John, and on one subject also with you, dear lady. Will you give me some time in the course of to-morrow—a few minutes—nay, perhaps, an hour alone?"

Isabella colored and looked away; but she was thankful for a reprieve from immediate agitation, and she replied in a low tone, "Certainly—but I must go and dress, or my maid will be impatient."

But Beauchamp still detained her for a moment, "You are an early riser, I think," he said; "will you take a walk before breakfast, down toward the stream? Nay, Isabella, why should you hesitate? Remember, I have a history to give."

"I hope not a sad one," answered Isabella gaily, "for I think I should be easily moved to tears just now, and I must not return with my eyes red—nay, Beauchamp, let me go or I shall cry now."

He released the hand he had taken instantly, and Miss Slingsby took a step away, but looked round, and returning at once, gave it back again, saying, more gravely, "What is the use of my long history?—and yet it had better be too. I will take a walk with you when you like, for I must speak with you too—but not now: there's no time. So farewell for the present," and she left him.

The dinner passed more quietly than Sir John Slingsby's dinners usually did. The baronet's spirits, which had risen immensely after the first pressure was taken off, fell again during the course of the day; and for the first time in his life, perhaps, he was grave and thoughtful throughout the evening. Isabella had her store of meditations, and so had Mary Clifford. The mother of the latter was calm and sedate as usual, and Doctor Miles, dry and sententious; so that Beauchamp, happy in what he had done, and happy in the confidence of love, was now the gayest of the party. Thus the evening passed away, though not sadly, anything but very merrily; and the whole party retired early to rest.

The next morning early, Beauchamp rose and went down to the drawing-room; but there was nobody there. One of the housemaids just passed out as he entered, and he waited for about a quarter of an hour with some impatience, gazing forth from the windows over the dewy slopes of the park, and thinking in his heart that Isabella was somewhat long. Now, to say the truth, she was longer than she might have been, for Isabella had been up and dressed some time; but there was a sort of hesitation, a timidity, a weak feeling of alarm, perhaps, which she had never known before. She shrank from the idea of going down to meet him, knowing that he was waiting for her. It would seem like a secret arrangement between them, she thought, and she took fright at the very idea. Then again, on the other hand, she fancied he might imagine she was treating him ill not to go, after the sort of promise she had made; then he had been so kind, so generous,

so noble, that she could not treat him ill, nay, not even by the appearance of a caprice. That settled the matter; and, after about a quarter of an hour's debating with herself, down she went. Her heart beat terribly; but Isabella was a girl, who, with all her gayety and apparent lightness, had great command over herself; and that command in her short life had been often tried. She paused then for a moment or two at the door of the drawing-room, struggled with and overcame her agitation, and then went in with a face cleared, a light step, and a cheerful air. Her hand was in Beauchamp's in a moment, and after a few of the ordinary words of a first morning meeting, he asked, "Will you take a walk, dear Isabella, or shall we remain here?"

"Do you not see my bonnet on my head and shawl over my arm?" she said in a gay tone; "who would stay in the house on such a bright morning as this when they have a free hour before them?"

"Come, then," he answered; and in two minutes more they were walking away together toward the wooded hill through which they had passed with Mary Clifford and Hayward about three weeks before.

It is strange how silent people are when they have much to say to each other. For the first quarter of a mile neither Beauchamp nor Isabella said a word; but at length, when the boughs began to wave over their heads, he laid his hand gently upon hers, and said,

"I think there can be no misunderstanding, Isabella, as to the words I spoke the night before last. Nor must you think me possessed of a very eager vanity if I have construed your reply as favorable to myself. I know you too well not to feel assured that you would not have so answered me had you been inclined to decide against my hopes. But yet, Isabella, I will not and do not consider you as plighted to me by the words then spoken, till—"

"That is just what I was going to say," replied Isabella, much to Beauchamp's consternation.

"I wished much to speak with you for the very purpose of assuring you that I do not consider you in the least bound by what you then said."

She spoke with a great effort for calmness, but there was an anxious trembling of the voice which betrayed her agitation, and in the end she paused for breath.

"Hear me, hear me," she said, as she saw Beauchamp about to reply; "since that night everything has changed. I then thought my father embarrassed, but I did not know him to be ruined. I looked upon you as Mr. Beauchamp; I now find you of a rank superior to our own, one who may well look to rank and fortune in his bride. You, too, were ignorant of the sad state of my poor father's affairs. It is but fair, then, it is but right that I should set you entirely free from any implied engagement made in a moment of generous thoughtlessness; and I do so entirely, nor will ever for a moment think you do aught amiss if you consider better, more wisely, I will say, of this matter; and let all feelings between us subside into kind friendship on your part, and gratitude and esteem upon mine."

"You set me free!" said Beauchamp, repeating her words with a smile, "how can you! My dear Isabella, this is treacherous of you; and to talk of setting me free even while you are binding me heart and spirit to you more strongly than ever! Not one more word upon that subject, my beloved girl. You must not teach me that you think I am so sordid, so pitiful a being to let a consideration of mere fortune, where I have more than plenty, weigh with me for one moment—I am yours, Isabella, if you will take me—yours forever, loving you deeply, truly, ay, and understanding you fully, too, which so many do not: but it is I who must set you free, dear girl; and I will not ask, I will not receive any promise till you have heard the story of my past life."

"But you must have it," said Isabella, raising her dewey eyes with a smile, "these things must ever be mutual, my lord. I am yours or you are not mine. But Beauchamp, we are coquetting with each other; you tell me you love; I, like all foolish girls, believe. Surely there is no need of any other story but that. Do you suppose, Beauchamp, that after all I have seen of you, after all you have done, I can imagine for one moment, that there is anything in the past which could make me change my opinion or withhold my hand? No, no, a woman's confidence, when it is given, is unbounded—at least, mine is so in you, and I need not hear any tale of past days before I bind myself to you by that tie, which, to every right mind, must seem as strong as a vow."

"Thanks, dearest girl, thanks!" answered her lover, "but yet you must hear the story; not from my lips, perhaps, for it will be better communicated to you by another; and I have commissioned good Doctor Miles to tell you all, for I would not have it said or though thereafter, by your father or by any one, that I have had even the slightest concealment from you."

"Not to me, not to me!" said Isabella, eagerly, and then added, laughing, "I will not listen to the good doctor; if there is anything that must be said, let it be told to my father."

Beauchamp smiled, and shook his head. "You will think me sadly obstinate and exacting," he said, "but yet you must grant me as a favor, Isabella, that which I ask. Listen to our worthy friend, the rector. His tale will not be very long; for many sad things may be told in a few words, and an account of events which have imbittered my whole existence till within the few last days can be given in five minutes. I will tell Sir John myself, but the reason why I so earnestly wish you to hear all, too, is, that no man can ever judge rightly of the finer feelings of a woman's heart. We cannot tell how things which affect us in one way, may affect her; and as there can be no perfect love without perfect confidence, you must share all that is in my bosom, in the past as well as in the future."

"Well," said Isabella, smiling, "as to obey is to be one of my vows, Beauchamp, I may as well begin my task at once. I will listen to the good doctor, though I confess it is unwillingly; but still, whatever he says, it will make no difference."

Beauchamp replied not to what she said; but

the conversation took another and a sweeter turn, and as the words they spoke were certainly not intended to be repeated to the world, I will not repeat them. Time flies swiftly when Love's pinions are added to his own, and Isabella colored when, passing the windows of the breakfast-room on their return, she saw the whole party assembled and Mary occupying her usual post. While Beauchamp entered and took the first fire of the enemy, she ran up to her room to lay aside her walking-dress; but Sir John was merciless, and the moment she came in assailed her with an exclamation of "Ha, ha, young lady. Early walks and morning rambles, making all your friends believe you have eloped. I hope you have had a pleasant walk, Isabella, with this noble lord. Pray, were you talking politics?"

"Profound!" answered his daughter, with a gay air, though she could not keep the blood from mounting into her cheek.

"And what conclusion did you come to on the state of affairs in general?" continued Sir John, looking from Isabella to Beauchamp. "Is there to be peace or war?"

"First a truce," answered Beauchamp, "and then a lasting peace, the terms of which are to be settled by plenipotentiaries hereafter."

"Oh!" said Sir John Slingsby, now for the first time comprehending how far matters had proceeded between his daughter and his guest; and giving up the jest, he remained in thought for some time.

When breakfast was over and the party had risen, Beauchamp at once took his host's arm, saying, in a low tone, "Before any other business, I must crave a few moments' conversation, Sir John."

"Certainly, certainly," said Sir John Slingsby aloud; and while Mary Clifford put her arm through Isabella's, with a heart full of kindly wishes and hopes for her cousin, the baronet led his friend into the library, and their conference commenced. As might be expected, Beauchamp met no coldness on the part of Sir John Slingsby; but after a hearty shake of the hand, an eulogium well deserved upon his daughter, and an expression of his entire satisfaction and consent, the baronet's ear was claimed for the tale of Beauchamp's previous life. It did not produce the effect he expected; for although he had some acquaintance with Sir John's character and habits, he certainly did not anticipate the bursts of laughter with which the old gentleman listened to events which had rendered him miserable. But there are two sides to everything, and Sir John had all his life taken the risible point of view of all subjects. He laughed, then heartily declared it an exceedingly good joke, but no marriage at all; and it was only when he found that counsel learned in the law had pronounced it to be valid, that he began to look at the matter more seriously. As soon, however, as he heard the intelligence which Beauchamp had lately received from Paris, he started up from his chair, exclaiming, "Well, then she is dead, and that's an end of it. So now I congratulate you, my dear lord, and say that the sooner the marriage is over the better. I shall tell Isabella so, and she has no affectations, thank God. But come, let us go to her. I must kiss her and give her my blessing."

The whole conversation had occupied nearly an hour, and when Sir John Slingsby and Beauchamp entered the drawing-room, they found it only tenanted by Isabella and good Doctor Miles. Her face was uncommonly serious, one might say sad, and the worthy clergyman was not gay.

"What is it, doctor?" cried Sir John Slingsby, "you look as grave as ten judges. Whose cat is dead?"

"James Thomson's," said Dr. Miles, drily, "and thereupon, I wish to speak with you, Sir John, for I suppose you will attend the funeral."

"You are a funny fellow, Doctor Miles," replied the baronet; "I'll talk to you in a minute: but I must first give my daughter a kiss—the first she has had this morning, for she played truant, and is going to do so again." So saying, he pressed his lips upon Isabella's cheek, and whispered a few words that made her color vary, and then, linking his arm in that of Dr. Miles, led him from the room, leaving his daughter and her lover alone together.

Isabella's face looked sadder and graver than Beauchamp had ever seen it; and to say the truth, his heart began to beat somewhat uneasily, especially as for a moment or two she did not speak, but remained with her eyes bent down. "Isabella," he said at length, "Isabella, you look very sad."

"How can I be otherwise, Beauchamp," asked the fair girl, holding out her hand to him, "when I have just heard a narrative of events which have imbittered all your life! I grieve for you very truly, indeed, and sympathize with you as much as a woman can do, with one placed in circumstances in which she could never find herself. But indeed, Beauchamp, it shall be the pleasant task of my whole life to make you forget these past sorrows."

His hand clasped more warmly upon hers as she spoke, and in the end he sat down by her on the sofa; his arm glided round her waist, and his lips were pressed upon hers. She had not the slightest touch of Miss Biron about her, and though she blushed a little, she was not horrified or shocked in the least.

"Then you do not blame me?" he said, "and notwithstanding all this, you are mine, dearest girl?"

"Why should I blame you?" said Isabella, with a smile, "you were not the person in fault—except, perhaps, in having drunk too much wine once in your life; and I suppose that is what all young men do, and old men too, very often; but the punishment has certainly far exceeded the offence; and as to being yours, Beauchamp, you know that I am—or at least will be when you wish it."

Beauchamp took her at her word, and that evening there were grand consultations upon many things. Sir John Slingsby was a hasty man, and he liked everything done hastily. Love or murder, strife or matrimony, he would have it over in a hurry. Isabella, Mrs. Clifford, Mary, were all overruled, and as Beauchamp submitted to his fate as determined by Sir John without a murmur, the marriage was appointed for that day fortnight.

CHAPTER XXXV.

How quietly one sits down to tell events in a tale like this, which made a vast sensation at the time they happened. One reason, I believe, why half the romances and almost all the histories in the world are so exceedingly dull, is, that the people who write them do not believe that the things they record actually happened — no, not even in their histories. They have a faint idea that it may have been so—some notion that such matters did very likely take place; but not that firm conviction, that deep and life-like impression of the transactions which they relate, that gives vivid identity to the narrative. There is always a doubt about history, which hangs round and fetters the mind of the writer, and is even increased by the accuracy of his research. There is some link in the evidence wanting, same apparent partiality in the contemporary chronicler, some prejudice on the part of the near teller of the tale, which casts a suspicion over all. We cannot cross-examine men who died a thousand years ago, and we sit down and ask with Pilate, "What is truth!" The romance-writer has a great advantage. He has truth within himself. All the witnesses are there in his own bosom. Experience supplies the facts which observation has collected, and imagination arrays and adorns them. In fact, I believe that, philosophically speaking, a romance is much truer than a history. If it be not, it will produce but little effect upon the mind of the reader. The author, however, must not sit down to write it coolly, as a mere matter of composition. He must believe it, he must feel it, he must think of nothing but telling the truth—ay, reader, the truth of the creatures of his own imagination. It must be all truth to him, and he must give that truth to the world. As they act, think, speak, in his own mind, so must they act, think, and speak to the public; and according to his own powers of imagining the truth, regarding certain characters, so will he tell a truthful tale or a mere cold fiction.

All the events which had taken place in Tarningham Park caused less bustle, though, perhaps, more profound sensations among the inmates of Sir John Slingsby's house than they did in the town and neighborhood. How Mrs. Atterbury of the Golden Star—it was a hosier's shop—did marvel at all that had occurred! and how Miss Henrietta Julia Tomlinson, the dressmaker, did first shudder at the thought of Sir John Slingsby's total ruin, and then rejoice with a glow of joy at the idea of Miss Slingsby's marriage to a peer *of the realm*. Then, again, there was a little blear-eyed woman with white cheeks, slightly marked with the small-pox, and a sharp nose of red, who went about the town with an alarm-bell in her mouth, spreading all manner of stories regarding Sir John Slingsby and the whole of the family at Tarningham Park. Miss Slingsby was actually sold, she said, and the money given had gone to clear the baronet of a part of his incumbrances; but she hinted that there was a heavy load behind, and declared decidedly that she should not like to have money out upon such security. This lady proved an invaluable ally to Mr. Wharton; for that gentleman did not stomach his disappointment comfortably. He looked upon himself as very much ill treated, inasmuch as he had not been permitted to fleece Sir John Slingsby down to the skin. He made his own tale good, however, quietly, assured everybody that notwithstanding his own heavy claim, and the great likelihood that there had existed of his losing many thousands of pounds, he should never have thought of proceeding against his poor friend if he had not heard that Mr. Wittingham had determined to arrest him for that heavy debt. A person calling himself Lord Lenham, he said, had come to Sir John's assistance, indeed, but he much feared that no assistance would avail; and perhaps Miss Slingsby, though she was such a cunning manœuverer, might find herself mistaken, for there was something suspicious, very suspicious, about some parts of the affair. He did not wish to say anything unpleasant, but there was something suspicious, very suspicious, and people might mark his words if they liked.

People did mark his words; and all set to work to inquire what the suspicious circumstances were: so that, what between inquiries and answers, and hints, and inuendoes, and suspicions, and surmises, and gossiping suggestions, and doubtful anecdotes, and pure lies, the little town of Tarningham was kept in a state of most exceeding chatter and bustle for several days and all day long, except at the feeding time, when the streets returned to their silent tranquillity, and not a soul was to be seen but poor little deformed Billy Lamb, first carrying out his tray of foaming tankards, and then plodding up the hill with a packet of letters and newspapers. As it is a fine day, and those large heavy floating clouds give frequently a pleasant shade, I do not see why we should not follow him up to Chandleigh Heath. How quick the little fellow's long, disproportioned legs carry his small round turkey-shaped body. But Billy Lamb must be going to visit his mother after he has fulfilled his errand, or he would not walk so fast this warm noontide. It is a round of six miles, yet he will do it in an hour and a quarter. On my life he is already on the heath. One can hardly keep up with him; and now he is at the cottage garden-gate. What strange things poetical ideas are! and how unlike reality! The poetical idea of a cottage, for instance, is rarely very like truth. We take it and cover it with roses and surround it with flowering shrubs. That may be all very well, for there are such cottages; but then we strip it of all coarse attributes of life: we take away the evils of poverty, and vulgarity, and vice, and leave it nothing but content, and natural refinement, and calm innocence. It is neither the scene of struggles against fortune, cold, fireless, cheerless, often foodless, with want, smoke, and a dozen of children, nor the prim, false rosewood, bad piano-forted abode of retired slopsellerism, nor the snug-embowered, back-lane residence of the kept mistress. There is no misery and repining there, no bad English and gin-and-water, no quiet cabriolets and small tigers, black eyes, ringlets, fluttery, finery, and falsehood. It is all love and roses—quarter of an acre of Paradise with a small house upon it. Such is the poetical idea of a cottage.

Such, however, was by no means the sort of

cottage, the garden-gate of which was now approached by Billy Lamb. It had been built by a coarse, vulgar man, was inhabited by an arrant scoundrel; and there the arrant scoundrel was, walking in his small domain with the lady whom we have more than once mentioned. He looked sharply round when he heard the garden-gate squeak; but was perfectly composed at the sight of the little pot-boy. The letters and papers he took, and looked at the covers, and then, with an indifferent air, asked,

"Well, my lad, what news is stirring in your little town?"

"Not much, sir," said Billy Lamb; "only about the marriage of the lord and Miss Slingsby."

The lady's eyes flashed unpleasantly, and her companion inquired,

"Well, what about that?"

"Nothing, sir, but that it is to be on Monday week, they say," replied Billy Lamb; "and all the people are as busy as possible about it, some talking, and others working hard to get all ready; for Miss Isabella will have everything she can made in Tarningham."

"D—— badly made they will be," answered the gentleman; "and what is the lord about?"

"Oh, nothing that I know of, sir," rejoined the pot-boy, "only all his people and things are coming down, carriages and horses, and that. The yard is quite full of them."

"And so it is to be on Monday week, is it?" rejoined Captain Moreton; "well, the sooner the better."

"Yes, yes," cried the lady, "and he may have guests at his marriage that he does not expect."

She spoke with an ungovernable burst of feeling, before her male companion could stop her; and the boy suddenly raised his clear, intelligent eyes to her countenance, discovering there legible traces of all the furious passions that were at work in her bosom.

"Oh, yes," cried Moreton, endeavoring to give another turn to her indiscreet words, and pressing her arm tight as a hint to hold her tongue; "doubtless the whole town and neighborhood will be there to see."

"Oh, dear, yes, sir," answered Billy Lamb; "though they say they wish it to be quite private. Good morning, sir," and he walked away with a careless air, closing the garden-gate behind him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed the worthy captain, laughing aloud; "this is capital, Charlotte. You see our trout has bit at the fly."

"And I have got the hook in his jaws," said the lady, bitterly.

"Yes," rejoined Captain Moreton; "and it is now high time that we should consider how we may play our fish to the best advantage. First of all, of course, the marriage must take place, or he will slip off your hook, my fair lady: but after that comes the game: and I think it would be much better to make no great noise even afterward, but to give him proof positive of your existence; and, by working upon his apprehensions, and laying him under contribution, we may drain him dry as hay."

"I will have revenge," cried the lady, fiercely; "I care for naught else, but I will have revenge; I will make him a public scoff and a scorn; I will torture him in a court of justice; I will break his proud heart under the world's contempt—try not to stop me, Moreton, for I will have revenge. You think of nothing but money; but vengeance will be sweeter to me than all the gold of earth."

"There are different sorts of revenge," answered Moreton, quietly; "and, depend upon it, that which I propose is much more terrible. Once he is married, and quietly informed that you are still living, think what pleasant tortures he would undergo, year after year, as long as you pleased. You would stand behind him like an unseen, but not unfelt fate, shadowing his whole existence with a dark cloud. Every hour he would live in terror of discovery, and shame, and punishment. He would never see a stranger, or receive a letter, without the hasty fear rising up in his heart. He would picture to himself the breaking up of all his domestic joys; he would see 'bastard' written on the face of every child; and his heart would wither and shrivel up, I tell you, like a fallen leaf in the autumn. Sleep would be banished from his bed; appetite from his table; cheerfulness from his hearth; peace from his whole life. Even the sweet cup of love itself would turn to poison on his lips; and our vengeance would be permanent, perpetual, undecaying. This is the sort of revenge for me!"

"It does not suit me!" cried the lady; "it does not suit me; I will have it at once; I will see him crushed and withering; I will feast my eyes upon his misery. No, no; such slow, silent vengeance for the cold-blooded and the calm. I tell you, you shall not stop me," she continued, fiercely, seeing that he listened to her with a degree of chilling tranquillity, which she did not love. "You may take what course you will, but I will take mine."

"Excellent!" said Captain Moreton, sneeringly; "excellent, my gentle Charlotte; but let me just hint, that we must act together. You can do nothing without me; I can stop it all at a word. Pray, recollect a little hint I gave you the other night; and now that the moment is come for drawing the greatest advantages from that which we have been so long laboring to attain, do not drive me to spoil all your plans, by attempting to spoil mine."

"Ha!" said the lady; "ha!" but she proceeded no further; and, sinking into herself, walked up and down musingly for several minutes, at the end of which time she began to hum snatches of an Italian song. Captain Moreton, who knew well her variable humors, thought that the mood was changed; but he was mistaken. He had planted that, of which he was to reap the fruit ere long.

In the mean time, the boy Billy Lamb, having closed, as we have said, the garden-gate, lingered for a moment, and then took his way across the common in the direction of Stephen Gimlet's house, which was at the distance of about a mile and a half. He went at a quick pace, but two or three times he stopped, and thought deeply. He was an observing boy, and saw and heard more than people imagined. He was a boy of very strong feelings also, and he had conceived an affection for Beauchamp, which made anything that touched that gentleman a matter of deep interest to him. Thus,

the first time he stopped he repeated to himself the incautious words the lady had uttered, syllable for syllable. "He may have guests at his marriage he does not expect," said the boy, meditating. "She looked mighty fierce too. I wonder what she meant? No good, I'm sure, by the way her eyes went."

He then walked on again about half a mile farther; and this time it was a narrow lane he halted in. "You see, our trout has bit at the fly!" repeated Billy Lamb, evidently showing that he had heard a part, at least, of what had passed after he left the garden; "that trout he talked of must be Mr. Beauchamp — that's to say, the lord. I can't make it out. I'll tell Stephen: he seems to know a good deal about them all; or that good, kind Captain Hayward. He's a great friend of this lord's, and will let him know; for they mean him harm, or I am mistaken."

When he reached Stephen Gimlet's cottage, however, and opened the door, he found the outer room only tenanted by the little boy, who was standing upon a stool, looking over the pages of a large old Bible, illustrated with some grotesque engravings, in which Adam and Eve, very naked, indeed; the serpent, with a human head in large curls, very much like that of a Chancery barrister; the same personage, in the conventional form of a satyr, together with a number of angels; and Noah's ark with all its beasts, figured conspicuously.

In turning his head sharply round to see who it was that came in, the child let fall the leaves that were in his hand upon those opposite; and instantly out flew an old time-stained scrap of paper, which made a gyration in the air before it reached the floor. The boy instantly darted after it, and picked it up before Billy Lamb could see what it was. The pot-boy would then have taken it out of his hand; but the other would not give it up, saying, with a screaming tone,

"No, no, no! it is granny's;" and the same moment the voice of Widow Lamb was heard from the inner room, demanding,

"Who have you got with you there, child?"

"It is I, mother," answered the deformed boy. "Is Stephen in? I want to speak with him."

"No, my poor William," answered the old lady, coming forth, and embracing her son; "he has been out a long while."

"Then, is Captain Hayward up stairs?" asked the youth.

"He is out too," answered the widow. "He was out yesterday for the first time, and to-day we have had a grand party here, all the ladies in the carriage, and Mr. Beauchamp walking. Mrs. Clifford came so kindly to ask after me. And so they persuaded Captain Hayward to go out with them. That is to say, Captain Hayward and Miss Mary, and Miss Slingsby with my Lord Lenham. They've gone all up to the Hall; Mrs. Clifford in the carriage, and the rest on foot; and I should not wonder, Bill, if Captain Hayward did not come back here again!"

"That is unfortunate!" exclaimed Billy Lamb; "I wanted so much to speak with him, or Stephen."

"Why, what is the matter, my dear boy?" said his mother; "if you will tell me what it is, I will let Stephen know when he comes back."

"Why, the matter is this," answered the deformed boy. "Stephen was asking me a great deal the other day about the gentleman who has got the cottage on Chandleigh Heath, and what his name is. Now, I have found out his name, and it is Captain Moreton."

"Have naught to do with him, Bill!" cried the widow; "have naught to do with him! He is a base villain, and has ruined all who have had any connection with him."

"Why, I have naught to do with him, mother," answered Billy Lamb, "but carrying him up his letters and newspapers; but I heard something there to-day that I thought Stephen might like to know; for I am sure he and the lady with him are plotting things to hurt this lord, who was so kind to poor Ste."

"Ha! what did you hear?" asked the old lady; "that concerns me more than Stephen, for I know more about that lady."

"She does not seem a very sweet one," answered the boy; "for when I told the captain about Lord Lenham going to be married to Sir John's daughter, she looked as if she had a great inclination to scratch somebody's eyes out."

"Going to be married to Sir John's daughter!" exclaimed Widow Lamb. "Bill, are you sure that's true?"

"Quite sure. Haven't you heard of it?" said the boy. "All the people in Tarningham know it quite well; and a quantity of things are ordered."

Widow Lamb mused gravely for several minutes; and then, shaking her head, said in a low voice, as if to herself:

"I begin to understand. Well, what more did you hear, Billy?"

"Why, after a little talk," said the boy, "when they heard that the marriage was to be on Monday-week, the lady cried out, 'He will have guests at his wedding that he does not expect!' and her eyes looked just like two live coals. She did not say much more; for the captain tried to stop her; but, as soon as I had got through the garden-gate, I heard him laugh quite heartily, and say out loud, 'This is capital, Charlotte; you see our trout has bit at the fly.'"

"And so, they have been angling for him, have they?" said Widow Lamb; "what more, my boy?"

"Why, I did not like to stop and listen, mother," said the poor deformed boy; "but I thought it could not be all right; and, therefore, I made up my mind that I would tell Stephen, or Captain Hayward, or somebody; for that Mr. Beauchamp, who has turned out a lord, was always very kind to me when he was at the inn, and gave me many a shilling; and I should not like them to do him any harm, if I can stop it; and I could see they were wonderfully bitter against him, by the way of that lady and her husband."

"He is not her husband," said Widow Lamb, with a scoff; "but that matters not, Bill; you are a good boy, and have done quite right; and, perhaps, it may save much mischief; so that will be a comfort to you, my son. I'll tell Stephen all about it, when he comes back; and

we'll talk the thing over together this very night, and see what can be done. It is strange, very strange, Billy, how things turn out in this world. Great people do not always know, when they do a kind action to poor people, and humble people like ourselves, that they may be helping those who will have the best means of helping them again. Now, from what you have told me, Bill, I may have the means of helping this good lord from getting himself into a terrible scrape. I am sure he does not know all, my boy; I am sure a great number of things have been concealed from him; and your telling me may set it all to rights."

"Well, that's pleasant," answered the deformed boy. "It makes one very lightsome, mother, to feel that one has been able to do anything to serve so good a gentleman; and so I shall go home quite gay."

"That you may, Bill," replied his mother; "but bring me up news of anything you may hear; for you can't tell what may be of consequence, and what may not."

The boy promised to obey, and went away whistling one of the peculiar melodies, of which he was so fond; in which, though the air was gay, there was ever an occasional tone of sadness, perhaps proceeding from a profound, though concealed, impression of melancholy regarding his corporeal infirmities.

It was late in the evening before Stephen Gimlet returned; but then Widow Lamb entered into instant consultation with him upon what she had heard; and their conference lasted far on into the night.

The next morning early the gamekeeper got his breakfast, and then putting on his hat, said,

"Now, I'll go, Goody Lamb. I shall be very awkward about it, I dare say, but I don't mind; for he will find out in the end, that it is for his own good I talk to him about such disagreeable things. So, here goes."

"You had better wait awhile, Stephen," said the widow; "most likely he is not up yet; for it is not seven o'clock."

"It will be well nigh eight before I am there," answered Stephen Gimlet, "and I can wait at the house till he is ready."

Thus saying, he walked away, and trudged on over the fields till he came into Tarningham Park, by the road which leads over the hill just above the house. He did not follow the carriage-drive, however, but took the shorter path through the chestnut-trees, and in about ten minutes after entering the gates, saw the house. There was a traveling-carriage standing before the hall-door, which was at the distance of a quarter of a mile, and hardly had Stephen Gimlet's eyes rested on it for an instant, when a servant got up behind, and the post-boy laid his whip lightly over his horses. The carriage rolled on, and the gamekeeper followed it with his eyes with a feeling of misgiving; but he pursued his way to the house notwithstanding, and entering by the offices, asked the first servant he met, if he could speak for a moment with Lord Lenham.

"That you can't, Ste," answered the man, "for he has just gone off to London. He will not be down for a week either, they say; and then comes the wedding, my lad, so that you have a poor chance of talking with him till the honeymoon is over."

Stephen Gimlet looked down perplexed; and then, after a moment's thought, he said, "Ay, there is to be a wedding, is there? I heard something about it. He is a kind good gentleman as ever lived, and I hope he may be very happy."

"I dare say he will now," said the footman, "for our young lady is fit to be the wife of a king, that she is. But as one marriage made him very unhappy for a long time, it is but fit that another should cure it."

"Then do you mean to say he has been married before?" asked the gamekeeper.

"Ay, that he has," replied the servant, "none of our people, not even Sir John's gentleman, nor any one, knew a word about it till I found it out. I'll tell you how it was, Ste. The day before yesterday morning the butler says to me, 'I wish, Harrison, you'd just clear away the breakfast things, for I've got the gout in my hand'—he has always got the gout, you know, by drinking so much ale, beside wine. Well, when I went into the breakfast-room after they were all gone, I saw that the door into the library was a little ajar; but I took no notice, and Dr. Miles and Sir John went on talking there and did not hear me at all in t'other room. I could not tell all they said; but I made out that my Lord Lenham had been married a long time ago, but that the lady had turned out a bad un, and that they had lived apart for many years, till the other day my lord heard from Paris she was dead, and then he proposed to Miss Isabella. Dr. Miles said something about not hurrying the marriage, but the jolly old barrownight said that was all stuff, that he would have a wedding before a fortnight was over, and he'd broach two pipes of port, and fuddle half the county."

"And when is it to be then?" asked Stephen Gimlet; but the man's reply only confirmed what he had heard before, and with by no means a well satisfied countenance, the gamekeeper took his way across the park again, murmuring to himself as soon as he got out into the open air, "Goody Lamb was right! They've cheated him into believing she is dead. That is clear. There is some devilish foul work going on; and how to manage, I don't know. At all events I'll go back and talk to the old woman, for she has a mighty clear head of her own."

As he walked on he saw our friend Ned Hayward strolling slowly along at a distance, and he felt a strong inclination to go up and tell him all he had been going to tell Beauchamp: but then he reflected that he had no right to divulge what he knew of the latter gentleman's secrets to another who might not be fully in his confidence. Beside, Ned Hayward was not alone. There was a flutter of a lady's garments beside him, and he seemed in earnest conversation with his fair companion. They were not indeed walking arm-in-arm together, but they were very close to one another, and as Stephen Gimlet paused, considering, he saw the lady's head frequently raised for a moment as if to look in her companion's face, and then bent down again as if gazing on the ground.

The gamekeeper judged from these indica-

tions that they were particularly engaged, and would not like to be disturbed, and taking that with other motives for not going near them, he walked back to his own cottage, where he found Widow Lamb with her large Bible open before her.

Gimlet's story was soon told, and his mother-in-law seemed as puzzled as he did for a time. He then suggested for her consideration whether it might not be as well to convey the intelligence they possessed to Captain Hayward or Sir John Slingsby; but Widow Lamb exclaimed, at once,

"No, Stephen, no! we might make mischief with the intention of doing good. We must wait. He will come back before the marriage-day, and you must see him then. I will go up with you and talk with him myself; for I have much to say that I will only say to himself."

"But suppose we should not be able to see him!" said Stephen Gimlet, "or if anything should prevent his coming till the very day."

"Then I suppose we must speak to some one else," replied his step-mother, "but do not be afraid, Stephen. Leave it all to me."

Stephen Gimlet was afraid, however; for he was one of those unfortunate eager people, who, when they take the interests of another to heart, are never satisfied till they see those interests perfectly secure. He had all his life, too, been accustomed to manage everything for himself, to rely upon no one, to trust to his own mind, and his own exertions for the accomplishment of everything he desired. It is an unlucky habit, which makes people very uneasy when once they contract it, and trebles both their anxieties and their labors; for there is not above one third, in ordinary circumstances, of anything that a man requires to do which can be done by his own hands, in the complicated state of society in which we live; but still Stephen Gimlet had that habit, and like an old coachman, he was not easy when the reins were in the hands of another.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

And what were Ned Hayward and Mary Clifford talking about? Wait one minute, and you shall hear all about it; but first let me pause to make only one remark. I have observed, during some acquaintance with life, and a good deal of examination into all its curious little by-ways and narrow alleys, that the conversation which takes place between two people left alone to talk together, without any witnesses but green fields and bowery trees, is never, or at least very seldom, that which any one, even well acquainted with them, would have anticipated from a previous knowledge of their characters. It was an extremely right, just, and proper view of the case, that was taken, when people (I do not know who) decided that three form a congregation. We all know it: we all feel it instinctively. Three is a congregation; and when we speak before a congregation, we speak to a congregation.

But Mary Clifford and Ned Hayward were alone together; and now a word or two upon the frame of mind in which they met. Ned Hayward, since first we introduced him to our readers, had taken a great part in many things where Mary Clifford was concerned. He had first made her acquaintance in rescuing her gallantly from the brutal and shameless attempt to carry her off, by a man whom she detested. He had told her kindly and frankly of her uncle's embarrassed and dangerous situation. He had, without the slightest ostentation, offered the means of relieving him from the most pressing of his difficulties, and had gone up to London to accomplish what he offered, with a mixture of delicacy of feeling, and gay open-hearted readiness, which doubled the value of all he did. He had come down again, fought a duel with the man who had insulted her, received a severe wound, suffered, and put himself to great inconvenience; and then had been found prepared at the moment of need, to redeem his given word in her uncle's behalf, without hesitation or reluctance, though evidently at a great sacrifice.

Nevertheless, all these things might have gone no further than the mind, even with a calm, gentle, feeling creature like herself. Gratitude she could not have avoided entertaining under such circumstances, respect, very high esteem; but she might have felt nothing more had that been all. There was a great deal more, however. Ned Hayward had disappointed all Mary Clifford's preconceived ideas of his character; and had gone on growing upon her regard every hour. She had found him thoughtful, where she had believed him to be heedless; feeling, where she had expected him to be selfish; full of deep emotions, where she had fancied him light; well informed and of cultivated tastes, instead of superficial and careless; and being imperatively called upon to do him justice in her own heart, she went on, and did perhaps something more. But still this was not all; he had first excited wonder, curiosity and pleasure, then admiration and esteem, then interest and sympathy. Tie all these up in a parcel, with gratitude for great services rendered, and a great number of musings regarding him in silence and in solitude, and what will be the result? Day by day after the duel she had thought of him—perhaps, I might have said night after night. Then, when she had seen him again, and knew him to be ill and suffering, she had thought of him with deeper feelings still, and even oftener than before; and when at length he came over with reviving health, and took up his abode in the same house with herself, she returned to her old manner of thinking of him, with a number of new sensations blending in her meditations; and she fancied that she was studying his character all the while. What was it that she compared it to? She thought it was like a deep, beautiful valley, so full of sunshine, that no eye, but one very near, could see the fair things that it contained. I do not know what all this was, reader, but I think it looked very like falling in love.

Nevertheless, though these things might cause Mary Clifford to love Edward Hayward, the reader may suppose that they afforded no reason why he should love her—but that is a mistake. Love is like a cast and a mold, where there is an impression upon both, different, yet representing the same object. Love at first sight—love which springs merely from the eye, is a thing apart; but love, which proceeds from acts and

words and looks, is generally, though not always, conscientious. The very deeds which, performed toward another, beget it in that other, beget it also in ourselves. A woman is cherished and protected. She loves the being who does cherish and protect her, because he does; and he loves her because he cherishes and protects. Ned Hayward had thought Mary exquisitely beautiful from the first; but that would not have been enough—he was not a doll fancier! But her conversation pleased him, her gentle sweetness charmed him, her situation and all that it produced between them interested him, and .... But he had thoroughly made up his mind not to fall in love; and that was all that was wanting to make the thing complete. There was only one difficulty or objection. Mary Clifford had, what was called in those days, a large fortune. The dean, her father, had been a wealthy and a prudent man; and he had left her about two thousand a-year, her mother's jointure not included. Now Ned Hayward had, as the reader knows, very little from the beginning; that little was now still less; and he had determined to hate all heiresses. Hate Mary Clifford! Pooh, pooh, Ned Hayward!

However, a certain undefinable sensation of being very far gone in love—the perception of feelings he had never experienced before, had made him very sad and uneasy for the last five or six days. He would have run away if he could; for he thought there was only safety in flight. But he could not go. He was not well enough to take a long journey; and he had promised Beauchamp to stay for his marriage. But marriage is an infectious disease; and even in its incipient stages, it is catching. Ned Hayward thought a great deal of marriage during those five or six days, of what a lucky man Beauchamp was, and of how happy he would be if he had only a tithe of his wealth—with Mary Clifford. But Ned Hayward was not a man to find himself in a difficult and dangerous situation without facing it boldly. He felt, that he had suffered himself to be entangled in a very tough sort of the tender passion, and he resolved to break through the net, and, in fact, quit Tarningham-house as soon as possible. But a few days remained to be passed ere that appointed for Beauchamp's marriage; and he fancied he could very well get through that short period without any further danger or detriment. "He would see as little of Mary Clifford as possible," he thought; "he would employ himself in reading, in walking, in riding out with Sir John, as soon as he was strong enough;" and thus, as usual with all men, he proposed to do a thousand things, that he never did at all; and consoled himself with resolutions that could not be executed.

On the day of Beauchamp's departure for London, Ned Hayward rose early, breakfasted with his friend, saw him off, and then, according to the plan he had proposed, walked out into the fine sunny morning air, intending to spend the greater part of the summer day in some of the cool and more retired parts of the park.

It was, at least, two hours before the usual time of breakfast; he had not an idea that any of *the family* was up; and thus pursuing one of the *gravel* walks away from the house, he went in *among the* chestnut-trees, and strolled on, fancying himself perfectly alone in the woods, when suddenly, in taking a turn, the path showed him the fair face and graceful form of Mary Clifford advancing toward him at the distance of about fifty or sixty paces. To avoid her, of course, was quite out of the question; but Ned Hayward resolved, that he would only speak to her for a moment, and then go on. But, heaven knows now it happened; in about two minutes he might be seen turning round with her; and their walk continued for nearly an hour and a half.

"Well, Miss Clifford," he said, with as gay a look as he could command, "Beauchamp is gone. Have you been taking a long walk?"

"No, not very far," answered Mary, "I saw some strange people crossing the park; and ever since that adventure which first made us acquainted with each other, I have become very cowardly. I therefore turned back; otherwise I should have much enjoyed a ramble, for I have a slight headache."

What could Ned Hayward do under such circumstances? He could not avoid offering to escort and protect Miss Clifford—he could not even hesitate to propose it. Mary did not refuse; but her "yes" was timidly spoken; and, instead of turning back with Ned Hayward through the wild wood walks, she made him turn back with her, and led him to the more open parts of the park, where the house was generally in sight.

A momentary silence had fallen over both before they issued forth from under the chestnut-trees; and each felt some awkwardness in breaking that silence: the surest possible sign of there being very strong feelings busy at the heart; but Mary felt that the longer the silence continued, the more awkward would it become, and the more clearly would it prove that she was thoughtful and embarrassed; and therefore she spoke at random, saying,

"What a beautiful day it is for Lord Lenham's journey. I envy him the first twenty miles of his drive."

"I envy him in all things," answered Ned Hayward; "his life may, and, indeed, seems likely to be made up of beautiful days; and I am very sure that mine is not."

"Nay, Captain Hayward," said Mary, raising her eyes gently to his face, and shaking her head with a smile, "you are in low spirits and unwell, otherwise you would never take so bright a view of your friend's fate, and so dark a one of your own. Many a fair and beautiful day may be, and ought to be, in reserve for you. Indeed, they must be; for your own heart lays up, by the acts it prompts, a store of sunshine and brightness for the days to come."

"May it not rather lay up, by the feelings it experiences, a store of bitterness and sorrow, of clouds and darkness?" asked Ned Hayward, in a tone so different from that he commonly used, that Mary started, gazed for a moment at him, and then, letting her eyes fall again as they met his, first colored slightly, and then turned pale. By the marks of emotion which she displayed, Ned Hayward was led to believe, that he had spoken too plainly of what he had never intended to touch upon at all; and he hastened to repair the error.

"What I mean is simply this, my dear Miss

Clifford," he said: "a man who enjoys himself very much—as I do—feels pain in the same proportion, or perhaps more keenly. Every source of pleasure is an inlet to pain, and as we go on continually in this world, losing something dear to us, day by day, I am occasionally inclined to envy those cold phlegmatic gentlemen, who, with a tolerable store of pleasures, have few pains but corporeal ones. I never pretend to be a very sentimental person, or to have very fine feelings, or anything of that sort, but now, as an instance of what I was speaking of, I cannot think of quitting this beautiful spot, and all the friends who have shown me so much kindness, as I must do on Monday next, without a sort of sinking at the heart, which is very unpleasant."

"You do not mean to say you are going on Monday!" exclaimed Miss Clifford, pausing suddenly, with the color varying in her cheek.

Ned Hayward was surprised and pleased; for there was no attempt to conceal that his staying or going was a matter of interest to her. He answered, however, gravely, and even sadly,

"I fear I must."

"But you have forgotten your promised visit to us at Hinton," said Mary, reproachfully, and deadly pale; "you promised to come, you know; I have counted upon that visit as affording an opportunity of settling how and where, when I come of age, which will now be in a few months, the money you so generously lent me, can be repaid.—Indeed," she added, earnestly, "you must come there for a few days, even if you do not stay here."

There was a tenderness, a tremulous softness in her tone, a slight yet sufficiently marked agitation in her manner, which made Ned Hayward's heart beat.

"Can I be beloved?" he asked himself. "Can she return the feelings she has inspired? I will soon know!—My dear Miss Clifford," he replied, "I fear that visit would prove more dangerous to me than this has been: and, therefore, however unwilling—however great would have been the delight, I must decline it."

Mary Clifford looked down without uttering a word; but her cheek remained pale, her lip quivered as if she would fain have given voice to some reply; and though her arm was not in his, he could feel that she trembled. Ned Hayward's heart beat too; but there was, as we have often seen before, a frankness, a straightforward simplicity in his habitual course of action, which overleaped many a difficulty that would have baffled other men.

"Let me explain," he said; but Mary made a slight motion with her hand, saying,

"Oh, no, no!" in a faint tone, and then she repeated the word "dangerous!"

"Yes," he said, "more dangerous, dear Miss Clifford! Can you not conceive how and why? In a word, then, I cannot and must not stay with you longer. I must, by as speedy a return as possible to other occupations, make an effort to forget that I have ever seen one, whom I fear I have already known too long for the peace of my whole life."

He paused for a moment with a sigh, raised his head high the next instant, and then added, "I have but one favor to ask you, which is this—not to let what I have just *said make any difference in your demeanor toward me* during the short period of my stay. I had no intention of troubling your ear with such things at all; but your own question brought forth what I would willingly have concealed—perhaps in this I have been wrong; but believe me, I am very well aware that difference of fortune has placed a barrier between us which cannot be overleaped. This is the only favor, then, dear lady—do not alter toward me—let me see you ever the same as I have yet beheld you; and when I go away forever, let me carry with me the remembrance of Mary Clifford as a picture of all that deserves love and admiration upon earth. Do not, do not change, notwithstanding my rash confession."

Mary Clifford looked up in his face, and a varying light played in her eyes, as if, at one moment, it was about to break forth sportively, and at another would have drowned itself out in tears.

"I must change, Hayward!" she said at length, with a bright smile upon her lip, "indeed you ask too much. How can you expect that I should live in the same house with you, and know that you love me, without showing in some degree what is passing in my own breast!"

"Mary! Mary!" he exclaimed, laying his hand upon her arm, and gazing in her face, "you would not—oh, I am sure you would not trifle with me—"

"Not for the world," she answered. "Edward, I am incapable of trifling with any man; but with you, to whom I owe so much, it would be base indeed!"

"But the great disparity of fortune," said her lover, with the shade again upon his brow. "Oh Mary, how can it ever be? You, I have heard, are wealthy—they call you 'the heiress'—and I know myself to be poor. Are you aware—surely I told you, that all I had saved out of the wreck of my father's fortune, only amounted at first to—"

"Will you pain me?—Do you wish to grieve me?" asked Mary Clifford; "if not, do not mention such matters as in any way likely to affect my feelings or conduct; and yet I do not wish you to consider me as a romantic girl, for I am not. I have always thought that a competence must be possessed to render the lives of any two people happy; but surely it matters not on whose side that competence comes. We shall have enough, Edward, for happiness; and though I know it would have been more pleasure to yourself if the greater part of our little fortune had been brought by you, yet I am very glad that *I* have it, as you have not."

"But your mother—your guardian, Mary?" said Ned Hayward, still in a doubtful tone.

Mary laughed, but with a slight touch of vexation in the tone; and she exclaimed,

"I do believe he will not have me, even when I have almost offered myself to him!"

But Ned Hayward would not lie under that imputation, and he cast his arms round his fair companion, assuring her that if she had the wealth of the world, the only portion he would value would be herself.

Mary freed herself gently from his embrace; and suffering him to draw her arm through his, walked on with him till the breakfast-hour was fully come.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It is strange how we all go grinding the fate of each other in this world, high and low, rich and poor, the cottage tenant and the lord of the mansion all jostling each other, and without knowing it, each making his fellow take a step this way or that, which very much influences the onward path. All was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park. Mary Clifford had assured Ned Hayward that her mother's consent would not only be given, but given cheerfully; that her guardians, whose period of rule was so nearly at an end, would raise no objection, and that all who loved her would be glad to see her the promised bride of one so well worthy of esteem. Nor was her promise unaccomplished; for good Mrs. Clifford was delighted. Ned Hayward had ever been a great favorite of hers ever since he had come to her rescue in Tarningham-lane. The guardians were quite quiescent, replying to the letter of announcement, that whatever Miss Clifford judged for her own happiness and received her mother's consent, would insure their approbation. Sir John was in an ecstasy, and Isabella, in the midst of her own happiness, felt happier still at that of her cousin. Daily letters were received from Beauchamp, all breathing joy and hope, and though lawyers were troublesome and men of business dilatory, yet not one word was said, not one thought seemed to be entertained of any real danger or difficulty.

All then was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park, and not one of its inmates had the slightest idea of the anxiety and alarm which were felt for them in a cottage not far off. Every morning and every evening long consultations were held between Widow Lamb and her son-in-law regarding the fate of Mr. Beauchamp, and just in proportion to their ignorance of the habits of the world were the difficulties that presented themselves to their imaginations. Stephen Gimlet was anxious to act in some direction. Mr. Beauchamp, as he still frequently called him, being absent, he thought it would be better to say all that they had to say, to Sir John Slingsby, or at all events to Captain Hayward; but on the contrary, his mother-in-law, with longer experience, a disposition naturally timid and cautious, and upon the whole better judgment, insisted that it might be wrong or dangerous to do so.

"You cannot tell, Stephen," she said, "what this good young lord has told them and what he has not. We cannot even be sure how this woman stands with him. He may have divorced her for aught we know. I am sure her conduct has always been bad enough; and if such should be the case, we might make the poor young lady unhappy when there is no need. Nobody even can guess at all the mischief that might happen. No, no, you watch closely for the young lord's coming back, and as soon as ever he is here, you and I will go up and speak to him. He must be back in time for that, and I dare say he will come on Saturday night; so there will be plenty or time."

It was one of Stephen Gimlet's maxims, and a very good one too, that there is never plenty of time; but he carried the matter somewhat too far, for he thought one could never do too much. Now that is a very great mistake; for in love, politics, and ambition, as in the roasting of a leg of mutton, you can remedy the *mens*, but you cannot remedy the *pis*. However, to make up for not doing what his mother-in-law would not let him do—and in regard to Beauchamp she had the whip-hand of him, for she did not let him into her secrets—he busied himself every spare moment that he had in watching the proceedings of Captain Moreton and the fair lady he had with him. His long familiarity with beasts and birds, greatly affected his views of all things, and he got to look upon these objects of his contemplation as two wild animals. He internally named one the fox and the other the kite, and with the same sort of shrewd speculation in regard to their manners, habits, and designs, as he employed upon brutes, he watched, and calculated, and divined with wonderful accuracy. One thing, however, he forgot, which was, that a human fox has a few more faculties than the mere brute; and that, although the four-legged fellow with the brush might require great caution in any examination of his habits and proceedings, Captain Moreton might require still more. Now that worthy gentleman very soon found out that there was an observant eye upon him, and he moreover discovered whose eye that was. There could not have been a more unpleasant sensation to Captain Moreton than to feel himself watched, especially by Stephen Gimlet; for he knew him to be keen, shrewd, active, decided, persevering, one not easily baffled, and by no means to be frightened; one, who must be met, combated, overcome in anything he undertook, or else suffered to have his own way. Captain Moreton was puzzled how to act. To enter into open war with Stephen was likely to be a very dangerous affair; for the proceedings of the worthy captain, as the reader may suppose, did not court public examination; and yet to suffer any man to become thoroughly acquainted with all his in-comings and out-goings, was very disagreeable, and might be perilous. To gain time, indeed, was the great thing; for Moreton's intention was, as soon as he had fairly seen his cousin married to Isabella Slingsby, to take his departure for another land, and to leave the consequences of the situation in which he had placed Lord Lenham, to operate, as he thoroughly believed they would operate, in destroying health, vigor, and life. His only object in remaining at all was so to guide the proceedings of his fair companion, and to restrain her fiery and unreasoning passions, as to prevent her overthrowing his whole scheme by her intemperate haste. But how to gain the necessary time was the question. He first changed his haunts and his hours, went out on the other side of the heath; but Stephen Gimlet was there; took his walk in the early morning, instead of late in the evening; but the figure of Stephen Gimlet was seen in the gray twilight, whether it was day-dawn or sunset; and Captain Moreton became seriously uneasy.

Nothing, however as yet appeared to have resulted from all this watching, till on Saturday morning, somewhat to Captain Moreton's surprise, the door of the room, where he was sitting alone, was opened, and in walked his friend and acquaintance, Harry Wittingham. The

young man was exceedingly pale; but still he appeared to move freely and without pain or difficulty; and a look of real pleasure came up in Captain Moreton's face, which completely deceived Mr. Wittingham, junior, as to the sensations of his friend toward him. He fancied, as Captain Moreton shook him warmly by the hand, and declared he was delighted to see him well again, that the other was really glad at his recovery. Now Harry Wittingham might have been wounded, sick, dying, dead, buried, turned into earth again, without Captain Moreton's caring one straw about him, simply as Harry Wittingham *per se;* but as one who might be serviceable in his schemes, who might help him out of a difficulty, and, by taking part in a load of danger, might help Captain Moreton to bear the rest, he was an object of great interest to the captain, who congratulated him again and again upon his recovered health, made him sit down, inquired particularly into all he had suffered, and did and said all those sorts of things which were most likely to make a man thus convalescent believe that a friendly heart had been greatly pained by all he had undergone.

Harry Wittingham was soon seated in an armchair, and making himself quite at home. Contrary to the advice of all doctors, he indulged in a glass of brandy-and-water at the early hour of half-past ten, and declared he was a great deal better for it, that old fool Slattery having kept him without wine, spirits, or porter, for the last five weeks.

"Ay, that might be necessary some time ago," said Moreton, "till your wound was healed, but it is all stuff now. It must have been a bad wound that you have got, Harry; and I am devilish sorry I could not be down myself, for I think then you would have got no wound at all. However, you gave him as good as you got, and that was some consolation. No gentleman should ever be without his revenge, whether it be with cards, or pistols, or what not; he should always give something for what he gets, and if he does that, he has every reason to be satisfied."

"I have not got quite enough yet," said Harry Wittingham, with a significant nod of his head; "and some people shall find that by and by."

"Ay, that's right, quite," answered Captain Moreton; "but I say, Hal, how is the old cock, your father? I heard yesterday he was breaking sadly—got the jaundice, or some devil of a thing like that—as yellow as one of the guineas he keeps locked up from you—time for him to take a journey, I should think."

For a minute or two Harry Wittingham made no reply, but then he set his teeth hard and said,

"I should not wonder if the hard-hearted old flint were to leave it all away from me."

Captain Moreton gave a long, low whistle, exclaiming, "Upon my life you must stop that. Hang me, if I would not pretend to be penitent, and play a good boy for a month or two."

"It is no use in the world," answered Harry Wittingham; "you might as well try to turn the Thames at Gravesend as to put him out of his course when once he has taken a thing into his head. He must do what he likes; he can't take it all, that's one comfort; but I say, Moreton, what the devil is that fellow Wolf hanging about here for? You had better not have anything to do with him, I can tell you. He is as great a scamp as ever lived, and I'll punish him some day or another. I should have come in yesterday, but I saw him sitting down there upon the mound upon the heath, looking straight here, and so I went away."

"Did you see him again to-day?" asked Captain Moreton, with very uneasy feelings.

"Oh, yes," answered Wittingham, "there he was, prowling about with his gun under his arm; but I doubled upon him this time, and went down the lanes, and in by the back way."

"I will make him pay for this," said Moreton, setting his teeth. "He has been spying here for a long time, and if it was not that I don't wish any fuss till the day after to-morrow is over, I would break every bone in his skin."

"It would be a good thing if you did," answered Harry Wittingham; "I'll tell you how he served me;" and he forthwith related all the circumstances of his somewhat unpleasant adventure with Stephen Gimlet when he visited the gamekeeper's cottage.

The moment he had done, Captain Moreton tapped him on the arm with a meaning smile, saying,

"I'll tell you what, Harry, though you are not very strong yet, still, if you are up to giving me ever so little help, we'll punish that fellow before to-morrow's over. If you can come here to-night and take a bed, we'll get up early and dodge him as he has been dodging us. He is always out and about before anybody else, so that there will be no one to help him, let him halloo as loud as he will. He is continually off Sir John's grounds with his gun and dog, so that we have every right to think he is poaching, as he used to do."

"Well, but what will you do with him?" said Harry Wittingham; "he is devilish strong, remember."

"Yes, but so am I," answered Captain Moreton; "and I will take him unawares, so that he cannot use his gun. Once down, I will keep him there, while you tie his arms, and then we will bundle him over here, and lock him up for a day or two."

"Give him a precious good hiding," said young Wittingham, "for he well deserves it; but I don't see any use of keeping him. If we punish him well on the spot, that's enough."

"There's nothing that you or I can do," answered Captain Moreton, "that will punish him half so much as keeping him here till noon on Monday, for now I'll let you into one thing, Harry: I am looking out for my revenge upon some other friends of ours, and I have a notion this fellow is set to watch everything I do, with promise of devilish good pay, if he stops me from carrying out my plan. It will all be over before twelve o'clock on Monday; and if we can keep him shut up here till then, he will lose his bribe, and I shall have vengeance. You can give him a good licking, too, if you like, and nobody can say anything about it if we catch him off Sir John's grounds."

"I don't care whether they say anything about it or not," answered Harry Wittingham; "they may all go to the devil for that matter,

and I'll lend a hand with all my heart. But remember, I'm devilish weak and no match for him now; for this wound has taken every bit of strength out of me."

"Oh, you'll soon get that up again," answered Captain Moreton; "but I'll manage all the rough work. But how do you get on about money if the old fellow gives you none?"

"I should be devilish bad off indeed," replied the young man, "if our old housekeeper did not help me; but she has taken her money out of the bank, and is selling some things for me; so I must not forget to let her know that I am here if I come to-night."

"Oh, I'll take care of that," answered Captain Moreton. "There's a boy brings up my letters and things, a quiet, cunning little hump-backed devil, who whistles just like a flageolet, and says very little to anybody. I'll tell him to go and tell old mother what's-her-name slyly, that you are here if she wants you."

The whole scheme seemed palatable to Harry Wittingham, and he entered into the details with great zest and spirit, proposing several improvements upon Captain Moreton's plan, some of which suited that gentleman quite well. Another glass of brandy-and-water was added, and Harry Wittingham declared that it was better than all the doctor's stuff he had swallowed since he was wounded, for that he was already much better than when he came, and felt himself quite strong again. After an hour's rambling conversation upon all sorts of things, not very gentlemanly either in tone or matter, the two worthy confederates parted.

As the visitor took his way back to Buxton's Inn, he looked boldly round for Stephen Gimlet with a pleasant consciousness of coming vengeance; but the gamekeeper was not to be seen, and meditating the pleasant pastime laid out for the following day, Mr. Wittingham reached the inn, and ordered a very good dinner as a preparation. He felt a little feverish, it is true, but nevertheless he drank the bottle of stiff port which was placed on the table when dinner was served; and elated with wine, set out as soon as it was dark, to take part once more in one of those schemes of evil which suited too well his rash and reckless disposition, little knowing that all the time he was the mere tool of another.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Well, doctor; well, doctor, what is the matter?" asked Sir John Slingsby, at the door of his own house, toward two o'clock on that Saturday afternoon; "you look warm, doctor, and not half as dry as usual. I declare, you have made that fat pony of yours perspire like an alderman at the Easter ball. What has put you into the saddle! Has the chaise broken down?"

"No, Sir John," answered Doctor Miles; "but the horse was sooner saddled than harnessed, and I wanted to see you in haste—where are you going now? for you are about to mount, I perceive."

"I am going down to set the fools at Tarningham to rights," answered Sir John Slingsby. "I hear that that bilious old crow, Wittingham, and deaf old Mr. Stumpforth, of Stumpington, have been sitting for these two or three hours at the justice-room, getting up all sorts of vexatious cases with Wharton to torment the poor people of the parish, and to put them in a devout frame of mind for their Sunday's duties; so I am going down to put my finger in the pie and spoil the dish for them. Come along, doctor, and help, for you are a magistrate too, and a man who does not like to see his fellow-creatures maltreated. You can tell me what you want as we jog along."

"We shall be going exactly in the right direction," said Doctor Miles, "for my business with you referred to your magisterial capacity, Sir John."

The worthy, who had his foot in the stirrup, raised himself into the saddle with wonderful agility, considering his size and his age; and, accompanied by Doctor Miles, was soon on his way toward Tarningham, listening with all his ears to the communication which the rector had to make.

"You must know, my good friend," said the doctor, "that some short time ago your gamekeeper, Stephen Gimlet, found in the little vicarage church at Moreton some one busily engaged, as it appeared, in the laudable task of altering the registers in the vestry. He locked him safely in, but the culprit got out in the night; and Gimlet communicated the fact to me. I would have spoken to you about it, but circumstances occurred at that time which might have rendered it unpleasant for you to deal with that business."

"I understand," said Sir John Slingsby, nodding his head significantly; "but who was the man?"

"Why, Gimlet asserts that it was no other than that worst of all bad fellows, Captain Moreton," replied Doctor Miles. "I examined the register, and found that an alteration had certainly been committed; for the date of one of the insertions was advanced several years before those that followed, by skillfully changing a naught into a six. Under the circumstances, I thought it best to consult with Wittingham, and I proposed that a warrant should be issued against Captain Moreton; but the worthy gentleman thought fit both to examine and cross-examine Gimlet in the first instance; asked him nine times over if he would swear that it was Captain Moreton; and, when he found that he had not seen the man's face, his back being turned to the door of the vestry when Gimlet went in, he pooh-poohed the whole matter, and refused to issue the warrant. I did not choose to do so myself, the event having occurred in a parish of my own, and with one of my registers, but this morning on visiting old Grimdley, the sexton, who is very ill, he made a full confession of his part in the affair: Moreton had bribed him, it seems, to open for him the family vault and the door of the vestry. In the one the worthy captain altered the date of his great grandfather's coffin from 1760 to 1766 by an instrument he seemed to have had made on purpose; and in the vestry performed the same operation with plain pen and ink."

"A pretty scoundrel," said Sir John Slingsby; "but I know what he wants. He wants to prove that his mother could not break the entail, which would be the case if the old man had lived an hour after she was born."

"Precisely so," said Doctor Miles; "but I did not choose to deal with Mr. Wittingham any more upon the subject, at least without your assistance; and therefore, before I either signed a warrant myself, or spoke with the people of Tarningham about it, I thought it better to come up to the park and consult with you."

"As the wisest man in the county," said Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "My dear doctor, I will get a certificate from you and qualify for the university of Gotham—but I will tell you what we will do: we will send the groom here for Stephen Gimlet, and his evidence, with the deposition of old Grindley, will soon put the whole matter right. Here, Tom, ride over like the devil to Ste Gimlet's cottage; tell him to come down as fast as his legs will carry him to the justice-room at Tarningham. We'll soon bring these gentlemen to the end of their law, and Wharton to boot—an ill conditioned brute, a cross between a fox and a turnspit—do you recollect his mother, doctor? Her legs were just like the balustrades of a bridge, turned the wrong side upmost, only they bowed out on each side, which gave to them a sort of ogee."

Thus rattling on, Sir John Slingsby rode forward till they reached the entrance of the little justice-room, which was conveniently situated immediately to Mr. Wharton's offices.

The appearance of Sir John Slingsby and Dr. Miles did not seem at all palatable to the two other magistrates and their clerk, if one might judge by the superlative courtesy of their reception. A chair was placed immediately for the reverend gentleman, Mr. Stumpforth vacated his seat for Sir John as president of the magistrates, and Mr. Wharton, with malevolent sweetness, expressed his delight at seeing Sir John among them again.

"You did all you could to prevent it," said Sir John, taking the chair, "but it would not do, Wharton. Now, gentlemen, what are you about? we will not interrupt business."

"There are a good many cases down," said Mr. Wharton; "some of them excise-cases, some of them under the poor-law, some of them—"

"Well, let us get through them, let us get through them," cried Sir John, interrupting him, "for we have business, too, which must be done."

"We must take things in their order," said Mr. Wittingham, drily.

"Oh, yes, according to the ledger," cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing; "everything in the regular way of trade, Wittingham, eh? Who's this? James Jackson, the publican," he continued, looking at the paper; "well, Wittingham, how does the debtor and creditor account stand with him?"

Mr. Wittingham winced, but replied nothing; and the case was regularly taken up. Some nine or ten others followed; and certainly everything was done by the two magistrates who had been found sitting, and their exceedingly excellent clerk, to tire out Sir John Slingsby and Dr. Miles, by protracting the investigation as long as possible. The poor persons, however, who had been compelled by the power of paper or parchment to appear in the awful presence of justice, had reason to thank their stars, and did so most devoutly, that the number of magistrates was increased to four. A number of cases were dismissed as frivolous; very lenient penalties were inflicted in other instances; and, if the real truth were told, the person who suffered the severest punishment under the proceedings of that day was no other than Mr. Wittingham, upon whom Sir John Slingsby continued to pour for two long hours all the stores of sarcasm which had accumulated in his bosom during the last fortnight. At length the magistrates' paper was over, and worthy Mr. Wittingham showed an inclination to depart; but Sir John Slingsby stopped him, exclaiming,

"Stay a bit, Wittingham, stay a bit, my good sir. The case with which we have now to deal you have already nibbled at; so you must have your share of it."

"I am ill, Sir John," said Mr. Wittingham, "I am not fit."

"Not fit I have long known you to be," rejoined Sir John, and then added in a murmur, "for anything but a tall stool at the back end of a slopseller's shop; but as to being ill, Wittingham; you don't pretend to be ill? Why, your complexion is as ruddy as if you had washed your face with guineas out of your strong-box. However, it is this business of Captain Moreton and his falsification of the register at Moreton church that we have to deal with."

"I have already disposed of that," said Mr. Wittingham, sharply, "and I am not disposed to go into it again."

But it was now Mr. Wharton's turn to attack Mr. Wittingham.

"You have disposed of it, sir," he exclaimed, with all the blood in his body rushing up into his face; "the falsification of the registers of Moreton church! why, I never heard of this!"

"There was no reason that you should," answered Mr. Wittingham, tartly; "you are not a magistrate, I think, Mr. Wharton; and beside, you might, in some degree, be considered as a party interested. Beside, you were absent, and so I sent for Bacon, and dealt with the matter myself."

"Friday's bacon and deviled the attorney," said Sir John Slingsby, with a roar; "you see he is such an active creature, Wharton, he must be doing, whether right or wrong. I declare he cuts out so much matter for the bench in reversing all his sage decrees, that the rest of the magistrates can scarcely manage it."

"I did not come here to be insulted, Sir John Slingsby," said Mr. Wittingham, the jaundiced yellow of his face gradually becoming of an olive green, "I did not come here to be insulted, and will not stay for such a purpose; I expect to be treated like a gentleman, sir."

"Wonderful are the expectations of man," exclaimed the baronet: "just as much might a chimney-sweeper expect to be treated like an archbishop, because he wears black—but let us to business, let us to business; if we go on complimenting each other in this way we shall not get through the affair to-night, especially with your lucid assistance, Wittingham; for if there be a man in England who can so stir a puddle that the sharpest eyes shall not be able to see a lost half-crown at the bottom, you are the man."

Up started the worthy magistrate, exclaiming, in a weak voice and bewildered air,

"I will not stay, that man will drive me mad."

"Impossible," shouted Sir John Slingsby, as Mr. Wittingham staggered toward the door; and he then added in a lower tone, "fools never go mad, they tell me;" but Doctor Miles, who saw that old Wittingham was really ill, rose from his seat, and crossing the room, spoke a word or two to the retreating magistrate, which he was not allowed to finish, for old Wittingham pushed him rudely aside and darted out of the room.

Before I proceed to give any account of the further inquiries of the three magistrates who remained, I shall beg leave to follow Mr. Wittingham to his own house. About two hundred yards' distance from the justice-room he stopped, and leaned for a minute or two against a post, and again paused at his own gate as if hardly able to proceed. He reached his own dwelling, however, and after several attempts, with a shaking hand, succeeded in thrusting his private key into the lock, and opening the door. The hall was vacant; the whole house still; there was neither wife nor child to receive and welcome him; no kindred affection, no friendly greeting to soothe and cheer the sick old man, whose pursuits, whose hopes, whose tendencies through life had been totally apart from the kindly sympathies of our nature. But there are times, steel the heart how we may, when a yearning for those very kindly sympathies will come over us; when the strong frame broken, the eager energies quelled, the fierce passions dead and still within us, the strong desires either disappointed or sated, leave us alone in our weakness, to feel with bitter regret that there are better things and more enduring than those which we have pursued; and when the great moral lessons, taught by decay, are heard and listened to for the first time, when perhaps it is too late to practice them. That lonely house, that silent hall, the absence of every trace of warm life and pleasant social companionship, the dull, dead stillness that pervaded everything, had their effect upon Mr. Wittingham, and a sad effect it was. All was so quiet and so still; all was so solemn and so voiceless, he felt as if he were entering his tomb. The very sunshine, the bright sunshine that, streaming through the fanlight over the door, fell in long rays upon the marble floor, had something melancholy in it, and he thought, "It will soon shine so upon my grave." What was to him then the satisfaction of the greedy love of gold, that creeping ivy of the heart, that slowly growing, day by day, chokes every softer and gentler offspring of that on which it rests? What was to him the gratification of that vanity, which was all that the acquisition of wealth had satisfied? Nothing, all nothing. He stood there friendless, childless, companionless, alone; sick at heart, disappointed in all those expectations he had formed, having reaped bitterness from the very success of his labors, and finding no medicine either for the heart or the body in the gold he had accumulated or the station he had gained.

He paused there for a moment, while a deep *and bitter* anguish of the regret of a whole life *took possession* of him, and then staggering on into the trim, well arranged, cold, and orderly library, he sunk into one of the arm-chairs by the side of the fireless hearth and rang the bell sharply. For two or three minutes no one appeared, and then he rang again, saying to himself,

"There never were such bad servants as mine; ay, ay, it wants a mistress of a house," and he rang again furiously.

In about a minute after the door opened, and Mrs. Billiter appeared, and Mr. Wittingham inquired, angrily, why nobody came at his summons. The housekeeper replied,

"That she thought the footman had come, but finding the bell ring again, she had hastened up herself."

Mr. Wittingham's rage was then turned upon the footman, and after denouncing him in very vehement terms, and condemning him to expulsion from his household, his anger either worked itself off, or his strength became exhausted, and he sat for a moment or two in silence, till Mrs. Billiter quietly began to move toward the door.

"Stay, Billiter," he cried; "what are you going for? I tell you I am ill, woman, very ill."

"I was going to send for Mr. Slattery," said Billiter, in a cold tone; "I saw you were ill, sir."

"Send for the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham; "that fellow Slattery is no good at all Here have I been taking his soap-pills and his cordial-boluses for these three weeks, and am no better, but rather worse. I will go to bed, Billiter—get me a cup of hot coffee—I feel very ill indeed."

"You had better see some one," said Mrs. Billiter, "for you don't look right at all, and it would take some hours to get another doctor."

"Well, well, send for the man, if it must be so," said Mr. Wittingham, "but he does nothing but cram one with potions and pills just to make up a long bill. Here, help me up stairs, I will go to bed; and bring me a cup of strong coffee—I declare I can scarcely stand."

As soon as Mr. Wittingham was safely deposited in his room, Mrs. Billiter descended to the kitchen, and sent the housemaid at once for Mr. Slattery, taking care to spend as much time as possible on the preparation of the coffee, not judging it by any means a good beverage for her master, in which she was, probably right. The surgeon, however, was so long ere he appeared, that she was obliged to carry up the coffee to Mr. Wittingham, whom she found retching violently, and complaining of violent pains. He nevertheless drank the coffee to the last drop, in the more haste as Mrs. Billiter expressed an opinion it would do him harm; after having accomplished which he sank back upon his pillow exhausted, and closed his eyes. The color of his skin was now of a shade of deep green, approaching to black under his eyes, and the housekeeper, as she stood by his bedside and gazed at him, thought to herself that it would not last long. It must not be pretended that she was in any degree greatly affected at the prospect of her master's speedy demise, though she had lived in his service a very many years, for he was not one to conciliate affection in any one; and her meditations were more of how she could best serve the graceless lad, whose disposition she had assisted to ruin, than of his father's probable fate.

While she thus paused and reflected, the quick creaky step of Mr. Slattery was on the stairs, and the moment after he entered the room, rubbing gently together a pair of hands, the fingers of which were fat and somewhat red, though very soft and shapeless, presenting the appearance of four long sausages and a short one. He had always a cheerful air, Mr. Slattery, for he fancied it comforted his patients, kept up their spirits, and prevented them from other advice. Thus he would stand and smile upon a dying man, as if he had a real and sincere pleasure in his friend's exit from a world of woe; and very few people could discover from the worthy gentleman's countenance whether a relation was advancing quietly toward recovery or the tomb. Thus with a jaunty step he approached Mr. Wittingham's bedside, sat down, and, as the sick man opened his eyes, laughed benignantly, saying,

"Why, my dear sir, what is all this? You must have been agitating yourself," and at the same time he put his fingers on the pulse.

"Agitated myself!" cried Mr. Wittingham, "it is that old bankrupt brute, Sir John Slingsby, has nearly driven me mad, and I believe these servants will finish it. Why the devil do you leave my wig there, Billiter? Put it upon the block; don't you see Mr. Slattery is sitting upon it?"

"Well, I declare," cried the surgeon, "I thought I felt as if I were sitting upon a cat, or something of that kind. But, my dear sir, you must really keep yourself quiet, or you will bring yourself into a feverish state. The pulse is hard and quick now, and your skin is very hot and dry. We must make a little addition to the soap-pill, and I will send you directly a stomachic cordial-draught, combined with a little narcotic, to produce comfortable sleep."

He still kept his fingers on the pulse, gazing into the sick man's eyes, till Mr. Wittingham could have boxed his ears, and at length he said,

"The draught must be repeated every two hours if you do not sleep, so that you had better have somebody sit up with you to give it you."

"I will have no such thing," said Mr. Wittingham; "I can't bear to have people pottering about in my room all night; I can take the draughts very well myself if they are put down by me."

"But they must be shaken before taken," said Mr. Slattery.

"Well, then, I can shake them," said Mr. Wittingham; and the worthy surgeon, finding his patient obstinate, gave up the point. He proceeded to ask a variety of questions, however, to which he received nothing but gruff and grumbling replies, the worthy gentleman principally insisting upon receiving something which would relieve the great pain he felt in his side. Thereupon Mr. Slattery undertook to explain to him all the various causes which might produce that pain; but the confused crowd of gall-bladders and gall-stones, and indurated livers, and kidneys, and ducts, and glands, conveyed very little tangible information to the mind of his hearer, and only served to puzzle, alarm, and irritate him. At length, however, the surgeon promised and vowed that he would send him all manner of remedies for his evils, and spoke in such a confident tone of his being better on the next day, or the day after, that he left him more composed. The housekeeper followed Mr. Slattery out of the room, but did not think fit to make any observation till they reached the foot of the stairs, when she touched Mr. Slattery gently on the arm and beckoned him into the dining-room. "He seems in a bad way, sir," said the housekeeper.

"A case of jaundice, Mrs. Billiter," replied the surgeon, raising his eyebrows, "which is never very pleasant."

"But I want to know if there is any danger, Mr. Slattery," continued Mrs. Billiter, "it is very necessary that people should be aware."

"Why, there is always danger in every disease," answered the surgeon, who abominated a straightforward answer to such questions; but then, bethinking himself, and seeing that it might be better to be a little more explicit, he added, "jaundice, even the green, or black jaundice, as it is sometimes called, which your master has, is not in itself by any means a dangerous disease; but there are accidents, which occur in the progress of an illness, that may produce very fatal results, sometimes in a moment. This is by no means uncommon in jaundice. You see the cause of that yellow, or green tint of the skin and eyes is this, either in consequence of biliary calculi, or the construction of the ducts leading from the gall-bladder, or pressure upon the gall-bladder itself, the bile is prevented from flowing, as it naturally does, into the intestinal canal."

"Lord a mercy," cried Mrs. Billiter, "what do I know of all such stuff! I never heard of people having canals in their inside before, or ducks either, except when they had eat them roasted; and that I'll swear my master hasn't for the last two months. Gall he has, sure enough, and bitterness too, as the Scripture says."

"Wait a moment, wait a moment, and you will see it all clearly directly," said the worthy surgeon. "As I have said, the bile, being thus prevented from flowing in its natural course, is absorbed into the vascular system; and, as long as it is deposited merely on the mucous membrane, showing itself, as we see, in the discoloration of the cuticle, no harm ensues; but the disposition of the smallest drop of bile on the membranes of the brain acts as the most virulent poison on the whole nervous system, and sudden death frequently follows, sometimes in five minutes, sometimes in an hour or two. Now this is the reason why I wished you to sit up with him to-night; but, as he won't hear of it, it can't be helped: and one thing is certain, that even if you were there, you could do no good, should such a thing occur; for I know no remedial means any more than for the bite of a rattlesnake."

"I wish he would see his son," said Mrs. Billiter, "but you told him he would be better to-morrow or the next day, and so there is no hope of it; for, unless he is frightened out of his wits, he would fly into a fury at the very name of the thing."

"Well, wait till to-morrow, wait till to-morrow," said Mr. Slattery, "and if I see that it won't hurt him, I will frighten him a bit. I don't see that there is any danger just at present, if he

keeps himself perfectly quiet; and he must not be irritated on any account. However, if I were you, I would be ready to go to him directly, if he rings his bell; and in the mean time I'll send him the composing draught."

Notwithstanding Mr. Slattery's composing draughts, Mr. Wittingham passed a wretched night. He was feverish, heated, full of dark and horrible fancies, hearing the blood going in his head like a mill, and thinking of everything that was miserable within the whole range of a not very extensive imagination. He bore it obstinately, however, for some hours, taking the potions by his bedside within even less than the prescribed intervals, but finding no relief. At length he began to wonder, if people would hear him when he rang. He found himself growing weaker and more weak; and he suffered exceeding pain, till darkness, and the torture of his own thoughts, became intolerable; and stretching out his hand, he rang the bell about three o'clock in the morning. The old housekeeper, who had remained dressed close at hand, was in his room in a moment; and Mr. Wittingham felt as much pleased and grateful, as it was in his nature to feel. She did her best to soothe and comfort him; and just as the light was coming in, the sedative medicines, which he had taken, began to produce some effect; and he fell into a heavy sleep. Nevertheless, when Mr. Slattery visited him, he found no great improvement; but a warm bath produced some relief. The worthy surgeon began to fancy, however, from all the symptoms that he saw, that he was likely to lose a patient of some importance; and he judged that it might be as well to establish a claim upon that patient's successor. He therefore determined to take the advocacy of Harry Wittingham's cause upon himself; and, in order to prepare the way for what he had to say in the evening he gave the worthy gentleman under his hands a significant hint, that he was in a good deal of danger.

Mr. Wittingham heard the announcement in silence, closed his eyes, compressed his lips, and seemed more terribly affected than the worthy surgeon had at all expected. He therefore judged it best to throw in a little consolation before he proceeded further, and he continued, in a soothing and cajoling tone:

"I know you to be a man of strong mind, my dear sir, and not likely to be depressed at the thought of a little peril. Therefore, if I had thought the case hopeless, I should have told you so at once. It is not so, however, at all; and I only wished to warn you, that there was some danger, in order to show you the necessity of keeping yourself quite quiet and taking great care."

Mr. Wittingham answered not a word; and, after a very unpleasant pause, the surgeon took his leave, promising to come again in the evening.

When he did return, Mr. Slattery found his patient wonderfully composed, as he thought. Nevertheless, there was an awkward something about the pulse, a sort of heavy, suppressed jar, which did not make him augur very favorably of his prospects. As he sat by the bedside with his fingers upon the wrist, and his eyes half-shut, as if considering all the slightest indications which might be afforded by that small agitated current that beat and quivered beneath his touch, what was Mr. Slattery reflecting upon? Not Mr. Wittingham's state, except as far as it was to influence his conduct in a non-medical capacity. He said to himself—or thought, which is the same thing, "This old gentleman will go. He has not stamina to struggle with such a disease. As I can do little for the Wittingham present, I may as well do what I can for the Wittingham to come. If I show myself his friend, he may show himself mine; and though perhaps the discussion may make life's feeble tide ebb a little faster, it is not much matter whether it be low water half-an-hour sooner or later."

Mrs. Billiter, however, did not happen to be in the room at the moment, and Mr. Slattery resolved to have a witness to his benevolent proceedings. He therefore asked numerous questions, and discussed various important points affecting the sick man's health, till the good housekeeper appeared. He then gradually led the conversation round to young Harry Wittingham, remarking that he had had a long drive since the morning, and speaking of Buxton's Inn, as one of the places at which he had called.

"By the way, I did not see your son, my dear sir," he added: "he was out. Indeed, he may be considered as quite well now, and only requires care of himself, kind attention from others, and a mind quiet and at ease."

Mr. Wittingham said not a word, and Mr. Slattery mistook his silence entirely. "I now think, my dear sir," he continued, "that it would be a great comfort to you if you would have him home. Under present circumstances it would be advisable, I think, I do indeed."

Then the storm burst, then the smothered rage broke forth, with fearful violence. I will not repeat all Mr. Wittingham said, for a great deal was unfit for repetition. He cursed, he swore, he gave Mr. Slattery over to perdition, he declared that he would never let his son darken his doors again, that he had cast him off, disinherited him, trusted he might come to beg his bread. He told the surgeon to get out of his house and never to let him see him again; he vowed that he was glad he was dying, for then that scoundrel, his son, would soon find out what it was to offend a father, and would understand that he could not make his peace whenever he pleased by sending any pitiful little pimping apothecary to try and frighten him into forgiveness. In vain Mr. Slattery strove to speak, in vain he endeavored to excuse himself, in vain he took a tone of authority, and told his patient he would kill himself, if he gave way to such frantic rage. Again and again Mr. Wittingham, sitting bolt upright in bed, with a face black and green with wrath and jaundice, told him to get out of the house, to quit the room, to close the books and strike a balance; and at length the surgeon was fairly driven forth, remonstrating and protesting, unheard amid the storm of his patient's words.

Mrs. Billiter did not think fit to follow him, for she knew her master well, and that his ever ready suspicions would be excited by the least sign of collusion. Beside, she was not altogether well pleased that Mr. Slattery had thought fit to take the business out of her hands without consulting her, and made, as she termed it, a fine kettle full of fish of the whole affair. Thus she acted perfectly honest when Mr. Wittingham

turned upon her as soon as the surgeon was gone, exclaiming,

"What do you think of all this, woman? What do you think of his impertinence?"

And she replied, "I think him a meddling little fool, sir."

"Ah, that he is, Billiter, that he is!" answered Mr. Wittingham, "and I believe he has tried to frighten me, just to serve his own purposes. But he shall find himself mistaken, that he shall. He has done me harm enough, though—putting me in such a passion. My head aches as if it would split;" and Mr. Wittingham pressed his hand upon his forehead, and sunk back upon his pillow.

By this time night was falling fast; and Mrs. Billiter retired to obtain lights; when she returned, Mr. Wittingham seemed dozing, exhausted, as she thought, by the fit of passion, to which he had given way. Sitting down, therefore, at a distance, she took up a book and began to read. It was one of those strange, mystical compositions, the product of a fanatical spirit, carried away into wild and daring theories regarding things wisely hidden from the eyes of man, in which, sometimes, by one of the strange contrarieties of human nature, the most selfish, material, and unintellectual persons take great delight. It was called the "Invisible World Displayed;" and it had been lately bought by Mr. Wittingham, since he had fallen into the melancholy and desponding state, which usually accompanies the disease he labored under. For more than an hour Mrs. Billiter went on reading of ghosts, and spirits, and phantoms, and devils, till her hair began to stand erect under a thick cushion-cap. But still there was a sort of fascination about the book which carried her on. She heard her master breathing hard close by; and more than once she said to herself, "He's getting a good sleep now, at all events." At length she began to think the sleep lasted somewhat long; and, laying down the book, she went and looked in between the curtains. He had not moved at all, and was snoring aloud; so, as the clock had struck eleven, she thought she might as well send the other servants to bed, resolving to sit up in his room and sleep in the great chair. About a quarter of an hour was occupied in this proceeding, and in getting some refreshment; and, when she returned, opening the door gently, she heard the same sonorous breathing; and, seating herself again, she took up the book once more, thinking, "I dare say he will wake soon; so I had better not go to sleep, ere I have given him the other draught." Wonderful were the tales that she there read, of people possessed of miraculous warnings, and of voices heard, and of apparitions seen, in the dead hour of night. Tarningham clock struck twelve, while she was still poring over the pages; but, though she was a good deal excited by what she read, fatigue and watching would have their effect; and her eyes became somewhat heavy. To cast off this drowsiness, she rose and quietly put the room in order; then sat down again, and had her hand once more upon the book, when suddenly the heavy breathing stopped for a minute. "He is going to wake now," said Mrs. Billiter to herself; but scarcely had the thought passed through her mind, when she heard a sudden sort of rattling and snorting noise from the bed; and jumping up in alarm, she ran forward, and drew back the curtain. The light fell straight upon the face of the sick man; and a horrible sight it presented. The features were all in motion; the eyes rolling in the head; the teeth gnashing together; foam issuing from the mouth; and the whole limbs agitated, so that the bed-clothes were drawn into a knot around him. Mr. Wittingham, in short, was in strong convulsions; Mrs. Billiter was, naturally, greatly alarmed; and her first impulse was to run to the door to call for help; but suddenly a new view of the case seemed to strike her. "No, I won't," she said; and, going back, she got some hartshorn, and applied it to Mr. Wittingham's nostrils, sprinkled some water on his face, wetted his temples, and did everything she could think of to put an end to the fit. It continued violently for several minutes, however; and she thought, "Perhaps he ought to be bled; I ought to send for Slattery, I do believe:" but at that moment the spasm seemed relaxed; the contorted limbs fell languid; a calm expression spread over the features; the eyelids fell heavily, rose, and fell again; and though the fingers continued to grasp the bed-clothes, it was with no violence. "He is getting better," said the housekeeper to herself. The next moment the motions of the hands ceased; a sharp shudder passed over the whole frame; the chest heaved and fell; then came a deep sigh; and the eyes opened; the jaws dropped; all became motionless; there was not a sound. Mrs. Billiter listened. Not the rustle of the slightest breath could be heard. She held the candle close to his eyes; the eyelids quivered not; the pupil did not contract. A cold, damp dew stood upon the sunken temples; and all was still—but it was the silence of death. She set down the candle on the chair, and gazed at him for two or three minutes, almost as motionless as the dead body before her; then, suddenly starting, she said in a low tone: "There is no time to be lost; I must think of the poor boy; for he was a hard-hearted old man, and there is no knowing what he may have done." She pressed her hand upon her forehead tight for a minute or two, in deep thought; then putting the candle on the table at a distance from the bed-curtains, she went out, ran up stairs, and called up the footman, waiting at his door till he came out.

"Master is very ill, John," said Mrs. Billiter; "I don't think he will get through the night, so you must run up—"

"And bring down Mr. Slattery," said the footman, interrupting her.

"No," answered the housekeeper, "Slattery said he could do no good; and master and he had a sad quarrel, but you must go and call Mr. Harry. Tell him to come down directly, and not to lose a minute."

"I had better take the horse," said the man, "for Buxton's Inn is a good bit of a way."

"He is not at Buxton's Inn," answered Mrs. Billiter, "but at Morris's little cottage on Chandleigh-heath. You can take the horse if you like, but be quick about it, for Heaven's sake. It is a clear, moonlight night, and you can gallop all the way."

"That I will," said the man, and ran down stairs.

Without calling any one else, Mrs. Billiter re-

turned to the chamber of death, looked into the bed for a moment or two, and saw that all was still. She knew he was dead right well, but yet it seemed strange to her that he had not moved. There was something awful in it, and she sat down upon a chair and wept. She had not loved him; she had not esteemed, or respected him; she had known him to be harsh, cruel, and unkind, but yet there was something in seeing the life of the old man go out solitary, untended by kindred hands, without a friend, without a relation near, with bitterness in his spirit and enmity between him and his only child, that moved the secret sources of deep emotion in the woman's heart, and opened the fountain of tears.

While she yet wept, she heard the horse's feet pass by toward Chandleigh-heath, and then for about an hour all was silent. Buried in deep sleep, the inhabitants of the little town knew not, cared not, thought not of all that was passing in the dwelling of their rich neighbor. At length a distant sound was heard of hoofs beating fast the hard road; it came nearer and nearer; and starting up, Mrs. Billiter ran down stairs with a light in her hand and opened the hall-door. The next moment she heard the garden-gate opened, and a figure came forward leading a horse.

Casting the rein over the beast's neck and giving it a cut with the whip to send it toward the stables, Harry Wittingham sprang forward, ran up the steps, and entered the house. His face was not pale, but flushed, and his eyes fiery.

"Ah, Master Harry," said Mrs. Billiter, as soon as she saw him, "he is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Harry Wittingham, "do you mean he is dead?"

"Yes," answered the old woman; "but come up, sir, come up, there is much to be thought of."

Without a word the young man stood beside, while she closed and locked the door, and then followed her up stairs to his dead father's room. She suffered him to gaze into the bed for a minute or two, with haggard eyes and heavy brow, but then she touched his arm, saying,

"Master Harry, Master Harry, you had better think of other things just now; he was very hard upon you, and, I can't help thinking, tried to do you wrong. Four or five days ago he wrote a great deal one afternoon, and then told me afterward 'he had remembered me in his will.' You had better see what that will is—he kept all the papers he cared most about in that table-drawer—the key hangs upon his watch-chain."

With shaking hands Harry Wittingham took up the watch, approached the table and opened the drawer with the key. There were several papers within and different note-books, but one document lay at the top with a few words written on the outside, and the young man instantly took it up, opened, and began to read it. Mrs. Billiter gazed at him, standing at a distance, with a look of anxiety and apprehension. When he had read about a dozen lines his face assumed a look of terrible distress; he dropped the paper from his hand, and sinking into a chair, exclaimed,

"Good God, he thought I shot at him!"

"But you didn't? you didn't, Master Harry?"

"I? I never thought of it!" exclaimed Harry Wittingham.

Mrs. Billiter ran forward, picked up the paper, and put it in his hand again.

"There's a large fire in the kitchen to keep water hot," she said in a whisper; "all the maids are in bed, and the man has not come back yet, but he won't be long—be quick, Master Harry, be quick."

The young man paused, gazed thoughtfully at the paper for a moment or two, then took up the light and hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

We must go back to an early hour of that same Sunday morning, and to the cottage of Stephen Gimlet, near the little church. Both Stephen himself and his mother-in-law had risen betimes; and the boy was still sleeping in his bed. The old lady spent three quarters of an hour in writing an epistle, with her spectacles on her nose, while her son-in-law ate his breakfast; and when the act of composition was over, she folded up in the letter an old piece of paper, partly printed, partly written, the very same, in fact, which had flown out of her family Bible one morning, when poor Billy Lamb, coming in, had found the book in the hands of Stephen Gimlet's little boy. She then added thereto an old, somewhat crumpled, and well worn letter, first reading over the address attentively, got a light and a small piece of red sealing-wax, sealed the letter, and stamped it with the end of her thimble.

"There, Stephen," she said, giving the letter to her son-in-law, "he is back now, that's certain; take that up to him, and tell him, that if he wants to hear any more about it, I can give him information of the whole. I know all the names, and I believe the minister is alive still. I would not go out of the house, if I were you, till I saw him; and, if by any chance he should not be come down yet, I would hang about and catch him when he arrives; for it is only just right he should know how the whole matter stands, before he goes any further."

"I won't miss him this time, goody," said Ste Gimlet; "so you and the boy get your dinner, if I should not come back in time. I am very uneasy at its not having been done before; for we poor people cannot tell what may become of such things with great folks, and after all you tell me, I am very sure that blackguard fellow, Moreton, is not hanging about here for any good."

Thus saying, Stephen Gimlet put the letter carefully up, and went away, as usual, with his gun in his hand, and his dog following. It was not yet more than half-past five o'clock; and, recollecting that the servants of Sir John Slingby were not very matutinal in their habits, the gamekeeper thought he might as well go upon one of his rounds, which led him near to Chandleigh-heath, and see if he could get any inkling of Captain Moreton's proceedings. He walked slowly along up the lane from his own house, crossed the high-road from Tarningham to London, and then, taking a path across the fields, soon came to another lane, which led him to a sandy way, having a high hedge with elm-trees on the left, and Chandleigh-heath on

the right. It was sunk down some way beneath the rest of the country, so as to give no prospect over the common; but a couple of hundred yards further on, a footpath went up over the bank and divided it into two, something after the fashion of a bird's merrythought, one branch leading to an old tumulus, topped with firs, and the other, which was much shorter, running down to the cottage inhabited by Captain Moreton. About twenty yards before he reached this turning, the dog, which followed at Stephen Gimlet's heels, began to growl in a somewhat angry manner; and the gamekeeper turned round to look in what direction the beast's eyes were bent. Before he could ascertain, however, a man suddenly sprang over the hedge, and casting himself upon him, seized the barrel of his gun with both hands. A fierce struggle ensued; for Stephen Gimlet at once perceived who his adversary was; and the gamekeeper, though taken unawares, was decidedly getting the better, when he suddenly found his arms seized from behind, and a cord passed quickly round them. The next instant the cord was drawn tight in spite of all his efforts; but at the same moment he had the satisfaction of hearing the voice of Harry Wittingham exclaim: "D—— the dog—he has bit me to the bone;" and, as his legs were free, he made so strenuous an application of his thick-nailed shoes to the shins of Captain Moreton, that the respectable gentleman let go his hold; and, darting away, Stephen Gimlet ran forward, as fast as he could, in the hope of meeting some one who would render him assistance. I have said, that his assailants sprang upon him from behind; and consequently, the only paths open for the fugitive were those which led toward the cottage or to the tumulus on the heath. In the latter direction he was not likely to find any one to help him; but down the lane, which passed close by the cottage, were a number of poor men's houses, the inhabitants of which usually went to work about that hour. It is a pity that Stephen Gimlet did not recollect that it was Sunday; but so it was: and the good laborers were taking an additional nap to refresh them after the toils of the week. No one knows how much one limb aids another, even in the peculiar functions of the latter, till some deprivation has taken place. Now, at the first consideration, we should say that a man did not run with his arms, but yet the arms help a man very much in running; and Stephen Gimlet soon found to his cost, that he could not run as he was accustomed to do, without them. He was much swifter of foot than either of those who followed; but yet, by the time that he had got three hundred yards down the lane, they had recovered their hold of him and thrown him down. In fact, it was a great convenience to them, that he had run; for every step that he had taken was in the direction which they had intended to carry him; and when they overtook him, he was not thirty yards from the garden gate of the cottage. He was easily dragged along for that distance, brought into the house and put into a room, which had been constructed by the retired hosier for what he called the butler's pantry, though it is by no means to be understood that he ever had, or *expected* to have such a *thing as a butler, or anything* the least like it. Nevertheless, as the room was destined to contain a certain amount of silver spoons, tea-pots, and other little pieces of the precious metal, strong bars had been put up to the windows; and the butler's pantry now formed a very convenient little cage for the bird, which the two gentlemen had caught out upon the common.

Before they shut the door upon him, Mr. Henry Wittingham made some proposal to Captain Moreton in a low voice, to which the other replied:

"No, no; he'll make an outcry and wake the women; and then we shall have it all over the place. You can lick him well before we let him out, if you like. Let us attend to the main business first, and, having got him in, keep him in; nobody knowing anything about it. Good morning, Master Wolf; you shall have some bread-and-water, if you like, but nothing else for the next four-and-twenty hours."

Stephen Gimlet answered not; and it is to be remarked, that—whether because he thought that shouting would be of no use, or that he chose to imitate the beast, whose name he had acquired, in its taciturn habits under adversity—not a word had he uttered from the beginning of the fray until the end. He suffered the door to be shut upon him in silence: and, while he remained revolving what was to be done, or whether anything could be done, his two captors retired to the little drawing-room, where they sat down and laughed for a moment at the success of their scheme. Their first merriment, however, soon gave way to some uneasy sensations. Captain Moreton rubbed his shins, which had suffered considerably from the contact with Stephen Gimlet's shoes. Harry Wittingham unceremoniously pulled off his boot, and found his whole stocking stained with blood, and the marks of four large fangs very apparent in the heel and tendon.

"Come along with me," said Captain Moreton, when he saw his companion's state; "we'll get a little salt-and-water; you shall wash your heel with it, and I will wash my shins, for that d—— fellow has kicked all the skin off—salt-and-water is the best thing in the world."

While they go to perform the part of surgeons upon themselves, I will, with the reader's leave, return to speak of one of the actors in the scene of Stephen Gimlet's capture, who has not had as much notice as he deserves. The dog, who had followed him from his own cottage, after having paid due attention to the heel of Mr. Wittingham, and received a severe kick for his pains, gave chase to the pursuers of his master down the lane, tore Captain Moreton's coat with a spring and a snap; but then suddenly, as if he saw that his own unassisted efforts could do little, and judged that it might be right to seek assistance, darted off at a right angle across the common, with his head hanging down, his tongue out, and some angry foam dropping from his mouth. He ran straight through a farmyard on the opposite side of the heath, bit at a woman who was going to milk the cows, but only tore her apron, wounded the farmer's dog with a sharp snap, went clear over the wall and straight on toward Tarningham, biting at every living thing that came in his way, but never

stopping to ascertain whether he had inflicted much or little evil. This misanthropical spirit soon called the attention of the people, and excited their indignation. They gave the poor dog a bad name; and, though no one could be found to undertake the exact task of hanging him, they followed with pitchforks, sticks, shovels, stones, and a very miscellaneous assortment of other weapons, such as pokers, tongs, etc.: and, driving him into the court-yard of the mayor's house at Tarningham, succeeded in killing him without his doing any further mischief.

Such is the tragic history of Stephen Gimlet's poor dog; but of none of the particulars were Captain Moreton and Harry Wittingham made acquainted at the time; for both these gentlemen thought fit to keep themselves strictly to the house during the whole morning. Of much and many things did they talk; they comforted the outward man with salt-and-water; they comforted the inner man with toast, coffee, eggs, and broiled ham. The broiled ham left them thirsty; and at twelve o'clock they tried to assuage such unpleasant sensations by a glass of cold brandy-and-water; and finding that not succeed according to their expectation, they tried another glass, hot. After that, Harry Wittingham declared he felt tired and sleepy with getting up so early, and retired to lie down for a time; but he continued sleeping in a broken sort of confused slumber for between three and four hours, when he was roused by hearing some very high tones, and apparently words, proceeding from the neighboring room. Without difficulty he recognized the voices of Captain Moreton and his fair companion, who had seemed to be in no very good-humor when she supped with him the night before; but he could not distinguish the subject of dispute on the present occasion; and, looking at his watch, he found that it was past four o'clock. Knowing that the dinner-hour at the cottage was five, he washed his face and hands, arranged his hair, as best he might, and went down to the drawing-room, still hearing the strife of tongues raging in the adjoining room.

It was some quarter of an hour before Captain Moreton joined him; and he was then informed by his worthy friend, that dinner would be half an hour later that day, as the maid had been sent to Buxton's Inn, for the purpose of ordering a chaise to be at the door at nightfall.

This announcement startled Harry Wittingham a good deal.

"But where the devil are you going to, Moreton?" he inquired; "you are not going to leave me alone with this fellow, are you?"

"Only for a short time, Mr. Wittingham," answered Captain Moreton, in his easy nonchalant way, "not long enough for him to eat you, or for you to eat him. You know what obstinate devils these women are, and I have got to do with the most pig-headed of the whole race. The fact is, Wittingham, we have got in our hands, if we do but use it properly, the means of having full revenge upon one or two good friends of ours; among the rest, that fellow, who, as you ought to remember, was second to Captain Hayward in his duel with you—Mr. Beauchamp, he calls himself."

"Why, I hear he has turned out a Lord Lenham, and is going to marry old Sir John's pretty daughter."

"Exactly so," answered Captain Moreton, drily; "but if he doesn't mind, his wedding tour will be a different one to what he expects; however, I have the greatest difficulty in preventing my fair friend Charlotte from spoiling the whole business; for she is in one of her violent fits, and then she gets as mad as a March hare. She and I must act together; but I must not appear in the business; for you see there are two or three little things that the people might bring against me. I have resolved, therefore, to get over to Winterton, till to-morrow's work is blown over; for she will be present to witness the marriage, do what I can to stop her. As the mischief would have it, however, I threatened to blow the whole matter up, if she would not submit to management; and so she will not let me out of her sight, threatening at the same time to cut my throat, or some pretty little thing of that kind, by way of making herself a pleasant companion. However, she must go with me, that's clear, and come over in a chaise to-morrow to the wedding. If she does not spoil all, and this man here can be kept in, we have got them completely in our power."

"Why, what in fortune's name can he have to do with Lord Lenham's marriage?" asked Harry Wittingham.

"I don't know exactly," answered Captain Moreton, musing gravely, "but I have a good many suspicions about him, which it won't do to mention just yet. All I ask, is, to have him kept in here till after the marriage is over; and you will have nothing further to do with it, than to keep the key of the room, and prevent any of the girls from going in. By so doing, you will punish him ten times more than if you licked him for an hour. I know you are not given to be afraid of anything; but, if people should make a fuss about it, it is very easy to say you did it to punish him for knocking you down the way he did."

Harry Wittingham smiled; and the moment after, Captain Moreton continued: "Here she comes, by Jove; I'll get out of the way for the present, and cram some meat down that fellow's throat without untying him. You'll stay, Wittingham, won't you? I shall be back to-morrow night."

"Why, I must stay, I suppose," said Harry Wittingham; "for good old Dame Bilbie thinks I shall be here till to-morrow night; and I expect her to send up some money, if she can get it."

Captain Moreton did not wait for anything further than this assent, but disappeared by the right-hand door; and the moment after, the fair lady, whom I have so often mentioned, entered by the other. Her face was somewhat redder than usual; but that was the only sign of agitating passions that could be discovered in her demeanor. Her step was calm, stealthy, and catlike; her eyes looked cold and flat, with a meaningless sort of glassy stare about them, as if purposely covered by a semi-opaque film to veil what was passing beneath. She looked slowly round the room, without taking any notice of Mr. Wittingham, though she had not seen him that day; and, walking round to the

mock-rosewood sofa, she sat down in silence, and took some papers out of the drawer of the table. Harry Wittingham wished her good morning, and addressed to her some commonplace observation, to which she replied with a forced smile, and then busied herself with her papers again. When Captain Moreton reëntered the room about a quarter of an hour afterward, a sudden fierce gleam came into her eyes and passed away again; but she uttered not a word; and, dinner being announced soon after, she took Mr. Wittingham's arm and walked into the small dining-room. When the meal was over, and she left the gentlemen to their wine, she passed by Captain Moreton's chair, and bending down her head, she said in a low voice, but loud enough for Mr. Wittingham to hear:

"Remember, Moreton!—remember! You know me!"

Captain Moreton only laughed, though the words were said with a threatening manner; and, as soon as she was gone, he plied Harry Wittingham with wine, which was followed by brandy-and-water; and in the pleasant occupation, thus provided, the two worthy compeers continued to exercise themselves, till the sky grew gray, and the roll of a chaise was heard before the garden.

"There, Wittingham," cried Captain Moreton, starting up, "there's the key of the little cellar—small enough, but there's sufficient in it to lay you dead-drunk for a fortnight. There's the key of the cage, too; keep the bird safe till ten or eleven o'clock to-morrow. I will try to keep my gray mare in hand; and, if we can manage both, you will hear some news to-morrow night, that will make you laugh heartily. Farewell, my good fellow," and going to the door, he shouted aloud, "Where's the portmanteau?"

"I put it in the shay, sir," said the girl; and, turning once more to Harry Wittingham, Captain Moreton told him that he should see him before ten the following night, and went to seek his fair companion.

In a few minutes more they were gone; but the gentleman they left behind did not see any reason why he should not finish the bottle of wine on the table, "just to take the taste of the brandy out of his mouth." After that he fell asleep in an arm-chair; and so sound was his slumber, that the maid came in twice and looked at him; but seeing that there was no probability of his waking for some hours, she put a fresh pair of candles on the table, and went to bed.

Harry Wittingham slept and dreamed. He thought he had committed some horrible act, that the hue and cry was raised, the whole county in pursuit, and that he could hear the galloping of horses coming close after him. He struggled to spur his own beast forward, but its legs would not move; and, looking down with horror and consternation, he found it was a rocking-horse with little bells at its ears and its tail. Suddenly a constable seemed to grasp him by the shoulder; and, starting up in agony, he found the servant-girl shaking him.

"Please, sir," she said, "Mrs. Billiter has sent up the man to say, that your father is dying, and you must go down directly."

Without a moment's thought or consideration, Harry Wittingham ran out, snatched up his hat in the passage, and, telling the man to follow on foot, mounted the horse and rode away to Tarningham.

CHAPTER XL.

The sun shone bright in Stephen Gimlet's cottage for a couple of hours after dawn, till about an hour before evening's close. For the first three or four hours the same sunshine seemed to pervade the interior of the house that glowed without. Widow Lamb seemed contented with what she had done; her meek face wore as warm a smile as ever now shone upon it; and she busied herself during the morning in all the little household arrangements, and in teaching the boy his letters. The boy himself played about merrily, while she was occupied with the inanimate things of the place, and then came and said his letters, infamously ill, indeed, but still somewhat better than usual. When the sun got round to his southernmost point, Widow Lamb, not at all surprised at her son-in-law's absence, as its probability had been announced beforehand, gave the boy his dinner, and took a very moderate portion of food herself; but when the day had three or four hours declined from its prime, she wondered that Stephen had not come back, and, at the end of an hour, grew somewhat uneasy. She consoled herself, however, by supposing, that Lord Lenham had not yet returned from London, and that Stephen was waiting for his arrival; but another hour passed, and another, and at length her son, Billy Lamb, made his appearance, inquiring somewhat anxiously for his brother-in-law.

Mrs. Lamb simply told him that Stephen was out, adding that he had been away all day.

"It is droll I haven't seen him," said the boy, "but I dare say he is vexed about his dog."

"Why, what has happened to the dog?" asked Widow Lamb. "He took it with him this morning early."

"Ay, but the people of Tarningham killed it for a mad dog," said Billy Lamb. "I dare say the poor beast was not mad at all. I saw it afterward and knew it directly; but I have seen nothing of Stephen."

"He is up at Sir John's," said Widow Lamb, "and I dare say is waiting till the young lord comes down from London."

"No, that can't be, mother," replied her son, "for the gentleman came down yesterday evening; one of our post-boys drove him."

"That's very odd," said Widow Lamb; "I wonder Stephen has not come back, then. I hope nothing's the matter."

"Oh, dear, no," replied the deformed lad; "you know Ste was always fond of wandering about, and would, at times, be out for a couple of days together; but I wanted to tell him that I have found out nothing about that Captain Moreton, except that he is going away from the cottage somewhere to-night. I did not see him myself, when I took up the letters to him to-day; but the servant-girl told me that she had been sent up to Buxton's Inn to order a chaise, and that it was to be down there just at night fall."

"Ay, ill birds fly at night," said Widow Lamb; "but I wish Stephen would come home, for he has been now gone well nigh twelve hours."

"Oh, he is safe enough, mother," reiterated her son, "it is not like if it were night-time, or winter either—but I must get back; for there will be all the supper beer to carry out;" and, after saying a few more words, he departed.

Hour after hour, however, went by; and Stephen Gimlet did not appear, till the good old lady's apprehensions increased every minute. She put the boy to bed, and sat up and watched; but eight, nine, ten o'clock came, and no one approached the cottage-door. A terribly anxious night was that which followed; and, though about midnight Widow Lamb went to bed, sleep did not visit her eyes for some hours. She lay and revolved all that could have happened. She was anxious for her son-in-law; anxious for the result of his mission to Beauchamp; and she had resolved to set off early on the morrow morning for Tarningham-park, taking the boy with her. At about half-past three, however, weariness overpowered the old woman, and she slept. Her frame was not very strong; and, exhausted with both watching and anxiety, the slumber that fell upon her was profound and long. The first thing that awoke her was the little boy pulling her by the arm and saying, "Granny, granny, you are a sluggard now, as you called me the other day. I am very hungry, I want my breakfast."

Widow Lamb started up, and looking at her old round watch in its tortoise-shell case, she saw that it was half-past seven o'clock. Vexed and angry with herself, she hurried on her clothes, and proceeded to give the boy some food, urging him to hasten his meal, as she was going to take him a walk. The temptation was strong, and at about a quarter-past eight, they were out of the cottage and on their way to Tarningham-park. She heard village bells ringing merrily, as on a day of festival; but Widow Lamb's heart was sad. The whole country was smiling in the morning light; but, though to a fine mind the beauties of nature never lose their charm, yet to the old there is, at all times, a melancholy mingled with the pleasure they produce; and, to the spirit cast down with apprehension or affliction, the very loveliness becomes a load. The boy lingered, and would fain have played by the way; but his grandmother hurried him forward as fast as his little legs would carry him; and they reached the mansion of Sir John Slingsby at a few minutes before nine. There were carriages already at the door. Servants were seen bustling about; but all were too busy to take notice of the old widow and the little boy, till, going into the court-yard, she addressed herself to one of the helpers in the stable, whom she had seen and known, and told him her apprehensions about her son-in-law.

The man kindly undertook to make inquiries, and let her know the result; and, leaving her there for some minutes, he came back shortly after with the butler, who told her that Stephen Gimlet had certainly not been there the day before. "I can't stop to talk with you, goody," he said, in an important tone; "for, you see, Miss Slingsby is just going to set out, to be married to Lord Lenham; but, as soon as they come back from church, I will tell Sir John, and, depend upon it, he will have Stephen sought for."

"If I could speak with Lord Lenham for one minute," said Widow Lamb; but the man interrupted her, laughing. "You must go down to Tarningham, then, goody," he said, "for his lordship slept there last night; or else, you can go down to the church of Little Tarningham, where, I dare say, he is waiting by this time; or, what is better than all, wait here till they come back, and I'll give Ste Gimlet's little boy a bit of bride-cake."

As he spoke, he hurried back again into the house; and Widow Lamb paused and thought, with the tears in her eyes; but at length she said, aloud, "I will go down to the church;" and, taking the little boy by the hand, who did not at all like the idea of losing the bride-cake, she hurried out of the gates of the court, and pursued one of the small footpaths leading toward Little Tarningham. She was within fifty yards from the park paling, when Sir John Slingsby's carriages drove past at a quick rate; and Widow Lamb, though little able from much exertion, hurried her pace till the boy was forced to run, to keep up with her. The church, as the reader knows, was at the distance of somewhat less than half-a-mile; and, when Widow Lamb reached it, there stood before the gates of the little church-yard two or three handsome carriages and one post-chaise. Passing quickly along the path through the cemetery, the old woman approached the door, which was ajar, and heard the full, sonorous voice of Dr. Miles reading the marriage service. She pushed open the door gently, and went in. There were a great number of people in the church, collected from Tarningham and the neighborhood—some in the little gallery, where they could see best; some in pews in the body of the church, and one or two in the aisle. The latter, however, did not prevent the old lady from seeing straight up to the altar, around which were congregated the bridal party, with Beauchamp and Captain Hayward on the one side, and Sir John Slingsby with his family on the other. Just as Widow Lamb entered, Dr. Miles, standing before the altar, was saying aloud, "I pronounce that they be man and wife together."

It was evident the ceremony was nearly over—the marriage, in fact, completed. The benediction was then given, and the psalm said; and, after all those parts of the service which are usually read, Beauchamp drew the arm of Isabella through his own and led her down the aisle, toward the little vestry which stood on the right-hand side of the church. The people in the pews rose up to look over; but, to the surprise of many, one of the pew-doors opened before the newly married couple had taken two steps, and a lady issued forth, and, turning her face toward the altar, stood right in the way of the advancing party. Her eye fixed straight upon Lord Lenham, flashing and fierce; her lip curled with a smile of contemptuous triumph, while her brow appeared knit with a heavy frown. At the same moment, a voice, which some persons near recognized as that of Mr Wharton, the attorney, exclaimed from the pew

which the lady had just left, "Now she has spoiled it all."

But what was the effect of this apparition upon those in whose presence it so suddenly appeared! Beauchamp staggered and turned deadly pale, and Isabella recoiled in alarm from that menacing look and flashing eye, saying, in a low tone, "Good Heaven, who is this!"

"Who am I, girl!" said the lady, aloud; "I will tell you who I am, and let him deny it if he can. I am this man's lawful wife, whom you have just married—look at his face: pale, dastard conscience is upon it. He is well aware of the truth that I speak, and the crime that he has committed."

But Beauchamp instantly recovered himself; and, while a dead silence prevailed in the whole church, he put Isabella's hand into her father's, advanced a step toward the person before him, and fixing his eyes firmly upon her, he said,

"Charlotte Hay, you have laid once more a dark and horrible scheme to injure me. By cunning artifices and long concealment you have taught me to believe you were dead for some years, and have waited for this moment for your revenge—you know it—you dare not deny it; but you may yet find yourself deceived. In one point you are already deceived; for, doubtless, judging from your own heart, you imagine I have concealed previous events from this lady and her family. Such is not the case; and now you force upon me that which I have always avoided, the trial whether there ever was any marriage at all between myself and you."

"Avoided it, because you knew it could not be questioned," answered the lady, scornfully. "Your father and yourself took lawyers' opinion enough, and the reply of every one was that the marriage was perfectly good and valid."

"Not worth a straw," said a voice behind her; and, turning round with the look of a demon, the eyes of Charlotte Hay lighted on Widow Lamb, who had walked quietly up the aisle at the commencement of this scene. For a moment or two she gazed at her, as if striving to recall her face, and then gave a short scream, muttering afterward to herself,

"I know who has done this—I know who has done this!"

"What is this, my good woman?" cried Mr. Wharton, stepping out of the pew, and putting himself at the side of Charlotte Hay.

Sir John Slingsby was darting forward toward him, with wrath in his countenance; but Doctor Miles held him by the arm, and Widow Lamb replied, boldly,

"What I said, Mr. Wharton, was, that this lady's pretended marriage with Lord Lenham, then Mr. St. Leger, was no marriage at all."

"But why? were you present? what can you know about it? are you one of the judges of the ecclesiastical court?" asked Mr. Wharton, with amazing volubility.

"I am no judge, and was not present, though I was in the house," answered Widow Lamb; "but it was no marriage at all, and I can prove it: so you need not be terrified, dear young lady, for you are his lawful wife at this very moment."

Charlotte Hay turned toward Isabella with a look of withering scorn, and exclaimed,

"You may be his concubine, girl, if you like; but you can never be his wife as long as I live."

"I say she is his wife," cried Widow Lamb, indignantly, "just as much as you are the wife of Archibald Graham, the minister of Blackford, my husband David Lamb's first cousin. You thought all trace of that marriage was removed; you knew not that there are people living who witnessed the marriage; you knew not that I have your marriage lines now in my possession, and a letter from your real husband, written long after Captain Moreton took you away from him, and after your pretended marriage with this gentleman."

"Produce them, produce them," cried Mr. Wharton; "let us see what these wonderful documents are. Such papers often turn out mere moonshine in a court of law."

"At all events, sir, this church is not a court of law," said Dr. Miles, advancing; "such matters must not be argued here; and I must remark, that, if this lady had any just cause to oppose this marriage, she was bound to state it when called upon in the solemn manner which the ritual prescribes. How the fact of her not having done so may affect the legal questions implicated is not for me to say; but I must declare that her not having tendered her opposition at the proper moment was highly wrong, and does not give a favorable impression to her case."

The lady turned her fierce eyes upon the rector, and then glared over the rest of the party, but seemed without a reply; for she made none. Mr. Wharton came to her assistance—with a falsehood, however.

"The lady was too much overpowered, sir, to speak," he said, "and I was not formally authorized by her to do so. But as to this old woman, I demand that the documents she mentions be produced; for I have every reason to believe that this is a mere pretext—in fact, a case of fraud, originating in conspiracy; and I shall not scruple to give the good lady into custody, if I can find a constable, unless she instantly produces the documents." He looked full at Widow Lamb while he spoke, and then added, "Have you got them? can you produce them?"

"I have not got them here," answered the old woman, in a faltering tone, somewhat alarmed at the threat of a man who had ruined her husband; "but they are safe enough, I am sure, and they shall be produced whenever there is a trial."

"Oh, oh!" cried Mr. Wharton; "what time to manufacture them! But I will take care of you, my good lady. I will see for a constable directly, and—"

"Nonsense, you rogue!" cried Sir John Slingsby; "you know very well that such a thing is out of the question. You can manufacture no charge upon such a ground, whatever others may manufacture."

"Rogue, Sir John!" cried Mr. Wharton, furiously; "that man is the rogue who does not pay his just debts, and you know whether the name applies best to me or to you."

"To you, lawyer Wharton," said Stephen Gimlet, coming up the aisle; "there, hold your tongue, for I heard you talk with Captain Mo-

ton this morning, and how you settled all your differences upon his promising you, what you called a *post obit bond*, to pay you five thousand pounds upon the death of Lord Harcourt Lenham. There, Goody Lamb, there is the letter you gave me yesterday; I'll tell you how it all happened that I could not deliver it, by-and-by."

"Here are the papers, here are the papers!" cried the widow, tearing open the letter; "here are the marriage lines, as the people call them in Scotland, between Charlotte Hay and Archibald Graham; and here is poor Archy's letter to my husband, written long after."

"You had better get into the chaise and go," whispered Mr. Wharton to the lady, who now stood pale and trembling beside him; and then raising his voice, as if to cover her retreat, he continued, "take notice, Sir John Slingsby, and all persons here present, that I charge the noble lord there with the crime of bigamy, in having intermarried with Isabella Slingsby, his wife, Charlotte Hay, being still living; and that I at once pronounce these things, in the old woman's hands, merely forgeries got up between her and Viscount Lenham, while he was staying at the cottage of her son-in-law, Stephen Gimlet, *alias* Wolf. You will act as you like, Sir John, but it is only a friendly part to say, that if you have any regard for your daughter, you will separate her at once from one who is not and can not be her husband."

Thus saying, he walked with a well assured air to the door of the church, neither turning to the right nor to the left; but the moment he turned away, Ned Hayward quitted the side of Mary Clifford, and, with a quick step, followed the lawyer. He let him pass through the church-yard, and open the gate; but then, going up to one of the post-boys standing by Beauchamp's carriage, the young officer said,

"Lend me your whip one moment."

The man at once put it in his hand, and the next instant it was laid over Mr. Wharton's shoulders some five or six times with rapid and vigorous reiteration.

"I think the price is five pounds," said Ned Hayward, nodding his head to the smarting and astounded attorney; "it is cheap, Mr. Wharton, and perhaps I may require a little more at the same price. Good morning," and he reëntered the church, while the servants and post-boys gave a grand shout, and Mr. Wharton sneaked away, vowing vengeance for a future day.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Come into the vestry," said Dr. Miles, in a low tone, to Beauchamp: "you have many things, my lord, to consider; and we have here the eyes of a multitude upon us, the ears of a multitude around us."

"You had better go back to the Park," said Sir John Slingsby, who had overheard the good old rector's words: "there we can talk the matter over at leisure."

"The register must first be signed," said Dr. Miles, gravely; "for, whatever be the result, *the ceremony* has been fully performed—come, *my lord*. The circumstances are, undoubtedly, *very painful*; but it seems to me they might *have been much worse*."

With slow steps and sad hearts the whole party followed; Isabella, pale as death, looking down upon the ground, and Beauchamp, with his lip quivering and his brow contracted, but his step firm and regular, as if the very intensity of his feelings had, after the first moment, restored him all his energies. As they passed through the vestry-door Isabella raised her eyes for an instant to his, and saw the deep dejection which was written on his countenance. She touched his arm gently to call his attention, and said, as he bent down his head,

"Do not be so sad; you have nothing to reproach yourself with."

"That is some consolation, dear girl," replied Beauchamp, in a low voice; "but still I must be sad. How can it be otherwise, when I have to part with you for a time, even at the very moment I call you my own?"

Isabella did not reply; but her cheek varied, first glowing warmly, then becoming deadly pale again.

"Where is Ned Hayward?" exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, looking round—"where the devil have you been, Ned?" he continued, seeing his young friend coming in at the vestry-door.

"I have been horsewhipping Wharton," answered Ned Hayward, in an indifferent tone; "but now, Lenham, what are you going to do in this business?"

"To go to London directly," answered Beauchamp, "and bring this matter to an issue at once."

"Pooh, the woman is not married to you at all!" cried Sir John Slingsby—"the whole thing is a farce; still I think you are right."

"I am quite sure you are," said Ned Hayward, "and I will go with you, if you will let me, Lenham. But first we must talk with good Widow Lamb, examine these papers of hers accurately, ascertain exactly all the circumstances, and be prepared with every sort of evidence and information. Cheer up, cheer up, my dear lord. Honor and straightforward dealing always set these things right at last. Shall I call in the old woman? she is standing out there by the vestry-door."

"By all means," said Dr. Miles; "it may be as well to make all these inquiries here, and determine at once what is to be done. The crowd of gaping idlers from Tarningham will disperse in the mean time. Sit down here, Isabella, and be firm, my child; God does not desert those who trust and serve him."

While he was speaking, Ned Hayward had beckoned Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into the vestry; and Dr. Miles, taking the papers from the old woman's hands, examined them carefully.

"The very appearance of these documents," he said at length, "puts the idea of forgery, or, at least, recent forgery, quite out of the question. No art could give all the marks of age which they present. But we can have another and a better assurance, I believe, than the mere look of the papers—"

"But what are they, what are they, doctor?" asked Sir John Slingsby; "I have not yet heard the exact import of either."

Isabella moved nearer to the clergyman while he explained, and all other eyes were fixed eagerly upon him.

"This first and most important document," he said, "purports to be what is called in Scotland the marriage lines of Archibald Graham, student in divinity, and Charlotte Hay, the daughter of Thomas Hay, of Greenbank, deceased, within the precincts of Holyrood—which means, I suppose, that he died in debt. The paper—I have seen such before—is tantamount to a marriage certificate in England. The marriage appears to have been celebrated in one of the parishes of Edinburgh, and I have lately had cause to know that very accurate registers are kept in that city, so that the authenticity of the document can be ascertained beyond all doubt."

"But the date, the date?" cried Beauchamp.

"The date is the 4th February, 18—," said Dr. Miles, "just thirteen years ago last February."

"Nearly two years before the execution of their villainous scheme against me," said the young nobleman; "so far, at least, all is satisfactory; but what is the other paper?"

"Hardly less important," replied Dr. Miles, whose eye had been running over the contents while he conversed, "but it will require some explanation. I would read it aloud, but some of the terms are more plain and straightforward than ladies' ears are accustomed to hear. It is signed Archibald Graham, however, dated five years ago, and addressed to David Lamb, who died in Tarningham some two years back. He speaks of his wife Charlotte, and tells his cousin that he hears she is still living in adultery with Captain Moreton. He says that as her seducer's property is somewhere in this neighborhood she is most likely not far distant, and begs David Lamb to seek her out, and beseech her, upon Christian principles, to quit her abandoned course of life. The good man—and he seems a really good man—says further, that although he can never receive or see her again, he is ready to share his small stipend with her in order that she may not be driven by poverty to a continuance in vice; but he seems to have been ignorant of her pretended marriage with Lord Lenham—at least, he makes no allusion to it."

"That was because he never knew it, sir," said Widow Lamb; "I beg pardon for speaking, but the way it all happened was this. Old Mr. Hay had spent all he had, and had taken to Holyrood to avoid his creditors. Archy Graham, who was then studying divinity in Edinburgh, had been born not far from Greenbank, and finding out Mr. Hay, was very kind to him and his daughter. Though he was not very rich himself—for he was only the son of a farmer well to do—he often gave the old laird and the young lady a dinner when they could have got one nowhere else, and when Mr. Hay was taken ill and dying, he was with him every day comforting him. He paid the doctors, and found them food and everything. When the old man died the young lady was left without any means of support. At first she thought of teaching, for she had learned all kinds of things in other times, but people were not very fond of her, for she had always been too gay for the Scotch folks, and there was something flighty in her way that was not liked. It was need, not love or *gratitude either, I believe,* that made her marry poor Archy Graham. Soon after he got the parish of Blackford, and went there to have the manse ready, leaving his wife in Edinburgh. He was only gone six weeks, but he never saw her again, for when he came back to take her to her new home, he found that she had been receiving the visits of a very gay gentleman for some time, and had, in the end, gone away with him in a phaeton about a week before he arrived. Eight or nine months after that a gay young lady came to stay on a visit at old Miss Moreton's, with whom my poor husband David Lamb was greeve, or what you call steward in England. I had gone down with her as her maid, and had married the steward about eight years before, for my poor girl Mary was then about seven years old. We saw this Miss Hay, as she called herself, very often, but never thought she was the runaway wife of my husband's cousin. Indeed, we knew little of the story till long after. Captain Moreton was generally at his aunt's house, though he often went away to England, and we all said he was going to marry the pretty young lady, if they were not married already, as some thought. But then he brought over his own cousin Mr. St. Leger with him, and soon after we heard of the marriage by consent when Mr. St. Leger had drank too much, and about his going away in haste to England, and we all said that it was a great shame, though we did not know it was as bad as it was. About four months after, old Miss Moreton died, and one day the captain came down in great haste to my husband and told him a long story about his being on the point of selling the property; but that he would take good care, he said, that David Lamb should not be out of employment, for his father, the Honorable Mr. Moreton, would take him as steward if he would go up to Tarningham directly. My husband said it would be better for him to stay on the ground till Miss Moreton's estate was sold, but the captain seemed in a great hurry to get us off, for he said that his father was very anxious to have a Scotch bailiff as they farmed so well, and he promised all kinds of things, so that what with one persuasion or another we were away in a week to Edinburgh, to take ship there for England. There we met with Archy Graham, who afterward came to visit us, and he and my husband had a long talk about his unfortunate marriage, all of which I heard afterward; but David Lamb was a man of very few words, and he did not mention to his cousin anything about our having seen his wife at old Miss Moreton's, though it seems the minister was even then going down there to try and separate her from Captain Moreton, for he had found by that time who it was that took her away, and it was because he had written several letters to the gentleman, and threatened to come himself directly, that the captain was in such a hurry to get us away to England."

"I do not understand why your husband did not tell the whole truth," said Dr. Miles, gravely, "it might have saved great mischief, Mrs. Lamb."

"I know that, sir," replied the widow, "but there are great differences in the way men think of such things. I asked my husband afterward why he did not mention all about the marriage with Mr. St. Leger, but he said"

wanted to hear more about it before he opened his mouth to any one; that he was not sure they had set up this law marriage as a real marriage at all; and that it might be only a sort of joke, so that if he spoke he might do more mischief than was already done. I knew him to be a very prudent, thoughtful man, very sparing, too, of his words, and it was not for me to blame or oppose him."

"Very true, Mrs. Lamb, very true," said Dr. Miles.

"Well, your reverence," continued the widow, "he did try to hear more of the business as soon as he had time to think of anything but himself and his own affairs; for poor man, when he came here he found that old Mr. Moreton had no occasion for a bailiff at all; and knew nothing at all about him. We were going back to Scotland, again, after having spent a mint of money in coming up to London and then down here; but my husband fell ill of rheumatic fever, and for six months was confined nearly to his bed. All—or almost all that we had saved was gone, and we had to try for a livelihood here as we best could. We did better than might have been expected for some time, and David made many inquiries in regard to his cousin's wife and her second marriage with Mr. St. Leger; but he only heard that the young gentleman was traveling, and that they had certainly never lived together. Then came the letter from Archy Graham; and my husband, whose health was failing, consulted me about it, and I said, that at all events, it was pity Mr. St. Leger or Lord Lenham, as he was by that time, should not know all the truth, for no one could tell how needful it might be for him to prove that he was never really married to Charlotte Hay, and David wrote back to his cousin, asking him to send him up proofs of his marriage with the lady. So that brought up the marriage lines, and I have kept them and the first letter ever since my husband's death."

"And is Archibald Graham still living?" asked Beauchamp, who had been listening with painful attention.

"He was living not two years ago," answered Widow Lamb; "for he wrote to me at the time of my husband's death, and sent me up ten pounds to help me. Poor David had not neglected what he thought of doing, when he asked for the proofs; but we could hear nothing of you, my lord. You had been very kind to my poor boy, and I always put my husband in mind of the business, so that he wrote to you once, I know, saying that he had important information for you if you could come to Tarningham."

"I recollect," said Lord Lenham, "such a letter followed me into Italy; but I did not recollect the name, and thought it but a trick of that unhappy woman."

"Well, my lord, the case seems very clear," said Doctor Miles; "but your immediate conduct in this business may require some consideration. Perhaps we had better all go up to the Park and talk the matter over with Sir John at leisure."

"No, my dear sir," answered Beauchamp in a firm tone, "my conduct is already decided. If you please, we will just walk to your house for a few minutes, I dare say all the people are gone by this time. Come, Isabella, there will be peace for us yet, dear one;" and he gave his arm to his bride, who drew down her veil to hide the tears that were in her eyes.

All the party moved forward but Sir John Slingsby, who lingered for a moment, and laid his hand kindly upon the widow's arm. "You are a good woman, Mrs. Lamb," said the old baronet, "a very good woman; and I am much obliged to you. Go up to the Park, Mrs. Lamb, and take the little boy with you. I'll come up and talk to you by-and-by; but mind you tell the housekeeper to take good care of the little man, and give him a hunch of bride-cake. I don't think there will be much eaten in the house by any one else. You go up too, Ste, and wait till I come."

When Sir John followed to the rectory, which was somewhat slowly, he found the rest of the party in the rector's drawing-room. Now the house was built upon a plan not uncommon, and very convenient for studious bachelors like Dr. Miles. The drawing-room on the right side of the entrance-hall opened by folding-doors into a library, which formed a right angle with it running along the back front of the house—for houses have contradictions as well as human beings, and I may add many a man has a back front to his character as well as many a house. The library occupied one half of that side, the dining-room the other half; the offices all the left of the entrance-hall, and the hall and the stair-case the center.

Beauchamp, at the moment of the baronet's entrance, was speaking to Dr. Miles and Ned Hayward in the bay window, Isabella was seated at some distance with her hand in her aunt's, and Mary Clifford was leaning tenderly over her. But the position of all parties was soon changed.

"The sooner the better, then," said Dr. Miles, in answer to something Beauchamp had said; and turning away, the young nobleman approached Isabella, and took her hand, saying, "Speak with me one moment, love."

Isabella rose, and her husband led her into the library, and thence to the dining-room, leaving the doors open behind him. "Dearest Isabella," he said, "forgive me for all the terrible pain I have caused you—but you know it was that I was deceived, and that for the world I would not have inflicted such distress upon you intentionally."

"Oh, I know it, I know it," said the poor girl, her tears flowing fast.

"But out of evil springs good, dear Isabella," continued Beauchamp: "by this day's misery and anxiety, I trust we have purchased peace and happiness for the future. Yet for me, my beloved, remains one more painful effort. Till the decision of the law is pronounced upon all the circumstances of this case, I must leave you, dear girl. No happiness that your society can give me must induce me to place you in a doubtful position. I must leave you, then, my dear Isabella, my bride, my wife, even here almost at the steps of the altar; but I go to remove every obstacle to our permanent reunion, and I trust in a very few weeks to clasp you to my heart again, mine beyond all doubt—mine forever. I knew not, dear girl—I hardly knew till now how dearly, how passionately I loved you, but I find from the difficulty of parting with

you, from the agony of this moment, what it is to love with the whole heart. That very love, however, requires me to go. Therefore, for a short, a very short time, farewell, my love;" and he threw his arms around her, and pressed one kiss upon her lips.

"Oh, do not go, do not go yet," said Isabella, clinging to him. "Oh, I was so happy this morning, Henry, I felt quite oppressed with it. I am sure there is a dizziness of the heart as well as of the brain—but now I shall go home and weep all day."

"Nay, do not do that, dear girl," said Beauchamp, "for our parting is but for a short time, beloved. Every one judges that I am right in going. Do not let me think my Isabella thinks otherwise, do not render more bitter what is bitter enough already, by a knowledge that you are suffering more than is needful. Cheer thee, my Isabella, cheer thee, and do not give way to grief and apprehension, when our fate is lightened of half of its weight, by the certainty, the positive certainty, that there is no serious barrier between us."

"I will try," said Isabella, "I will try; and I believe you are right, but still this is all very sad," and the tears poured down her face afresh.

When Beauchamp came forth, however, Isabella came with him, and was calmer; but she would not trust herself to speak till he was gone. The parting was then soon over. Ned Hayward called up the carriage, gave some directions regarding his own baggage to Sir John Slingsby's servants, and bade farewell to Mary Clifford and the rest. Beauchamp once more pressed Isabella's hand in his, and hurrying out sprang into the carriage, Ned Hayward followed, and one of the post-boys, approaching the side after a servant had shut the door, touched his hat and asked, "Will you go by Winterton or Buxton's Inn, my lord?"

"By Winterton," answered Beauchamp, mechanically, and in another minute the carriage was rolling on.

For about twenty minutes Sir John Slingsby remained talking with Dr. Miles, and then the party which had set out from Tarningham Park, so happy and so gay, not two hours before, returned sad and desolate. Even the old baronet's good spirits failed him, but his good-humor did not; and while Isabella retired with Mary to her own room, he called Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into his library, after having assured himself that the little boy was taken good care of by the housekeeper; he repeated his sage commendation of the old woman's conduct, saying, "You are a good woman, Widow Lamb, a very good woman, and you have rendered very excellent service to us all this day. Now I am not so rich as I could wish to be just now; but I can tell you what I can do, and what I will do, Widow Lamb. Stephen has here, his cottage as keeper. It is a part of his wages at present; but I might die, you know, or the property might be sold, Widow Lamb, and then those who came in might turn you out. Now I'll give you a lease of the cottage and the little garden, and the small field at the side—they call it the six-acres field, though there are but five acres and two roods, and the lease shall run for your two lives. You may put in the little man's life, too, if you like; and the rent shall be a crown a-year, Widow Lamb. I'll have it done directly. I'll write to Bacon to draw the lease this minute," and down sat Sir John Slingsby to his library table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, approaching with a respectful bow, "but I think it would be better not to give the lease, just yet, though both I and Goody Lamb are very much obliged; but you recollect what that bad fellow, attorney Wharton, said about the papers being forged, and if you were to give us anything just now, he would declare we were bribed; for he is a great rascal, sir, as I heard this morning."

"You are right, you are quite right, Stephen," replied Sir John Slingsby; "and Wharton is a great rascal. I am glad that Ned Hayward horsewhipped him; I dare say he did it well, for he is a capital fellow, Ned Hayward, and always liked horsewhipping a scoundrel from a boy. But what is it you overheard this morning, Stephen? I hope you were not eaves-dropping, Ste. That is not right, you know."

"Not I, Sir John," answered the gamekeeper, "but I could not help hearing. I'll tell you how it all was in a minute. Yesterday morning I was coming over here with the papers which Goody Lamb gave me for Lord Lenham; but I took a bit of a stroll first, and just when I was close upon Chandleigh-heath, Captain Moreton jumped out of a hedge upon me in front, and young Harry Wittingham pinioned my arms behind, and before I could do anything for myself, they had a rope tight round my elbows, and got me away to the lone cottage, where they shut me up in a room with bars to the windows, and kept me there all day and all last night. I did not sleep much, and I did not eat much, though the captain crammed some bread into my mouth, and gave me a pail of water, out of which I was obliged to drink like a horse; but they never untied my arms. However, I heard a good deal of going about, and a carriage-wheels, and some time after—it must have been twelve or one o'clock at night—there was a great ringing at the bell, and people talking, and I heard young Wittingham's voice, and then some one galloped away on horseback. But nobody came to let me out, and I sat and looked at the day dawning, wondering when all this would come to an end. I looked long enough, however, before I saw a living soul, though, about six, I heard people moving in the house. About an hour after I saw poor Billy Lamb out of the window, creeping about in the garden as if he was on the lookout for something, and I put my foot to one of the panes of glass, and started it in a minute. That was signal enough for the good lad, and he ran up and put his face to the window, whispering to me to make no noise, for Captain Moreton had just come in in a gig, and had met Mr. Wharton at the door, and they were both in the drawing-room together. I was not going to stay there, however, like a rat in a trap, a minute longer than needful; so as soon as I found that Bill had his knife in his pocket, I made him put his arm through the broken pane, and cut the cords round my elbows. I then got his knife to open the door,

but the one I came in by was bolted as well as locked, so I couldn't get out that way. But there was another door at the side, and I forced the lock back there soon enough. That let me into the dining-room, which had two doors too. Through one of them I could hear people talking loud, and the other was locked. I could not manage to open it, and though I had a great longing to go in and give Captain Moreton a good hiding, yet as they were two to one, and I was half-starved, I thought it might not turn out well, and stayed quiet where I was. Then I heard them talking, and Wharton said he could hang the captain; and I thought it very likely. But the captain said to do that would put nothing in Wharton's pocket, and he had better take his *post obit*, as he called it, for £5000, which would give him a chance of something, and come over with him to Winterton, and keep the lady quiet if she would go to the church. There was a good deal of dirty haggling about it, but I made out that the woman whom he called Charlotte was going to be at the wedding, and that she had a great spite at his lordship, and I guessed all about the rest from what Goody Lamb had told me. So as soon as they had gone off in the gig together, which was not more than two or three minutes after, I walked out through the drawing-room, half-scared the servant-girl into fits, and came away to little Tarningham church, sending Billy Lamb up to my cottage. That is the whole story, sir."

The old baronet commended his keeper highly and vaticinated that attorney Wharton would be hanged some day, in which, however, he was mistaken, for that gentleman lived and prospered; and his tombstone assures the passer-by that he died universally regretted and respected!

The day passed heavily at Tarningham Park, and Isabella remained all the morning in her own room. It was a very bitter cup that she had to drink; for to apprehension and disappointment was added another painful sensation. To her it was inexpressibly distressing to be made the talk of the common public. She had felt that the very announcement of her marriage in the public newspapers, the gazing crowd in the church, the spectacle and the publicity, in fact, which attend such events, were anything but pleasant. But now to be the topic of conversation, the object of tales and rumors, to be pitied, commiserated, perhaps triumphed over—be even slandered, added deeply to all she suffered both on Beauchamp's account and her own. However, she made a great effort to conquer at least the natural expression of her feelings. She knew that her father, her aunt, her cousin, all felt deeply for her, and she was resolved to cause them as little pain as possible by the sight of her own. She washed away all traces of tears, she calmed her look, she strove not to think of her mortification, and at the dinner-hour she went down with a tranquil air. Her room was on the side of the house opposite to the terrace, and the principal entrance, but she had to pass the latter in her way to the drawing-room. As she did so, she saw a carriage and post-horses at the door, and as she approached the drawing-room, she heard a voice loved and well known. She darted forward and entered the room. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward were both there, as well as her father and Mary Clifford. The very effort to conquer her own feelings had exhausted her strength, and joy did what sorrow had not been able to do. Ere she had taken two steps forward, she wavered, and, ere Beauchamp could reach her, had fallen fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XLII.

With bitter disappointment at his heart; with the dark shadow which had hung so long over his existence, turning all the rosy hopes of life to the leaden gray of the grave, now returned after a brief period of brighter expectations; with the cup of joy snatched from his hand at the very moment he was raising it to his lips, Beauchamp leaned back in his carriage, and gave himself up for a few minutes to deep and sorrowful meditation. He remembered well when first the feeling of love was springing up in his heart toward Isabella Slingsby; that upon mature consideration of his fate he had determined to crush it in the bud, to batter down the fountain of sweet waters, which he feared some malific power would turn to poison, and never attempt to link the fate of that dear girl to his sorrowful one, even by the gentle tie of mutual affection; and now he almost regretted that he had not kept his resolution. It is true, circumstances had changed; it is true, there were good hopes that the evil star of his destiny seemed likely to sink, and a brighter one to rise; but yet a mind long accustomed to disappointment and sorrow, can with difficulty be brought to listen to the voice of hope without having the warning tongue of fear at the same time. All seemed to promise well for the removal of that heavy weight which had oppressed his heart, kept down his energies, crushed love and joy, and left him naught in life but solitude, and disappointment, and despair. But still his experience of the past taught him to expect so little from the future, that he dared not indulge in one vision of relief, and although he had used the words of hope to Isabella, he could not apply the balm to his own wound.

Ned Hayward sat beside him quietly, and let him think for about ten minutes; and he did so for two reasons. In the first place, he knew that it was very vain to offer consolation so soon after a bitter mortification had been received; and, in the next place, he did not wish to rouse his companion from the reverie till they had passed Tarningham Park; for he judged that the sight of scenes, associated in memory with happy hopes now removed afar, would only add poignancy to disappointment. However, when the park was passed (and the four horses went at a very rapid rate), he commenced the conversation in a way the most likely to lead Beauchamp's mind from the more painful points of his situation, to fix them upon those more favorable.

"Of course, Lenham," he said, with an abruptness that made his companion start, "before you act even in the slightest particular, you will consult some counsel learned in the law. This seems a case in which, with proper management, you have the complete command

over your own fate; but where a few false steps might be very detrimental, so far, at least, as delaying the determination of the affair for some months."

"I know not, my dear Hayward," answered Lord Lenham, "how this may turn out; but circumstances have rendered me, once the most hopeful and light-hearted of human beings, the most desponding. I have a sort of impression upon me, that the result will not be so favorable as you anticipate. I have to oppose long practiced cunning and the most unscrupulous use of every means, however base and wrong. I must remember, too, that this business has been long plotting, and depend upon it, that nothing which a perverted human mind could do to obliterate every trace of this former marriage has been left undone. Depend upon it the conspiracy has been going on for some time, and that the concealment of this woman's existence has been intentional and systematic. In fact nothing could be more artful, nothing more base, but nothing more evidently prearranged than all the steps which they have taken within the last two or three months. Even on the very sale of her goods, which took place in Paris about a month ago, it was announced by public advertisement that they had been the property of the *late* Charlotte Hay, Lady Lenham. I am afraid neither I nor any lawyer, however shrewd, will be found equal to encounter this woman, whose cunning and determination I never knew matched."

"She seems a precious virago indeed," said Ned Hayward; "but never you fear, my dear lord. I don't set up to be a Solomon, but there's a maxim which I established when I was very young, and which I have seen break down very much less frequently than most of his proverbs, that will go in your favor, if we but manage properly. It is this: 'Rogues always forget something.' Depend upon it, it will hold good in this instance. Indeed we see that it has; for these good folks forgot completely the marriage certificate in the hands of Goody Lamb. Doubtless that certificate will be easily verified, so as to put its authenticity beyond all doubt; then nothing will remain but to prove the existence of your predecessor in the fair lady's affections at a period subsequent to her pretended marriage with yourself."

"That may be difficult to do," said Beauchamp.

"Not in the least," cried Ned Hayward. "He has written to the good old widow within two years, it seems. Of course they will try to shake her testimony; and, though I don't think that can be done, we must be prepared with other witnesses. Now, you and I don't, in the least, doubt the old woman's story; and, if that story is true, her husband's cousin, this fair lady's husband, was living, and the clergyman of a place called Blackford, not two years ago. Every body in his parish will know whether this is true or not, and a Scotch minister's life is not usually so full of vicissitudes as to admit the possibility of a difficulty in identifying that Archibald Graham, of Blackford, was the husband of Charlotte Hay."

"You should have been a lawyer, Hayward," said Beauchamp, with a faint smile; "at all events, you prove a very excellent *counselor* for my hopes *against my fears*."

"A lawyer! Heaven forefend!" exclaimed Ned Hayward, laughing; "a soldier is a much better thing, Lenham; ay, and I believe, when he knows his profession, more fit to cope with a lawyer than almost any one else. It is alway his business to mark well every point of hi. position, to guard well every weak part; and then. having taken all his precautions, he advances straightforward at the enemy's works, looking sharp about him that he be not taken in flank, and he is almost sure to carry the field, if his cause be good, his heart strong, and his army true."

Such conversation was not without its effect upon Beauchamp's mind. Hope is the next thing to happiness; and hope returned, becoming every moment more and more vigorous, from the cheerful and sanguine character of his companion. At length Ned Hayward looked out at the window, exclaiming,

"Here we are coming to Winterton, I suppose, where we change horses. Devil take those post-boys; if they go at that rate through the crowd, they will be over some fellow or another."

"Crowd," said Beauchamp; and he, too, put his head to the window.

The little solitary inn at Winterton-cum-Snowblast was on the side of the road next to Ned Hayward, but when Lord Lenham, leaning forward, looked out, he saw some forty or fifty people, principally country folks, ostlers, and post-boys, collected round the door of the house. There was a sprinkling of women among the various groups into which they had fallen, and in the midst appeared a common post-chaise with the horses out, while a man, on horseback, was seen riding away at a jolting canter.

"There's something the matter here," said Beauchamp; "I will tell one of the servants to ask."

As he spoke, the chaise dashed on toward the inn-door, and Ned Hayward's prediction of the consequences likely to ensue had nearly been verified, for so eagerly were many persons in the crowd engaged in conversation, that they did not change their position until the last moment, and then a general scattering took place, which, in its haste and confusion, had well nigh brought more than one man or woman under the feet of the leaders.

"Horses on," cried the wheel post-boy, as he drove up, speaking to the ostler of the inn, whose natural predilection for post-horses called his attention to the carriage sooner than that of any other person in the crowd.

"We ha'n't got two pair in," he said, in reply, "without that pair which is just off the shay; we ha' been obliged to send off one this minute to the magistrates about all this here business."

"What is the matter, my man!" said Ned Hayward, out of the carriage window; "what business is it you are talking of!"

"I had better call master, sir," said the ostler, pulling the brim of his old hat, with a somewhat renitent look, as if he did not like to answer the question; "he'll be here in a minute."

"This seems something strange," said Beauchamp; "we had better get out and see. Open the door, Harrison."

The servant, who was standing with his hand upon the silver knob of the carriage-door, instantly did as he was ordered, and threw down the steps with a degree of vehemence customary to lackeys and serviceable to coachmakers. Ned Hayward, being next to the door, got out first, and as he put his right foot to the ground, the landlord of the inn came up, bowing low to the first occupant of a carriage which had two servants behind and a coronet on the panel. The bow would have been much more moderate to a simple yellow post-chaise.

"What is the matter here, landlord? Has any accident happened?"

"Why, yes, my lord," replied the landlord, supposing our friend to be the proprietor of the vehicle, "a terrible accident, too; that is to say, not exactly, either; for it is clear enough the thing was done on purpose by some one, who, it is not for me to say till the magistrates come."

"But what is it? what is it?" said Beauchamp, who followed; "you seem to be very mysterious."

"Why, you see, my lord," replied the landlord, who thought he could not be far wrong in honoring both gentlemen with the same title, "it's an awkward business, and one does not like to say much; but the gentleman got his throat cut, that's certain; and whether he did it himself, or whether the lady did it for him, seems a question. All I can say is, I saw him sound asleep on the sofa five minutes before she came back. He had a glass of brandy-and-water, and two fried eggs, just after she went away with attorney Wharton, and seemed quite in his right mind then, only a little tired with sitting up so late last night and getting up so early this morning; but you don't seem well, sir," he continued, seeing Beauchamp turn a look to the countenance of Ned Hayward, with a cheek that had become as pale as death; "had not you better come in and take something?"

"Presently, presently," said Beauchamp; "go on—what were you saying?"

"Nothing, sir, but the lady seems dreadfully wild, and I can't help thinking she's out of her mind; I always did for that matter."

"Is the gentleman dead?" asked Beauchamp, in a low tone.

"No, sir, not quite dead," said the landlord, "and the surgeon is a-sewing up of his throat; but it's no good, I'm sure, for the room is all in a slop of blood."

"Do you know his name?" said Beauchamp.

"Why, Captain Moreton, I believe, sir," said the landlord; "I've heard so; I don't know it for certain."

"I will go in and see him," said the young nobleman; and he added, seeing a look of hesitation on the landlord's countenance, "I am his first cousin, sir; my name is Lord Lenham."

The announcement removed all doubt upon the good man's mind, and Beauchamp and Ned Hayward walked forward into the inn, guided by the landlord. He conducted them at once up stairs to the rooms which had been occupied by Captain Moreton and Charlotte Hay. At one of the doors on the landing-place, they saw a man standing with his arms folded on his chest; but the landlord led them past to the room in front of the house, first entering quietly himself. It was a ghastly and horrible scene which presented itself, when Beauchamp and Ned Hayward could see into the room. The floor, the carpet, the sofa, were literally drenched with gore; and even the white window-curtains were spotted with dark red drops. On the sofa, with an old white-headed man, and a younger one leaning over him, was the tall, powerful frame of Captain Moreton. His face was as pale as death; his eyes sunk in his head, with a livid blue color spreading all round them. His temples seemed as if they had been driven in; the features were pinched and sharp; the eyelids closed; and the only sign of life apparent was a slight spasmodic movement of the muscles of the face, when the hand of the surgeon gave him pain in the operation he was busily performing. Two or three other persons were in the room, among whom was the landlord's wife; but they all kept at a distance, and the man himself advanced to the surgeon's side, and whispered a word in his ear.

"Presently, presently," said the old gentleman, "it will be done in a minute;" but Captain Moreton opened his eyes and turned them round in the direction of the door. It is probable that he did not see his cousin, for they closed again immediately, but nevertheless his lips moved as if he fain would have said something. Beauchamp did not advance till the old surgeon raised his head, and the young man who was assisting him took his hands from the patient's arms. Then, however, Lord Lenham moved forward, and in a low tone asked the medical man the extent of the injury. At the same moment Ned Hayward, judging that his presence there was useless, if not inconvenient, advanced to a door at the farther side of the room, saying to a person whom he instantly judged to be the mistress of the house,

"I think we had all better go in here for a minute or two."

"The lady is in there, sir," said the landlady; "we have put somebody in to watch her, for Heaven knows what she may do next."

Nevertheless, Ned Hayward, who thought that perhaps some information valuable to his friend might be obtained, opened the door to go in; but the sight he beheld made him suddenly pause, though it had none of those very striking and horrible objects which were presented by the chamber he was just quitting. Yet there was something still, quiet, and awful about its dark features, which perhaps affected the mind still more. The room was a bedroom with one window and a door, which Captain Hayward easily distinguished as that at which he had seen a man standing on the outside. On the end of the bed sat Charlotte Hay, dressed exactly as he had seen her in the church, and nearer to him appeared a strong dull-looking young man seated in a chair, with a constable's staff in his hand. The unhappy woman's position was calm and easy, and she sat perfectly motionless, with her high color unchanged, her hands resting clasped together on her knee, her head slightly bent forward, and her eye with the peculiar dull glassy film over it, which we have already mentioned more than once, fixed earnestly upon the floor. She seemed in deep thought, but yet not the thought of intelligence.

but rather the dreamy, idle, vacant pondering of mental imbecility. There was an undefinable something that to the eye at once distinguished her state from that of deep reflection, and a curl of the lip, not quite a smile, yet resembling one, seemed to mark out the idiot. The shutters of one of the two windows were closed, so that the room was in a sort of half-light, yet on the spot to which the gaze of Charlotte Hay seemed attached the sunshine was streaming gaily, and the contrast between her fate, her prospects, her history, and the warm, pure light of heaven, was more painful than the harmonizing gloom of the dungeon could have been.

When the door was opened by Ned Hayward, though it creaked, as inn-doors will do, upon its hinges, she took not the slightest notice; indeed, she seemed unconscious of every thing; but the constable who had been placed to watch her rose and advanced toward the door to say that nobody could have admission there.

"When the justices come, sir," he said, addressing the young officer in a low tone, "they can do as they like, but nobody shall speak with her till then."

As he uttered these words he heard a slight sound and turned his head, but he turned it too late. Charlotte Hay had instantly taken advantage of his eyes being withdrawn. She was already near the window, which was partly open, and as he darted across to lay hold of her she threw it up, and with one leap sprang out. Ned Hayward instantly closed the door that no sound might reach the other room, and ran forward to the young man's side, who stood with his head leaning out and his eyes gazing down below. The house was built on a slight slope, so that the back was a story higher than the front, yet the height from the window to the stable-yard could not be more than twenty feet, but the court was paved with large irregular stones, and there lay the form of Charlotte Hay still, motionless, and silent. No groan reached the ears of those who looked down from above—not even a quiver of the limbs was to be seen. Some of the men in the yard were running up in haste, and the young officer and the constable hurried down. It mattered little, however, whether they went fast or slow, for when they reached the yard they found three men lifting a corpse. Ned Hayward gazed upon that countenance where fierce and untamable passions had nearly obliterated mere beauty of feature, but no trace of passion was there now. All was mournfully calm, and though the eyelids moved once up and down, there was naught in the eyes when they were for an instant displayed but the glassy stare of death. The bonnet, which was still upon her head, was dented in at the top, and a small red stain in the white silk showed where the blood was issuing slowly forth from some hidden wound received in the fall.

They carried her slowly into the house, and placed her on a sofa in what was called the parlor, while Ned Hayward ran up stairs to call down the surgeon. When he opened the door, the elderly man whom we have mentioned was washing his hands at the table, and Beauchamp was seated by the sofa on which his cousin lay, bending down his ear to catch the faint words of the wounded man, who seemed speaking to him eagerly.

The surgeon raised his eyes as the door opened, and perceiving the sign which Ned Hayward made to him to come out, dried his hands in haste and went to the door.

"You must come down directly," said the young officer; "the unhappy woman has thrown herself out of the window, and though I believe all human aid is in vain, yet it is necessary that some surgeon should see her at once."

The old man nodded his head with a grave look, returned for his instruments which were on the table, and then followed down to the parlor. He paused a moment by the side of the sofa, and gazed upon the face of Charlotte Hay with a thoughtful air, then placed his hand upon the wrist for a few seconds, withdrew it, and said aloud,

"I can be of no use here—life is extinct. I will examine the head, however," and taking off the bonnet and cap he pointed with his finger to a spot on the back of the skull, where the dark brown hair was matted and dabbled, saying, "Look there! I cannot make a new brain."

Ned Hayward turned away with a slight shudder, for though he had faced death many a time himself, and had seen men fall dead or wounded by his side, he had never beheld a woman subject to the fate which man is accustomed to brave.

"This is a terrible business altogether, sir," said the surgeon, following the young officer to the window; "do you know anything of it?"

"Nothing," replied Captain Hayward, "except that I believe the unhappy woman was mad, for her conduct through life was that of a person hardly sane. Do you think Captain Moreton likely to live?"

"Three or four hours, perhaps," replied the surgeon, "certainly not more. She did her work very resolutely and with a strong hand. The hemorrhage cannot be entirely stopped; he has already lost an awful quantity of blood, and he will sink gradually."

"Then you think that there is no doubt of her hand having done the deed?" asked Ned Hayward.

But the surgeon would not exactly commit himself as far as that.

"He did not do it himself," was the reply, "that is quite impossible. The wound is from left to right, and drawn so far round that he could not have inflicted it with his own hand. He must have been lying on the sofa, too, when it was done—probably asleep, for the stroke of the razor was carried beyond the neck of the victim, and cut the horse-hair cover through and through. The gentleman up stairs with him is his cousin, I believe?"

"I believe so," answered Ned Hayward; "but I am not acquainted with your patient, and therefore cannot say exactly."

The next moment steps were heard coming down, and Beauchamp and the landlord entered the parlor.

"Will you have the goodness to go up to Captain Moreton, sir," said the young nobleman, addressing the surgeon, before he saw what the room contained, "the bleeding from the throat has recommenced, and nearly suffo-

cates him. Hayward, I must stay till this is over," he continued, as the old gentleman hurried away; but then his eyes fell upon the sofa, and he caught Ned Hayward's arm, and grasped it tight without uttering a word. For a moment or two he stood motionless, as if turned into stone by the sight before him, and then walking slowly up to the side of the corpse, he gazed long and earnestly upon the face. His feelings must have been strange during that long, silent pause. There before him lay the being who had been the bane of his peace during all the early brighter years of life; the woman who, without ever having obtained the slightest hold of those affections by which the heart, when they are misplaced, is usually most terribly tortured, had, by one infamous and daring act, acquired the power of imbittering every moment of his existence. The long, dreadful consequences of one youthful error were at end, the dark cloud was wafted away, the heavy chain broken. He was free! but by what horrible events was his liberation accomplished! What a price of blood and guilt had they who had enthralled him paid for their temporary triumph ending in complete defeat! He could not but feel, that by the death of that woman, sunshine was restored to his path, and yet pain and horror at the means of his restoration to light and happiness quelled every sensation of rejoicing. Mingled as almost all human feelings are, perhaps never did man's heart experience such mixed emotions.

After what seemed a long time to give to any contemplation, he turned toward Captain Hayward, inquiring, in a low tone,

"How did this happen, Hayward, and when?"

"A few minutes ago," replied his friend; "the constable who was watching her came to the door to speak with me, and taking advantage of his back being turned she threw herself out of the window. Perhaps, Lenham," he continued, with that good feeling which always in matters of deep interest sprang up through the lighter things of Ned Hayward's character—"perhaps it is better that this is as it is. The act was undoubtedly committed in a state of mind which rendered her irresponsible for her own conduct. Had she survived, her fate might have been more terrible, considering another deed in regard to which it might have been difficult to prove her insanity."

"God's will be done," said Beauchamp; "that unhappy man is in no fit state to die, and yet I fear death is rapidly approaching. All his hatred of myself seems to have given place to the implacable desire of vengeance against this poor tool of his own schemes. He says that there is no doubt that she committed the act; that he was sleeping on the sofa, having sat up late last night and risen early this morning, and suddenly found a hand pressed upon his eyes and a sharp instrument drawn furiously across his throat. He started up, crying for help, and beheld the wretched woman with the razor in her hand, laughing, and asking if he would ever betray her secrets again. It is, in truth, a terrible affair; but I fear his deposition must be taken, and if he is to be believed she must have been perfectly sane."

"I wonder if she was ever perfectly sane?" said Ned Hayward; "from all I have heard I should doubt it—but here comes one of the magistrates, I suppose, or the coroner."

It proved to be the former, and the worthy justice first entered the parlor and examined the corpse of Charlotte Hay as it still remained stretched upon the sofa. Country justices will have their jests upon almost all subjects, and though he did it quietly, the gentleman in question could not refrain from saying, after looking at the body for a moment,

"Well, we are not likely to obtain any information from this lady, so we had better see the other person, who is capable of being more communicative. Which is the way, landlord! Have this room cleared and the door locked till the coroner can come, he will take the evidence in this case. I must get, if possible, the deposition of the gentleman whom you say is dying."

Thus saying, with the landlord leading the way, and Beauchamp, Ned Hayward, and one or two others following, he walked slowly up stairs and entered the room where Captain Moreton lay. The surgeon was bending over him and holding his head up on his left arm. But the moment the old man heard the bustle of many feet, he waved his right hand as if to forbid any one to approach. Everybody paused for an instant, and in the midst of the silence that ensued an awful and very peculiar sound was heard, something like that made by a horse taking a draught of water, but not so long and regular. It ceased, began again, and ceased; and the surgeon laid Captain Moreton's hand down upon the sofa-cushion and looked round.

The magistrate instantly advanced, saying,

"I must take the gentleman's deposition, Mr. Abbot."

"You come a little too late, sir," said the surgeon: "he will make no more depositions now."

It was, indeed, as he said. Captain Moreton had just expired; and all that remained for the magistrate, who was soon joined by one of his worshipful brethren, was to gain all the information that could be obtained from the persons in the house regarding the deaths of Charlotte Hay and her paramour. Beauchamp and Ned Hayward answered the questions which were addressed to them, but entered into no unnecessary details. The rest of those who were called upon to give evidence, or volunteered it, were much more garrulous; and as the two gentlemen remained to hear the whole depositions they were detained for some hours at Winterton.

When all was at length over, and Lord Lenham and Ned Hayward stood before the inn-door, they gazed at each other for a moment or two without speaking. At length Beauchamp's servant came up from the side of the carriage, which, having been ordered some time before, was before the house, and inquired, in a commonplace tone,

"Where shall I tell them to drive, my lord?"

There was a momentary look of hesitation in the young nobleman's face, but the next instant he answered in a decided tone,

"To Tarningham Park," and turning to his friend as soon as they were once more in the vehicle, he said, with a sigh,

"I will at least carry her the tidings, Hayward, and then—"

He paused, and Ned Hayward asked, in his usual cheerful tone,

"And what then, Lenham?"

"Once more on the way to London," said Beauchamp, adding gravely, but firmly, "there must not be a doubt in her mind as to the validity of her marriage. I know how one drop of such bitterness can poison the whole cup of joy; but tell me, Hayward," he continued in a more cheerful tone, "when is your own marriage to take place? You have told me nothing of it yet, but you must not suppose that my eyes have been shut either yesterday or this morning."

"I did not mention it because I imagined that you had enough to think of, Lenham," answered Ned Hayward, "not from either want of frankness or want of regard, believe me. But to answer your question—the day is not yet fixed. Mrs. Clifford has consented much more readily than I expected, Sir John when he heard of it was overjoyous, and Mary's two guardians, knowing that their power is soon coming to an end, have determined to use it leniently. Heaven only knows when we first became acquainted, about three months ago, by the side of Mrs. Clifford's carriage, that therein was my future bride. Had I known that I stood in peril of love, and that with an heiress, too, I believe I should have turned my horse's head and galloped all the way back to London. Nay, more, there has not been a day during the last month, till about a fortnight ago, that finding myself in imminent danger, I have not been ready to depart, but circumstances — circumstances, my dear Lenham, those chains of adamant, kept me here till one day, without at all intending it, I told the dear girl I loved her, and she bade me stay, so I had nothing to do but to obey, and now I think in three weeks more, thoughtless Ned Hayward will be the husband of the sweetest and loveliest girl in the world."

"With one exception," said Beauchamp, smiling; "and one of the best husbands in the world will he make her. But one thing more let me say, Hayward: as little as you thought of finding marriage on your onward path when first we met, so little did I think of finding friendship, as little did I hope for or even wish it; and yet there is naught on earth I value more than yours except the love of her I love best. Should the sage lawyers have a doubt as to the validity of my marriage with Isabella, should they even think it better that the ceremony be repeated, with the fair lady's leave we will choose the same day, and stand at the altar like brothers, as we have been to one another for some time past."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

SWEEPING OUT THE BALL-ROOM.

Beauchamp and Isabella were left alone together for a few minutes before dinner, for Sir John Slingsby and the rest of the party were considerate. She lay upon the sofa, still weak from the effects of the fainting fit into which she had fallen, and Beauchamp sat beside her, holding her hand in his. He had told her all that happened, gently and kindly, not dwelling upon dark and horrible particulars, but showing her simply that the aspect of their fate was altered. He then went on to tell her his plans, informing her that it was his intention that night to set off once more for London, in order to ascertain, by the best legal opinions he could obtain, whether their marriage was really valid, and, in case of finding that there was even a doubt on the subject, to have the ceremony performed again; but Isabella changed all his purposes.

"Beauchamp," she said, for so she still always called him, "I think I know you love me, and will not refuse me a request. It is this:—Do not go to London at all; do not make any inquiries about the validity of our marriage. Look upon it as invalid, and let it be renewed. In a few weeks, a very few weeks, Mary is going to give her hand to your friend Captain Hayward. Let us wait till then, and go with them to the altar. There may be some painful circumstances to me, some painful memories. I do not love to be made the subject of conversation and gossip, and in the church the scene of this morning will come terribly back to my mind; but in the mean time you will be with me every day, and that will compensate for a great deal."

So it was arranged; and in six weeks from that time the two cousins were united to the men whom they loved. Difficulties and dangers have their interest in telling; calm and tranquil happiness has too few incidents for record. Ned Hayward and Mary took up their abode with Mrs. Clifford, and the fair bride had never any cause to repent that she had discovered in her husband something deeper, finer, nobler than those who had given him the name of thoughtless Ned Hayward. Certainly there were some changes came over him. He was as cheerful, as sunshiny, as frank and ready as ever; but he was not quite so fond of fishing, shooting, and hunting. He liked a quiet walk or ride with Mary better. He found out for himself a new employment also, and devoted a great part of his time to the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, easily gaining his old friend's consent, upon the plea that he wanted occupation. His rapid perception of the bearing of all things submitted to him, his strong good sense, and quick, resolute decision, soon brought those affairs into a very different condition from that in which he found them; and Sir John Slingsby found that, by proper regulation, with an income diminished by the careless extravagance of many years, he had really more to spend than when his revenue was nominally much larger.

Isabella and Beauchamp were as happy as the reader has already judged they would be. He was looked upon by his acquaintances as a grave and somewhat stern man; but Isabella had reason to know, that in domestic life he was cheerful, gentle, and kind; for it was only in the heartless bustle and senseless chatter of ordinary society that there came over him a shadow from the long consequences of one only error.

We have but few other characters to dispose of. Mr. Wharton's history has already been told. Mr. Bacon did much better in life than

might have been expected. Although he was an honest man, he met with a tolerable degree of success, strange to say. Aiding Ned Hayward in the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, he became, in the end, a sort of agent or law-steward to the baronet. Beauchamp, who bought the Moreton property in the end, employed him in the same capacity; and two other gentlemen in the county, finding that matters throve in his hands, made him their agent also. He never gave them any cause to complain, and derived a very comfortable income from the exercise of this branch of his profession; but, what is far more extraordinary, in no instance did the property of his employers pass from them to him.

Stephen Gimlet in course of time became the head keeper to Sir John Slingsby, was well to do in the world, and gave his boy a very good education. Widow Lamb lived for nearly ten years after the events which have been lately detailed, and she had the happiness of seeing her poor boy William, by kind assistance given when most needed, and judiciously directed when received, rise from the station in which we first found him to be, at six-and-twenty years of age, the landlord of the White Hart at Tarningham; and often on a summer's evening, when there was not much to do in the place, he would stand at his inn-door, and thinking over all the strange events he had seen in his youth, with a melancholy feeling of the difference between himself and other men, he would whistle the plaintive melodies of which he was so fond in boyhood, as if imagination carried him altogether away into the realms of memory.

There is but one other character, perhaps, that deserves any mention; and, though his career was brief, we may speak of it more at large. Harry Wittingham took possession of his father's large property with title undisputed. A pompous funeral excited half-an-hour's wondering admiration in the people of Tarningham, when the old gentleman was committed to the grave; and for some short time hopes were entertained, even by wise and experienced persons, that young Wittingham would change his mode of life, become more regular and careful in his conduct, and cast away the vices and follies that had disgraced him. For a fortnight he remained almost entirely at home, examining papers, looking into affairs, and showing no small talents for business. A number of small sums, lent out by Mr. Wittingham on interest, were called in rather sharply, and some considerable purchases of land were made, showing a disposition on the part of the young gentleman to become a county proprietor. His reputed wealth, as is always the case in England, whatever a man's character may be, procured him a good deal of attention. People of high respectability and good fortune, especially where there were two or three unmarried daughters, called and left their cards; but Harry Wittingham's chief visitor and companion was his friend Mr. Granty, and two or three county gentlemen of the same stamp, who wore leather breeches and top-boots, rode handsome *horses*, and sported a red coat in the hunting *season*. The establishment kept up by old Mr. *Wittingham* was greatly increased, even within a month after his death. There were two more grooms in the stables, two more footmen in the hall; but this was no sign of extravagance, for the property could well afford it, or even more; but yet there was a sort of apparent uneasiness of manner, an occasional gloom, an irritability upon very slight occasions, upon which neither prosperity nor the indulgence of long thwarted tastes had any effect; and Mr. Granty himself, in conversation with a friend, thought fit to wonder what the devil Harry Wittingham would have, for he seemed never contented, although he possessed as good a fortune as any man in the county.

At length Harry Wittingham gave a dinner-party, and fixed it, without any knowledge of the coincidence, upon the very same day when Mary Clifford bestowed her hand upon Ned Hayward. When he discovered that such was the case, some short time before the party met, he became very much irritated and excited; but pride would not permit him to put the dinner off, and his friends assembled at the hour named. Seven persons appeared punctually as the clock struck the hour, and shortly after descended to the dining-room, where delicacies, and even rarities, were provided in abundance, with the choicest wines that could be procured from any quarter. The soup was turtle, brought expressly from London; but Harry Wittingham himself did not taste it. He ate a good deal of fish, however, and asked several persons to drink wine: but it appeared as if he determined to keep his head cool, for he merely bowed over his glass, and put it down. Mr. Granty, who well knew his old habits, was surprised at his abstemiousness, and thought it hardly fair, for he had himself determined to have a glorious night of it at the expense of Harry Wittingham's cellar, and such conduct in the host seemed likely to chill the drinking propensities of his guests.

"Come, Wittingham," he cried, at length, "let us have a glass of champagne together."

"With all my heart," answered his entertainer, and the champagne was poured out.

"Now, Wittingham, drink fair," said Mr. Granty, laughing; "for, hang me if you have tasted a drop to-day—this way, at one draught."

"With all my heart," answered Harry Wittingham, and raised his glass. He held it to his lips for a moment, and then, with a sudden and very apparent effort, drank the wine; but a sort of convulsive spasm instantly spread over his whole face; it was gone in a moment, however, and, as if to conceal it, he said something sharply to his butler about the wine not being good. "It was corked," he said; and Mr. Granty, laughing, cried,

"Try another bottle."

Another bottle was brought, and the glasses filled all round. Harry Wittingham raised his with the rest, but instantly set it down again, and pushed it away from him, murmuring with a haggard look, "I can't!"

As may be easily expected, this very peculiar conduct had its effect upon his guests. The party was a dull one, and broke up early, every one remarking that Mr. Wittingham tasted not one drop of all the many wines that circulated round his table.

When every one was gone, he rang the bell

sharply, and told the servant to go for Mr. Slattery.

"Tell him to come directly,—I do not feel well."

In ten minutes more the surgeon was in the house, felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, asked a few questions, and then said, with a smile,

"A little fever!—a little fever! I will send you a cooling draught, and all will be quite right to-morrow, I dare say."

"Don't send me a draught," said Harry Wittingham, "I can't drink it."

"Oh, it shall be as good as wine," said Mr. Slattery.

"Good or bad, it does not matter," answered the young gentleman, staring somewhat wildly in his face; "I tell you I can't drink it—I drink not at all—I hate the very thought of drinking."

Another quick, short spasm crossed his countenance as he spoke; and Mr. Slattery, sitting down beside him with a somewhat dubious expression of countenance, hemmed for a moment or two, and then said,

"Why, what can one give you, then? But tell me a little more of the symptoms you feel," and he put his hand upon the pulse again. "Have you any headache?"

"No," answered Harry Wittingham, "I have a sort of burning in my throat."

"Great irritation of stomach!" said Mr. Slattery, in a solemn tone. "Have you met with any accident lately? Run a nail into your hand or foot, or anything of that kind?"

"No," answered Harry Wittingham, "but a d—— dog bit me just above the heel six weeks ago, and it is not quite well yet."

"Let me look at the wound," said Mr. Slattery, "it may be producing irritation."

The shoe and stocking were soon removed, and Mr. Slattery perceived four distinct marks of a dog's fangs in the tendon and muscles of Harry Wittingham's leg. At each there was a round lump raised above the skin, and from two of them a small, sharply defined red line was running up the leg toward the body.

Mr. Slattery bled him largely immediately, and telling him he dared say he would be quite well in two or three days, returned home, and sent off a man on horseback to the county town for a bottle of the Ormskirk medicine. The Ormskirk medicine arrived; but instead of being well in two or three days, in not much more than a week after, Harry Wittingham was in his grave.

THE END.

THE

4

FALSE HEIR.

BY

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THE FALSE HEIR.

CHAPTER I.

I TRUST it is not presumptuous to suppose, that to that Being, who has revealed himself to us as a God of mercy and of love, the sight of human fate and all its vicissitudes, the wandering course of each intelligent creature, the effect of every man's actions upon others during his life, the results that follow from generation to generation unto the end of time, the hopes that are formed but to be disappointed, the disappointments which are in reality blessings, the longings for that which would prove destructive, the joys that kill, and the sorrows that make alive, with all the infinite complications of one event with another from the commencement to the close (which offer to our eyes nothing but a confused, inextricable maze), must be a subject of deep interest, as His all-comprehending view beholds the beginning and the end, and sees creation and all its results rounded in by His own glory. Yes, surely it must be to Almighty love and wisdom a sight of deep interest: for God, in permitting free-will to man, could never leave him without the protection of His tenderness and mercy; and the mere exercise of those attributes implies a care, an interest in his fate.

To our limited view, however, the course of one human being offers matter for meditation and for feeling enough; and to trace the life of a fellow-mortal from the cradle to the grave—wherever we can do so with anything like a knowledge of the actions, the events, the motives, and the thoughts—is, perhaps, the most instructive study that we can pursue. In the history before us, then—a history which all who are acquainted with the annals of France during the last century will know to be a true one—I shall commence with the very earliest period, and begin with the events which preceded the birth of him whose changeful existence I purpose to depict.

In the wide, green court of an old French chateau, surrounded by high walls, with a tall iron gate at one end, and the raised terrace on which the mansion itself stood on the other, were collected, one evening in the month of June, a gay and merry group of peasantry as ever danced upon the grass in that land of light and thoughtless hearts. A great upturned wine-barrel served as a throne for the fiddler, the girls and lads were in their best, and many a joke and jest, with which I will not regale the reader's ears, passed gayly among the groups, circulated chiefly, it would seem, at the expense of a stout, well-looking peasant of about thirty years of age, and a neat-looking, pretty young woman of two or three-and-twenty, habited as a soubrette or lady's maid. These two bore all the shafts of wit which were aimed at them with great glee and good-humour, kept fondly together through the whole evening, and, by the gay attire of the man and the profuse ornaments that decked the girl, it was easy to perceive that they were bride and bridegroom.

It was, indeed, the marriage evening of Gerard Latouches and Marguerite Lemaire — a marriage which had been brought about by the good offices of Marguerite's master and mistress; and now, after carousing through the whole day in the court of the castle, and the gardener's cottage at the side, they were dancing the sun down to the sound of the fiddle, with quite as much wine in their heads as any of the party could carry without approaching to inebriety.

Standing upon the terrace above were a lady and gentleman, themselves in their early prime, the Marquis de Langy being now in his seven-and-twentieth year, and the marchioness several years younger. A fine boy, of four years old, hung at his mother's gown; and a tall, dark man, some eight or ten years older than the marquis, but bearing a strong family resemblance to him, stood near the lady, with the little boy between them, among the curls of whose fair hair rested his strong and sinewy hand.

"A merry scene, my sweet niece," he observed, speaking to the marchioness; "I have not seen a merrier since you made Victor happy with your hand some five years ago."

"Five!" said the lady, thoughtfully. "Yes, indeed, it is more than five, for this dear boy was four last April. But I do love to see you in a gay party, my good uncle; for, though you are so grave yourself, you seem to enjoy it as much as any one."

"I do, Adele," he said; "for I like to see my fellow-beings enjoy the short life that their organization allows them. With us, who think that this life is all, it is pleasant to see the most made of it."

"Hush, hush!" cried the lady, holding up her finger with a look of playful reproach. "I will not hear you upon those subjects."

"You might, safely," replied the other. "Those who think as I do have none of the spirit of conversion about them; and, indeed, we would rather not. We see no reason why other people should not continue in their pleasant delusions. Probably the finest and the most beneficial of all the works of fancy is religion. I would not take a particle of it from you to save my life."

"Come, Victor, come!" cried the lady; "they are all giving their little presents, and we must give ours also. Let us go down. Will you come, Monsieur de St. Medard!".

"We all intend to do the same," rejoined the Marquis de Langy. "With such prudent people as Latouches and Marguerite, money is the best gift one can bestow. I give them a hundred and fifty crowns, and Adele fifty."

"And I have got such a pretty *bonbonnière!*" said the little boy.

The Viscount de St. Medard bent down his head and kissed him, saying, "I will put ten louis in the inside, and so your uncle's present and your own shall go together."

The child was delighted at the idea, and held out the little ornamented box which he had bought to give to the new-married couple. His father's uncle counted out ten golden pieces into it, and the little party descended the steps of the terrace towards the spot where the marquis's tenantry were enjoying themselves.

Whether it depends on our insular situation, or whether some drop of strange and irritable fluid has mingled by chance in the mixed current of the English blood, I know not; but certain it is, that there is a much greater portion of *mauvaise honte*—I beg the reader's pardon for using a French expression—in the English character than in that of any other nation upon the earth. That is to say, ten men will feel it in England where one man feels it in France: which is the reason, and perhaps the only reason, why a French peasant does a thousand things with grace and ease, upon which an English one spends a vast deal of awkwardness and trouble.

The good people in the court had gone on dancing, sporting, and laughing, without the slightest restraint, although they knew that the eyes of their lord and lady were upon them; and, even while the party from the chateau was approaching, they ceased not in their proceedings, which were somewhat curious to eyes not much accustomed to witness the habits and manners of the lower classes. Each person had brought with him to the wedding a small present of some kind, as is still very customary in many parts of France; and now, two and two—a man and a woman—they advanced to the sound of the fiddle, and made their little offering to the young couple—the man giving his gift to the bride, and taking a kiss for an equivalent; the woman presenting her's to the bridegroom, and receiving a warm salute in return. Some of the presents were of considerable value; but, in those cases where poverty did not permit of any expensive purchase, the giver covered the smallness of his gift by the ludicrousness of its character, and endeavoured to excite a laugh at his fun, if he called forth no admiration of his generosity.

With every sense of propriety, however, the peasants, as soon as the marquis and marchioness were near enough to make it evident that they were coming to offer their presents likewise, drew back to let them advance, and the bride and bridegroom rose from the chairs in which they had been seated, and received them with all respect.

Marguerite was a pretty-looking girl, hiding a good deal of gay and light-hearted fun under a demure look, while Latouches himself was, as we have said, a stout, handsome countryman; though, to speak truth, he seemed somewhat more abashed by his new capacity of bridegroom than Marguerite by hers of bride.

The marquis and marchioness presented their gifts; and the noble lord, though not a man to carry the *droits du seigneur* to any unpleasant extent, took a hearty taste of the fair maid's lips, while the bridegroom approached his respectfully to the cheek of the marchioness. The little boy was fondled and caressed by both, as he held out the *bonbonnière* to his mother's former maid, saying, "There, Marguerite! my uncle's present is in the inside."

The maid opened it, and instantly dropped a low courtesy to Monsieur de St. Medard, while the bridegroom looked over her shoulder into the box with a glistening eye at the sight of the gold, and whispered to her to count it. Marguerite, however, knew better, and, closing the box again quietly, handed it to Latouches, saying, in a low tone, "Fy, you miser!"

The noble party then withdrew to a little distance, and talked to some of the elder people, while the rest of the peasants brought up their presents also, and shouts of laughter continued till the sun went down. The merry scene then closed, and Marguerite and her husband retired to a cottage hard by, while the marquis, his uncle, his wife, and his little boy re-entered the chateau, and talked quietly over the event of the day.

"She is a pretty girl, and, I dare say, a good girl too," said Monsieur de St. Medard, as they walked into the saloon. "Do you know the man well?"

"Oh, yes," replied the Marquis de Langy; "he holds a little farm of mine on the edge of the forest: a stout, hard-working fellow, and will make Marguerite an excellent husband."

"Perhaps so," rejoined Monsieur de St. Medard, with a thoughtful air. "A cunning animal, I should suspect."

"Oh, no," rejoined his nephew; "he is a very good creature, and an old suiter of Marguerite's."

"Constancy is something, at least in this world," said the viscount. "And now, my good niece and nephew, have you any commands for England?"

"For England!" exclaimed Monsieur de Langy, starting; "why, what are you going to do in England?"

"First, to fulfil some of the king's commands," answered Monsieur de St. Medard, "and, next, to see some old friends there. But the truth is, I go as ambassador to see if, by my influence, we cannot smooth down some of the difficulties regarding this commercial treaty."

"They will make a heretic of you in England," cried Madame de Langy.

"That would be difficult," said the viscount; "but, nevertheless, Adele, you would look upon that as something gained from the enemy at least, would you not?"

"No," cried she, eagerly, "no. Better be of no religion at all than a heretic."

Monsieur de St. Medard smiled and looked at his nephew, and the conversation turned to other subjects.

There we will leave it, in order briefly to recapitulate the events of the ensuing year, as far as the family of the Marquis de Langy was concerned. The Viscount de St. Medard returned to Paris on the following day, and thence proceeded to England on the mission with which he was charged. Not long after, the fine boy of Monsieur and Madame de Langy was taken ill with one of the complaints of childhood, and,

though he recovered, never regained altogether his health and strength.

During the winter of the ensuing year, however, the fair proportions of the marchioness were seen to change. The marquis seemed well satisfied that his wife's figure had lost its symmetry; and, though he was always a kind and affectionate husband, showed greater tenderness and care than ever. As the spring was coming on, the marchioness sent her carriage to the farm of Latouches, on the borders of the forest of Compiegne, which was nearly a day's journey from the chateau, and the vehicle rolled back again, bringing her former maid, Marguerite, now Madame Latouches.

When the marchioness beheld her, she could not help laughing at the change which had taken place in the poor girl's once smart figure; and she exclaimed, "Alas! Marguerite, I wonder if I look such a round, squat personage as yourself!"

"Oh dear, no, madame," replied the former maid, who had not forgotten the duty of flattery. "You are so much taller than I am; one would scarcely know that you were so."

"There is no doubt of that, Marguerite," said the marchioness; "and, as I promised you in October, you shall nurse the baby."

"Oh dear, I am so glad!" cried Marguerite; "I always did love children, you know, madame, and yours I shall love beyond anything."

CHAPTER II.

Oh! when youth gasps for the object of desire, how gladly would he step over the long hours of expectation as easily as the teller of a tale. How many would at this moment—if immutable fate would let them—annihilate the two or three years to come, which lie between them and fruition, in order to be at once at the bright goal towards which they strain their eager gaze—how many, how many! And yet they all are young; for even middle age learns that half the delight is in the pursuit; and age has found that, often, before we reach that goal, the prize is gone. Happy is it for mortal man that he cannot in life, as I can in this book, blot out the flight of two or three years, and say, in two words, They passed.

Two years and nine months had gone by since the Marquise de Langy and Marguerite, her former maid, spoke of events to which the hopes of both were turned; and now I must lead the reader to a small farmhouse at the edge of the forest of Compiegne. It was eventime in the autumn; the leaves were yellow in the deep wood, and some of them already strewed the ground. The gnat, the shrill trumpeter of the season, whirled high in the air; the partridge was heard calling in the field; a rosy lustre spread warm over the blue sky, and caught some light clouds overhead. There was a coolness in the breeze which told that the breath of winter would soon chill the world; and every sign on tree, on herb, on field, said that the bright time of year was past, and the dark and chilly period at hand.

"Surely nothing dies but something mourns," said the poet; and the death of summer, of all other losses, seems to call forth and to deserve the sorrow of all the earth. Gray sadness steals over everything, and the brightest autumnal day has something solemn and serious in its splendour which speaks of the fleeting of enjoyment and points to the tomb of all dear hopes.

The farmhouse was small and lowly—little more than a cottage, indeed—with a mud wall running around the court and out-buildings; but it was prettily situated on a slight rise, with a deep wood behind, and in front the undulating fields of the farm, with a small but deep stream flowing in the lowest part of the valley which it overlooked. The face of the building turned to the southwest, so as to monopolize the greater part of the light of evening. On the left was a little vineyard, through which the rays of the sun were seen streaming in pleasant lines of yellow lustre, while a small flat green offered a sort of esplanade, from which an extensive and beautiful view presented itself to the eye; and on the right was a little wood, detached from the forest, and belonging to the Marquis de Langy. Beyond the field before the cottage ran a road—not exactly a highway indeed, but one of the second class—and from it branched off a path leading to a small hamlet, above which might be seen rising the spire of the parish church.

Long lines of light and shade, as tree or upland interposed, stretched across the whole prospect; a troop of cattle appeared winding up under the direction of a little girl; and down a distant bank a flock of sheep followed their shepherd, taking their way homeward to the fold. The sound of a voice singing a merry song in the evening came, not altogether cheerfully, on the ear; and the whole scene was peaceful and quiet, but still grave—one might almost say melancholy. At least, so it was felt by a gentleman who walked slowly up the path from the village, and approached the farmhouse.

As was the case then, and is still, with most buildings of the kind in France, the first room that one entered was the kitchen, which is, in fact, the saloon of the lower orders; and in that of the farm of Godard, for so was called the house we speak of, sat Marguerite Latouches by the fire, which was warming the evening soup, watching the progress of the cookery. There was one little boy, between two and three years old, standing at her knee, and another, of the same age, or very nearly so, sitting in the doorway of the farm, sometimes amusing himself by scraping the dust into tiny pyramids with his small hands, sometimes raising his round rosy face towards the sky, and looking at the glowing clouds overhead. The evening was growing cold; and Marguerite, casting some more pieces of wood upon the embers, called to the little boy to come in, a command which he did not seem very willing to obey. She repeated the order in a sharp tone, for Marguerite was now all the farmer's wife; and, though but little more than three years had passed since her marriage, you could scarcely recognise the smart, slim, smooth-tongued, pretty *soubrette* in the stout, bustling, active, quick-tempered wife of Gerard Latouches.

"Come in," she cried, "come in this minute, or I will give you a drubbing, you little rebel."

The boy looked out of the door a moment longer, and then toddled up to her side, saying, in his childish accents, "Man coming."

"Not coming here," replied Marguerite Latouches, "unless it's papa."

"No, not papa," rejoined the boy; and the next moment, as Marguerite rose and took a step towards the door to see who it was, the gentleman we have spoken of entered the farm-house, and was received with a low courtesy.

He paused for a moment, gazing at Marguerite as if in doubt, and then said,

"Ah! Marguerite, you have grown so stout I scarcely recollected you. Do you know me?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the wife of Latouches, "quite well, though I did not know you were come back from foreign parts."

"I have been in France three days," replied the gentleman; "and, as I passed this way to Picardy, I resolved I would stop four or five miles short of my proper lodging-place, to see my little namesake, and bear news of him to Victor and Adele. Two fine boys, upon my soul. Which is he, Marguerite?"

The woman paused an instant, hesitated, and coloured. What was it moved her? The reader may learn hereafter.

But, in the mean time, Monsieur de Medard went on, scarcely waiting for a reply. "But I need not ask you: this fair-haired urchin is my little Francis."

"No, sir," replied Marguerite, as the viscount put his hand upon the head of the boy, who had been standing at her knee; "that is my son, the other is your godson."

Monsieur de Medard gazed at the child with a thoughtful look, and then called him, saying, "Come hither, Francis, I am thine uncle, boy; wilt thou love me?"

The child ran towards him without fear or hesitation, and, for his only reply, held up his fair round face and gave the stranger a kiss.

"Well, thou art a dear boy," said Monsieur de St. Medard, holding him to his heart: "let us see thy face;" and he carried him to the doorway, gazing at him intently for a moment or two. "Why, thou art not like thy father, or mother either," he continued; "more like me, I should think, or my poor brother."

"Oh yes, sir, very like the marquis's father," said Marguerite Latouches, approaching.

"Why, do you recollect him, Marguerite?" asked the viscount.

"Oh yes, sir, quite well," replied the farmer's wife. "You know, my brother, who is now the intendant of the marquis, was then a servant of his father's, your brother, sir."

"Ay," said Monsieur de St. Medard, "I remember. The boy is like him. Well, I can safely tell them he is well and thriving. When was his father here?"

"Why, sir, not for a twelvemonth," answered Marguerite, in some surprise. "Did you not know that Monsieur de Langy is with the army of the Upper Rhine, and madame is very ill at Nancy?"

"No, indeed," said Monsieur de St. Medard, with a look both of sorrow and surprise; "I had not heard it. But I have been wandering far and wide, Marguerite; I have been in India."

"In the Great Indies!" cried Marguerite; "that is very far indeed."

As she spoke, a loud cry attracted her attention, and, turning round, Monsieur de St. Medard and herself perceived that the little boy, whom he had at first mistaken for his nephew's son, had fallen into the fire. With a loud shriek the woman darted towards it and dragged it forth; but its clothes were in a blaze; and, had it not been for the presence of the viscount, the child would have been burned to death, and perhaps the mother also; for she held it clasped in her arms, and the flame was catching her own apron. That gentleman, however, who was an old soldier, prompt and ready in every moment of difficulty, unclasped the large blue roquelaure, or coat-cloak, which he wore, and casting it over both mother and child, extinguished the fire in a moment. She herself was uninjured; but the right arm of the little boy was severely burned, though apparently not so much so as to place him in any danger. His cries, however, were very bitter, and, after endeavouring to soothe him for some time, Monsieur de St. Medard left the cottage, saying he would send up a surgeon from the village.

"There is no surgeon there, sir," said Marguerite, "there is no surgeon there; but the curé is a great doctor. He will come up, sir, he will come up. Hush, my poor boy! hush!"

Monsieur de St. Medard walked down towards the village with a rapid step, though in a meditative mood. So much, indeed, were his thoughts occupied, that he scarcely saw the farmer Latouches himself, who was coming up on his return home, till the stout peasant bowed low and uncovered his head, saying, "Bon jour, Monsieur le Vicomte."

Monsieur de St. Medard looked up, and instantly recognised Latouches, who had with him a tall, stout-made, handsome-looking boy of some fourteen or fifteen years of age, with a countenance expressive of talent and activity of mind, yet with a somewhat shy and sidelong look, which is rarely to be found even among the bashful, except there is a consciousness of some weakness, fault, or vice at the bottom of the heart.

Monsieur de St. Medard was something more than a great observer of the human character; he was endowed with that sort of instinctive insight into the minds of others which some men do certainly possess as a gift, not an acquirement. He was cautious in using it; for, skeptical in all his ideas, he doubted its reality and its accuracy, and never relied on his own first impressions of another till those impressions were confirmed and justified by after observation. He had seldom, if ever, found himself wrong, however; and after telling Latouches what had happened at the farm, he walked on, saying to himself, as he thought of the countenance of the lad who was with the farmer, "That will be a bold and powerful fellow, but I doubt that he will be a very honest one."

Without farther comment, he proceeded to the village, found out the good curé, and sent him up to the house of Madame Latouches, after having conversed with him a moment or two in regard to the two children. This conversation brought reflections into his mind which lasted during the greater part of the evening after he had returned to the little cabaret where he had taken up his abode, and which his servants had made as comfortable for him as the circumstances permitted.

Reflections similar to those which occupied Monsieur de St. Medard may perhaps have already crossed the mind of my readers, though of course his thoughts were modified by the circumstances of the times and the country.

"Well," he said, meditating over the scene on the farm, "I cannot help thinking that this custom of ours is both a barbarous and unnatural one, for a mother to give her child into the hands of a comparative stranger to educate as well as to nurse during the first three years of its life—to put it into a cottage, and let it receive its first impressions from persons in a low and ignorant condition. The practice has quite gone out in England; I wish it would go out with us also. The excuse we make is, that the child becomes more robust and healthy than if it were subjected to all the delicate treatment of a fond mother in a wealthy and luxurious house. They say a child's bodily constitution is fixed in the first three years of its existence: they seem to forget its mental constitution altogether. My belief is, that a child's education begins when it is six weeks old, and that every hour after its very first ideas develop themselves roots in its mind some principle which affects its whole existence, implanting thoughts, feelings, tendencies a thousand-fold more difficult to eradicate than those which are received in after life. Seeds planted in a virgin soil shoot far more deeply down, and produce a thousand-fold more fruit than when the ground has been exhausted by repeated crops. If I had a son I could not cast him on the hands of strangers—for years!—no, nor for hours."

Such reflections occupied the thoughts of Monsieur de St. Medard, as we have already said, during the greater part of the evening; for he was one of those whose minds are almost always busy with things of great moment, and, in many instances, his ran before the age in which he lived. Unfortunately indeed, in breaking away from the shackles of evil custom, folly, and prejudice, it overleaped all reasonable barriers, and cast away, not alone the chains that bound it, but the garments with which it was clothed.

The practice, however, upon which he commented was at one time almost universal throughout what were called the civilized states of Europe, and the first two or three years of a child's life were spent in the cottage of some foster-parent, very often as badly chosen as the system itself was badly devised. Mothers, and fathers too, excused to themselves the act on various pretences; but fashion, vice, vanity, were in reality the only foundations. Among a nation where the latter weakness, namely, vanity, has always been the predominant fault in the national character—a fault which, as is very often the case, may lead to some of the ennobled splendours of worldly greatness—it is easy to understand that this bad custom took a firmer root, and lasted longer, than with any other people; and, though it had diminished at the period of the Revolution, it was in full vogue not many years before that event. The eldest son of the Marquis de Langy had been so brought up in the house of one of his tenants; and, when a second son appeared, he, as we have seen, had been immediately given over to the care of the girl who had been his mother's maid.

Of a kind heart and a good disposition, Marguerite had loved him nearly as well as her own child, and both the father and mother had every cause to be satisfied with the treatment which their offspring had received up to the period when the marquis was obliged to join the army on the Rhine, and his wife accompanied him into Lorraine. His prolonged absence and her own illness made her more than once think that it was lucky her little Francis had been placed in such good hands. But, alas! Adele de Langy did not know all that was taking place in the farm of Godard.

Too often does it happen in all the affairs of life, too often does it happen with every class of men, that we content ourselves, that we congratulate ourselves, on knowing that one part of any complicated transaction is going right, without thinking of all the many parts that may be wrong and ruined. It is one of the great evils of the one-sidedness of most men's nature, that they fix their whole thoughts, and direct their whole efforts, to a very small branch of each subject presented to them. A statesman looks at the operation of the law he frames, perhaps, upon one class of people only; perhaps upon one portion of the interests of that class; perhaps upon one portion of the interests of the world at large; forgetting altogether either the multitudes that must be affected collaterally, or the manifold minor necessities of the very beings whom he seeks to benefit, or the innumerable results to society in its moral temperament and its physical state which any law affecting one of the great questions of polity must touch either remotely or immediately.

Again, a father applies himself to the intellectual culture of his son: he loads his mind with knowledge, he teaches him language after language, he feeds him with the dry scrapings of the rind of antiquity; he adds mathematics to arithmetic, and finishes the pile with geometry; he crushes him, in fact, under keys, yet never teaches him to open one door. Another parent looks to the culture of his son's body: he is taught grace and ease of carriage, skill in all sports and exercises; he can ride, he can leap, he can pitch the bar; he can fence, dance, swim with the best. But the heart, reader, the heart is altogether forgotten; the spirit is without its culture, the feelings without their due governance. Or, perhaps, the case may be reversed, though, alas! that is but seldom; for the material things of life offer that which is so much more tangible, that the idleness of intellect disposes almost all men rather to deal with them than with those things that are more difficult to grasp. It is the one-sidedness of our general nature which has retarded the progress of society more than anything else on earth; and that, also, is the defect which, in domestic life and all its relations, causes one half of the miseries that exist. Thank God! a war has at length commenced against this great error, and men have not only learned that every object has its many sides, but that they themselves have each their many powers for examining, considering, and appreciating the various qualities and relations of everything that is submitted to them. Men can no longer limit their views who would pretend to greatness, but, in dealing with the infinite variety of other things, must bring into action the infinite variety that is in themselves. As under

the green surface of the ocean, whether it be rising into mountains of foam, or calm as the face of innocent Hope, there are a thousand unseen currents tending different ways, so in every affair of life are there results and tendencies below the surface, and in the breast of every man qualities, capabilities, streams of soul, if we may so call them, which he must seek for, discover, and define, if he would shape his course aright.

To return, however, to the matter from which we have strayed: the Marquise de Langy had placed her son in the cottage of the peasant with the purpose of ensuring to him that health and strength which were then supposed to follow a hardy education in early youth, and she thought of nothing more. She was content to know that this object was secured; and she was neither aware, nor inquired, whether his mind was suffering, nay, nor whether any other of his interests whatsoever were endangered by his residence there. The reader will learn hereafter that they were deeply affected, but how, it is the purpose of this tale to show. For the present, we must return to the farmhouse, and speak a few words of the farther events of that night.

On the arrival of Latouches himself at the cottage, Marguerite did not seem particularly well pleased at the sight of his companion. Her anxiety for the little boy whose arm had been burned, however, occupied her too much for many comments upon the appearance of Jean Marais, as she called the youth who accompanied her husband.

"Some new mischief, I suppose," she said; "I wonder if he will ever be steady!"

"I should think not," replied Latouches; "a young good-for-nothing! However, he must sleep here, Marguerite; for, if he goes back again, his master will half kill him."

"It must be in that room, then," rejoined Marguerite, pointing to a small chamber off the kitchen. "I won't have him up stairs again."

"I can sleep anywhere," said the boy, laughing, with a saucy air; "in the wood, if you won't take me in, Marguerite."

"Ay, and make a fine *fricot* for the wolves," answered Marguerite. "But don't talk so loud; the poor little man will go to sleep if you will let him."

A few minutes after, the good curé entered in haste, and applied such remedies as he judged necessary to soothe the child and heal the burn. Latouches himself showed great anxiety; and the only one who seemed careless was the youth, Jean Marais, who took the other little boy upon his knee, fondled, played with, teased him, and seemed delighted with the child's bold impetuosity. The poor little sufferer was, after a time, lulled into slumber; and Marguerite then put the other boy to bed also, saying to her unwelcome guest, "Get you to your room, Jean, and to sleep; it's the only way of keeping you out of mischief."

The lad laughed, and withdrew into the little sort of cabin which was assigned to him; and in a few minutes, without much preparation, was safely ensconced under such bedclothes as he could find.

When all was quiet, Marguerite and her husband looked in each other's faces for a moment or two in silence, but with a meaning and somewhat stern expression on both parts. A long conversation ensued, in the course of which Marguerite related the visit of Monsieur de St. Medard, and her husband put various questions to her in an irritable and impatient tone. The conference lasted for more than an hour, and ended by the wife of Latouches going to bed in tears, while he remained for a moment in the kitchen. Taking out four or five louis and a handful of silver, which he had brought from the neighbouring market, Latouches deposited the whole sum safely in the drawer of a large oaken table which stood in the middle of the room, having first counted a small sum which was there before. He then locked the drawer and retired to bed, leaving the fire smouldering on the hearth.

An hour passed without any event taking place in the kitchen of the farm of Godard; but at the end of that time, the door of thin planks which led into the little room tenanted by Jean Marais opened gently, and that good youth himself entered, completely dressed.

"Ha, ha!" he murmured to himself, "I have got hold of a secret, have I? I will keep that for service some future day. But now for my present wants. They must be supplied. I cannot stay at Marcilly, that's clear; and I must make my way off as fast as possible. Now, uncle Latouches, I must borrow a few crowns; and, if ever you ask me for payment, your secret, and all you have robbed me of, will be quittance enough, I think!"

As he thus spoke, he produced half a dozen keys of different forms out of his pocket, and applied them to the drawer. They did not succeed in opening it, however; and the youth then brought forth a large knife, with which he speedily contrived to press down the bolt of the lock. The light of the fire was quite sufficient to show him the object of his search; and, making one clear sweep of the contents of the drawer, he opened the door, and in a minute was walking hastily along the fields.

CHAPTER III.

Once more we must pass over another lapse of time, comprising three years, and, bringing before the reader again the same four persons who had stood upon the terrace of the Chateau de Langy on the marriage day of Gerard Latouches and Marguerite Lemaire, must group them in the saloon of the same chateau, as they sat down to take their coffee on the evening of a summer's day.

Six years had changed Adele de Langy a good deal, but she was still a pretty and interesting woman, with an expression of great sweetness and tenderness, perhaps heightened by being somewhat paler than before. There is something in the aspect of rosy health rarely combined with great gentleness; it gives the idea of the material, the animal part of our being predominating over the spiritual. It is not always so, indeed, for there are some faces, full of the high life of this earth, through which the soul seems to look by the eye; and one who gazes at them, and sees the varying expressions which the heart brings over the countenance, feels as if looking at some magnificent

building, and beholding beautiful forms passing across the open windows. Adele de Langy, however, had gained, rather than lost, by her health having been slightly impaired.

Her husband, too, no longer looked the young man: his face had lost its smoothness; there were the lines and stains of exposure and care upon it; and, as he moved to take his seat at the table, a slight degree of lameness was perceptible from a wound he had received in a skirmish some months before. The beautiful little boy of four years old, who, at the period to which we have referred, had stood at his mother's knee, was now grown into the tall, pale stripling of ten; somewhat girlish in look and manner; for the great tenderness called for by delicate health had shielded him from those lessons of privation, activity, and exposure which give, even to boyhood, the manly tone so desirable in every one who is to mingle, sooner or later, with the world.

The person of the whole party who seemed the least changed was the Vicomte de St. Medard, and the only thing which indicated that Time's hand had worked any alteration in him was, here and there, a gray hair, and a slight deepening of the thoughtful wrinkle between his brows. Although not more than by ten years his nephew's senior, he had looked, when we first introduced him to the reader, wellnigh old enough to be the marquis's father; but, since that time, Monsieur de Langy seemed to have gone on in years, while he had stood still, and now one would not have said that there was much more than half a lustre between them. He was somewhat more richly dressed than before, however, though still in military costume; for he had by this time risen high in the service of his country, and many circumstances had contributed to raise his fortune as well as his station. The emoluments of the various posts which he had filled had been large, and his expenses small; and in India he had also acquired considerable wealth, which his habits of moderation and frugality had prevented him from dissipating, as frequently occurred with many fortunes there obtained.

Such prudent conduct was not pursued by Monsieur de Langy, who, according to the extravagant customs of the day, had greatly embarrassed a splendid fortune; nor was he in the way to retrieve his error in any great degree; for, although he had taken the opportunity of quitting the army to diminish an establishment far beyond his means or necessities, yet his income still barely sufficed to meet his expenses, so that the debts already incurred remained a continual charge upon him.

It has been necessary to say thus much in order to show that the wealthy uncle was, naturally enough, an object of great deference to the family of De Langy. I do not mean to say, indeed, that there was anything like servility, for Monsieur de St. Medard exacted nothing of the kind, nor would either the marquis or his wife have been inclined to show it; but, in such circumstances, our wishes and our hopes, without our knowing or feeling their operation, too often affect our demeanour and our tone—ay, even our thoughts and our actions—towards those upon whom our fortunes depend.

The whole party in the Chateau de Langy, then, had seated themselves round the table, while several servants in gorgeous liveries stood ready to pour out the fragrant coffee into cups of that beautiful porcelain for which France was at that time even more famous than now. Monsieur de St. Medard, whose Eastern travels had rendered him a connoisseur in the juice of the berry, was dictating to every one, in a half, laughing tone, the exact proportion of cream and sugar, and the servants, taking their tone from the master and mistress of the house, were listening with profound respect to his critical dictum, when the door of the saloon burst open, and in rushed, with the overflowing joy of youth in his countenance, and a thousand graces and beauties, which, like the flowers of spring, fade away one by one as life's year advances, as lovely a boy as ever was seen, exclaiming, "Oh! my uncle, my uncle, my dear uncle, come hither into the park; there is such a beautiful bird! you must come and see it, and tell me what it is;" and, catching Monsieur de St. Medard by the arm, he wellnigh pulled him off his chair.

"Hush, François," said his mother; "do not tease your uncle in that manner. He cannot come—he is taking his coffee."

"Oh! but he must come," cried the boy, still pulling him by the arm, "or the bird will be gone. He will come, I know; he always does what I ask him."

The viscount bent down his head and kissed the boy's fair forehead, and then looking round with a somewhat rueful smile, as much as to say, "My young tyrant will spoil my coffee," he rose, and, half led and half dragged by the child, went out by a glass-door into the park.

What the bird was, or whether they found it at all, I know not; but in a few minutes little Francis de Langy returned, holding the flap of his uncle's coat, and laughing with the joyous peal of five years old.

"My dear uncle," said the marchioness, as they came in, "you spoil that boy. I must really interfere."

"Nay, Adele," replied Monsieur de St. Medard, "I only spoil him because I have him but seldom with me. Give him to me altogether, and I will not spoil him. Will you go with me, Francis, and be my boy?"

"That I will," cried the boy, springing at a bound on his knee, and casting his arms round his neck; "that I will, and then Victor won't tease me."

The next moment, however, he turned his eyes to his mother's face, and saw a tear upon her cheek.

"But I won't leave mamma!" he exclaimed; "I will be her boy too, and papa's, and yours, and everybody's but Victor's, for he teases me."

"But you shall come and see mamma very often," said Monsieur de St. Medard.

"Every day!" asked the boy.

"Perhaps so," answered his uncle. "Will you give him to me, Adele? Victor, what say you?"

"We will talk of it by-and-by," said Monsieur de Langy, looking first towards his wife, and then towards his eldest son. "Nay, Adele, do not weep; my uncle does not want to separate Francis from us. St. Medard is not so far

off but that you may see him every day, as he says. But we will talk of it by-and-by. There, Victor, drink out your coffee, and go and play in the park: take Francis with you."

The two brothers went forth together, though, it must be owned, unwillingly; and, after they were gone, the coffee and the servants were sent away, so that the marquis and his uncle were left with the marchioness, who by this time had wiped away her tears, and remained silent and grave, but not altogether sorrowful. A momentary pause ensued, as if nobody exactly liked to renew the subject; but it was Madame de Langy who spoke first.

"I have but one fear, my dear uncle," she said, giving Monsieur de St. Medard her hand; "perhaps you divine what it is?"

"But you are wrong, Adele," replied Monsieur de St. Medard; "I told you long ago, people who think as I do seek not to make converts. A fool named Vanina once did so, and they burned him for his pains, as he well deserved. But it is clearly shown that he had no fixed opinions of any kind. He was a weak, vain, foolish man. With myself, and I suppose it is the case with others, my convictions are unwilling, and not pleasant to myself; so, depend upon it, that I shall not force them upon another. But, my dear Adele, I am ready and willing to promise you that he shall have every instruction you may think fit in your own particular doctrines and notions. He will be still your son, though he may be my heir; and I take him but as a loan to cheer my solitude, to enliven my leisure hours, to give me an object and an end in life. I cut him not off from the parent stem, I only seek to bend the young tree over a spot that has been too long scorched by the rays of the sun—my own heart, I mean, Adele. You will not make him a bigot, of course—I know you will not; that were a folly that I could not consent to—but make him, if you will, a sincerely religious man. I can desire nothing better. It is a highly enviable state. I look upon religion—I do not mean bigotry—I look upon religion as one of the most beneficial things that the mind of man ever discovered; it in fact supplies the place of those moral laws which, though immutable and severe in their nature, would be effectual upon very few unless enforced by the despotic voice of religion. I therefore think it but right and just, in the absence of all knowledge as to how the mind of any child will turn out, to give him a sound and calm religious education, in order to ensure that he shall have some principles which will guide him aright, if simple ethics can gain no hold upon him. You shall take every care of his religious education yourself, Adele, and I will interpose neither barrier nor objection. Now are you satisfied?"

"Oh yes," replied the marchioness; "I am sure you would not pervert him."

Monsieur de St. Medard turned to his nephew with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. "You see how she treats me, Victor," he said; "the very best that she can say for me is, that I will not pervert your son. Will you consent to my adopting him?"

"Right gladly, my good uncle," answered the marquis; "I told you so this morning. Only settle upon him a sufficient sum to make him independent under all circumstances—and, of course, let it be understood that, in case of anything happening to our poor boy Victor before he marries or comes into his succession, Francis shall be restored to us as the heir of Langy—and I will yield him with pleasure and with gratitude. You will make him a good soldier, I know, and an honest man likewise. One cannot well desire more."

"I will try to make him," said the viscount, with a look of conscious integrity, though not exactly of what is called self-satisfaction, "I will try to make him what I am myself, Victor, in every point but one. I cannot say more; for a man can but endeavour to do those things which he thinks right, and the moral sense with which every man is endowed tells me that I have so acted for some years. My views may be wrong in morals as well as religion, but I do not think they are, and I have acted up to them. I will endeavour to teach him to do the same; for, depend upon it, the man who seeks in all things to do that which is right, is seldom without discovering in the end what really is right, even by the very act of seeking it."

The matter was thus settled, and, a few days after, Francis de Langy accompanied the viscount to his estate of St. Medard. He was not told that he was henceforth to be comparatively a stranger to his father's house. Had he been so, perhaps his boyish imagination even might have taken fright at the severing of all those sweet ties with which the kind hand of Nature has attached us to the bosom of paternal love. He might have felt—early as were his years—that there is no tenderness like that which God himself ordained to be the soft resting-place of infancy; that the cradle of our best affections is a mother's heart; that the most impenetrable shelter against the storms of the world are a father's arms. He might have felt it, though not known it; for feeling goes before experience, and outstrips reason. It is the instinct of man, given him as a safeguard for those early years, before the gifts which are bestowed upon him to direct his manhood can be brought into operation; before intellect, from the materials furnished by memory out of the past, forges an ægis to guard his breast against the future.

They told him not, then, and he went joyfully, as if for a visit for a few days. All was new to him, all was happy, and, ere he felt the change, the change was effected. His uncle was all kindness, and the hours passed pleasantly away. Monsieur de St. Medard, with a lively recollection of all that had been imperfect, and all that had been painful in his own education, took care that nothing of the kind should be felt by the beautiful boy whom he had adopted; and, studying his character with an anxious eye, and a keen and discriminating mind, he prepared to repress all that promised dangerous fruit, and to cultivate the many fine and hopeful qualities which were apparent in his disposition.

During the first three or four months Madame de Langy visited her son almost every day, but at the end of that time the season of the capital returned, and though she and her husband both might have been better pleased to stay at their chateau, custom, the great god of France, carried them unwillingly to Paris.

Purposely the Viscount de St. Medard remained in the country, for he was anxious to wean Madame de Langy, as he expressed it, from her child. Two months effected the object that he wished; that is to say, the lapse of time did not diminish her love or her tenderness in the least, but it broke through the habit of seeing him frequently; and when, at length, her uncle and his adopted son followed to Versailles, where the court then was, she herself abstained from that daily intercourse with the boy which she knew could not always go on, and which she had found it so painful to interrupt. The little Francis himself had readily become reconciled to his situation, for his uncle had always been the object of his warmest love; nor was his affection diminished, even in the least degree, by finding that Monsieur de St. Medard, though kind and indulgent, would not, to use the ordinary term, spoil him in the least. The viscount never harassed him by manifold exactions; there were few things that were prohibited to him, there were few things that were required of him; but the directions which he had once received, he soon learned, must be obeyed to the letter; and though his nature was impetuous and his heart full of ardent feelings, yet those feelings were, if I may so express it, thoughtful in their character, and, even as a boy, he would say to himself, 'I will do as my uncle bids me, because he is so kind."

Ere I close this chapter to turn to another page in the history of this boy's life, I must pause for a moment to give a picture of a person who, though not one of the principal characters in this book, had a great influence on the fate of Francis de Langy. I do not mean merely his material fate, I mean the fate of his mind; and, though readers in general are not fond of this sort of portrait-painting, yet I must beg them to pause with me for a moment, assuring them that, however unskilfully the sketch may be executed, it is from nature; and I give it as much in justice to a particular class from which we do not in general expect much good, as to a nation from which we do not expect much sincere feeling. I speak of a French *bonne*, or nursery-maid.

Louise Pelet had been engaged by Madame de Langy to take charge of her youngest son on his return to his home from the *Ferme Godard*. She came from the house of a relation of the marquis, with whom she could never agree, but who gave her a character for perfect honesty, sobriety, and another virtue for which her class are not in general very conspicuous. The lady acknowledged, however, in recommending her to Madame de Langy, that Louise had "a desperate temper."

But Madame de Langy knew that her fair cousin was excessively weak, excessively vain, and excessively capricious. It was admitted that Louise was extremely fond of children, and did not show her bad temper with them; and, consequently, Adele imagined that a more reasonable mistress might make a more reasonable maid. She was not mistaken: Louise became devotedly attached to the boy; and though she was what is usually termed *free spoken* to her mistress, expressing her opinion in the very plainest terms when it was sought for, and sometimes when it was not, she was, nevertheless, perfectly respectful and obedient. She was not fond of her fellow-servants, it is true, and got out of their way with great perseverance and success; but she was neither a tale-bearer nor a slanderer of others, holding her tongue very discreetly when they were absent, though occasionally expressing not very favourable views of their conduct to their face. She was, moreover, activity itself; always employed, never idle, and doing everything with a rapidity and promptitude which did not in the least interfere with neatness of execution. Blithe and cheerful was she always, too, which is one of the best and most necessary qualifications in a person employed about children; for the heart of man in his early years is like one of those prepared plates, invented in our own days, which take a permanent print of the objects placed before them without any operation of man's hands to draw the outline or induce the light and shade. If our minds are as, we are told by great philosophers, but bundles of ideas, the objects that surround us in infancy—when our first impressions, which form the foundation of all the after structure, are acquired—can be of no slight importance, and the cheerfulness and contented character of the persons placed about a child have undoubtedly a powerful influence in giving the same happy tone to his after disposition.

But the most remarkable point in the character of Louise Pelet remains yet to be told. As one of her fellow-servants said of her, "she was destitute of amiable weaknesses." It was very generally admitted by her companions that she had never had a *foiblesse* for any one, and it seemed, moreover, that she was resolved never to have a *tendresse* either; so that grooms and coachmen, footmen and valets, nay, butlers and cooks themselves, assaulted her heart in vain. At the greater part she laughed, which is undoubtedly the best manner of extinguishing unwished-for love; but at the rest, if they persisted, she grew angry and impatient, and, indeed, showed very little compassion for the sufferers from the tender passion. Her indifference towards mankind proceeded from no neglect which she had met with from the other sex, for she certainly had been a very attractive personage, with a neat figure, a pretty foot and ankle, and good eyes and teeth; and even at the time that she entered the household of Madame de Langy, in her smart lace cap, her little characteristic jacket, and her red petticoat, she was still pleasant to look on, although she had passed her thirtieth year. Louise was, moreover, a sincere and devout Roman Catholic; that is to say, she had a strong sense of religion, and, of course, adhered to the doctrines in which she had been brought up. She heard mass whenever she had an opportunity, she fasted sturdily upon all days appointed for that purpose; and, although she had great powers of abstinence, she got thin upon the rigid observance of Lent, and somewhat pale before Easter-day. She confessed at the regular times and seasons; but it was always remarked that after confession she was more placable and less sharp in her replies than usual, and, consequently, Madame de Langy imagined that errors in temper formed the great bulk of her sins, and were the especial faults which the worthy priest thought

fit to point out for amendment. Louise was a very sensible as well as a very conscientious person, and, having a clear insight into her own little weaknesses, she was always anxious to conquer them. Nevertheless, she was not a bigot, hated hypocrisy, in matters of religion endeavoured to prevent her left hand from knowing what her right did, made her fasting and her prayer both in secret, would hear even a priest blamed with perfect composure, and tolerated a jest at any of the many absurdities with which the folly of men had overloaded her Church.

Such was the personage to whom Madame de Langy had confided the care of her younger son; and, when the little boy was adopted by Monsieur de St. Medard, she stipulated that Louise Pelet should accompany him. The viscount consented willingly enough, as the presence of Louise relieved his mind of the only embarrassment which he anticipated; and, after she had been with him a short time, the esteem he felt for her was so great, that he resolved, if willing to stay, she should never quit his house, even after her charge of the boy was over.

For her part, Louise loved and respected her new master; and the only observation which she was ever known to make in his dispraise was, "It is a pity that he is such a fool as to have no religion, when so good a thing is to be got at every corner."

CHAPTER IV.

Years passed with Francis de Langy: the bark of life floated along the stream of time, filled with all the merry crew of boyhood, shouting on their way at every rock and angle that they turned, singing gay songs to the ripple of the waves, laughing at those whom they left behind upon the bank, though opening their eyes with astonishment, here and there, at the wrecks which they beheld even in those seemingly quiet waters.

Years passed by, and Monsieur de St. Medard's hair grew grayer. Victor and Adele de Langy fell into the slough of middle life. Their son, the young count, became a youth, imitating the faults and follies of men, tasting the first intoxicating drops of vice, and promising to pain his parents' heart with more than an ordinary share of errors and weaknesses. Their eyes often turned with longing and affection towards their second son, Francis, now somewhat past fourteen years of age, and unusually tall, strong, and powerful for his period of life. He was strikingly handsome in person too; and the eyes of Adele saw in his noble features, and still more noble expression, a promise that he would grow up with higher objects and pursuits than his brother, and make up, in pride and satisfaction to his father and herself, for the sorrows and anxieties which Victor was bringing upon them.

The character of the boy seemed fully to justify her in such hopes. The bold, frank openness of his disposition, which was the first *thing that* had won the love of his father's uncle, had never left him. He was fearless in all *things, candid in* all things; he knew not what a falsehood is—he scarcely conceived it possible to tell one. With nothing to conceal and with nothing to dread, truth was the first habit of his mind; and with truth there was, of course, cheerfulness. What is there that should prevent the heart from beating free when there is not a fetter upon it! But, although he was perfectly gay, happy, and contented, the continual society of Monsieur de St. Medard had, of course, produced its effect upon the young Francis de Langy. It gave him a thoughtful turn even in his gayety. His light-heartedness was not without reflection; his very cheerfulness proceeded from the pleasantness of his thoughts, not from the absence of them; so that he was, in fact, in mind as well as in body, more advanced than his years. It might be that the course of education which Monsieur de St. Medard pursued with him had produced the same effect upon his corporeal and his mental powers, for the viscount had taught him to examine the opinions he received, to investigate, to analyze, to combine; and, at the same time that he had given him these exercises for the mind, he had instructed him, or caused him to be instructed, in all those bodily exercises which strengthen the muscles and develop the powers of the human frame. At fourteen he was master of almost all weapons, an excellent swimmer, a good horseman, an unerring shot; and, as grace is the child of strength married to activity, there were few persons in whom that quality was more remarkable than in the boy whose course we have been tracing.

There was but one subject of daily interest on which Monsieur de St. Medard never spoke with his adopted son, and that was religion. With conscientious adherence to his word, he not only avoided throwing any doubts as stumbling-blocks in the young man's way, but he himself engaged a clergyman of irreproachable character, a man of sense, of learning, and of firmness, to act as his constant instructer, and to stay with him in the house. The Abbé Arnoux had travelled far, had seen many nations, had mingled with philosophers as well as ecclesiastics, had heard many opinions discussed, combated, and defended, and, remaining calmly firm in those which he had first received, was fully prepared to support them at all times against attack, whatever form it might assume. The viscount, in short, could not have chosen any one so capable of guarding his adopted son against his own peculiar notions as the person he gave him for a tutor; and, at the same time that he did so, he himself obtained for a companion one of the few men, as he expressed it, with whom he could converse reasonably. With the abbé, however, from delicacy of feeling, he abstained from all conversation on religion, as he did with his nephew from respect to his word; and but for the fact of his never setting his foot within the doors of a church, or attending upon any of the ordinances of religion, the boy would not have discovered that his kind relation differed from the rest of the world in his religious views. True it is, he took no great notice of the matter, and the Abbé Arnoux was a great deal too wise and too virtuous to call the attention of his pupil to what he looked upon as a lamentable error in the mind of their mutual benefactor.

Thus had proceeded the course of Francis de

Langy's life up to the period when, having passed the age of sixteen, it seemed necessary to Monsieur de St. Medard to give him a more general knowledge of the world; for, alas! that is a book which every man must study sooner or later, and he who has not some knowledge of it can never take a first place in the class into which he has been put. The viscount having now formally adopted his nephew—a proceeding surrounded with more legal securities in France, at least at that time, than is admissible in England—the king bestowed upon him the title of Baron de St. Medard, which he would have borne had he been actually the son of his father by adoption; and, accompanied by the Abbé Arnoux, with two servants, Monsieur de St. Medard and Francis de Langy set out on a tour through their native land.

It was in the spring of the year, but the spring far advanced, and touching upon summer; a season which in Paris and its neighbourhood is, perhaps, the most disagreeable, on account of the cloud of dust which hangs constantly in the air. The steps of the travellers were directed, in the first place, towards the celebrated baths of Mont d'Or, in order to reach which—as they varied their course according to the objects that they desired to see—they passed through a very interesting portion of the kingdom. But as this work is neither intended for a descriptive tour, nor an account of the principal manufactures of the eastern provinces of France, I shall hurry on with them towards Auvergne, which they approach in the beginning of the month of June.

Monsieur de St. Medard, although he had not prevented his adopted son from visiting any town which was worth his notice in the neighbourhood of their direct road, had nevertheless lost but little time by the way; for a latent desire of seeing some old and well-loved friends had, perhaps, directed his journey to Auvergne in the first place, and now somewhat quickened his movements, without his being aware that such was the case. It were trite to tell the reader that the causes of one half of our actions are unknown to us; for every man, who has at all examined his own mind, must have discovered that very often the motive most apparent to himself at the time was not the real one. But we may go a little farther and say, that, even when we do discover the principal motive, we seldom, if ever, perceive all those accessory causes which modify it in its course between conception and execution. The heart of man is a well of secrets, from which we bring up but one bucketful at a time; and truth—that is, the whole truth—still lies at the bottom.

Francis de Langy had hitherto been busy with the most material things of life, for there are various shades of substantiality in all that we deal with. First, there is the actual matter of the world, and the mere physical actions and enjoyments which spring from the exercises of our corporeal frame, from the indulgence of any of our animal appetites—the operation of matter upon matter. Then come, as another grand class of human objects and pursuits, those movements of the mind, and their subjects, which, though not actually dealing with corporeal substances, nevertheless are not independent of them, taking from them their indications and their terms. This comprises all the sciences, and many of the arts. A third class is still more refined and subtle in its nature and its objects. Though matter must always mingle, more or less, while we hold this mixed being, with all our thoughts and feelings, yet the imaginative powers of the mind are certainly those which receive less aid from the material world in which we live, and have more of the operations of the spirit in them, than any other of our faculties. The most abstract workings of the intellect—those, for instance, which have for their object the eternal truths of the mathematics, which would be if the worlds were not—still are forced to have recourse to material forms, and ideas borrowed from them, for the mind of man to be able to conceive them at all. But the thrilling sensations of the soul—the thoughts of the spirit, which are feelings—when awakened by fine music or called forth by some wide and magnificent scene, deal not at all with the mere material objects presented to our corporeal senses, but receive, as it were, an answer—a message from Heaven. Rightly directed, wisely used, imagination is the greatest gift and blessing of intellectual man. Whether he will or not, it mingles, more or less, with almost all his acts and almost all his pleasures. But how it may be taught to elevate and purify all those enjoyments, would man but give the due ascendency to the finer essence, and suffer it to direct his corporeal energies! How it might raise his tastes! how it might soften his feelings! how it might purify his desires! how it might ennoble his nature! how it might dignify his life! how it might tranquillize his death! for imagination must ever be an ingredient in that power by which we realize to ourselves "the substance of things not seen." To him who has imagination well directed, the whole universe and all its vicissitudes are but an instrument of eternal music, and the hand of God producing infinite harmony at every touch.

Francis de Langy had, as I have said, dealt hitherto with the more material things of life. Sciences he had studied, arts he had learned, athletic sports and vigorous exercises he had enjoyed; but imagination had received but little culture, and a small supply of food. A new world of sensations was about to be presented to him; a spirit that slumbered in his bosom was about to be roused; and the touch that woke her from her sleep was from the hand of Nature.

The three travellers had passed the night at a small and uncomfortable inn, dirty, neglected, and ill-furnished; and, rising early from beds which offered no inducement to remain longer in them than was absolutely necessary, they set out about five o'clock in the morning, intending to go on foot to Clermont, and thence to the Mont d'Or. A thick fog hung over the whole scene for the first two hours of their journey; but at length, after having changed horses in the small town of Aigueperse, they climbed on foot the high hill just beyond that place, while the carriage followed, and some signs of the mist dispersing began to appear ere they reached the top. The Abbé Arnoux was expressing his regret that they should be cut off from the beautiful view of Limagne which the top of the mountain displays, and cited some lines from Gregory

of Tours, which afford, perhaps, the first record of a strong sense of picturesque beauty in one of the barbarous kings of the middle ages that we possess.

"Just such a misfortune as that which has befallen us to-day," said the abbé, "befell Childibert more than a thousand years ago. That was quite natural; but what was not quite so much to be expected, is the fact, that poor Childibert felt the disappointment as much as we can do, though he had no Claude Lorraine to instruct his eyes in the details of picturesque beauty."

"I think we shall be more fortunate than the king, abbé," said the viscount; "for, if I mistake not, the mist does not go beyond this side of the mountain. Do you not see the yellow sunshine there, appearing in a long line upon the edge of the sky, like the golden fringe upon the hangings of a throne? The wind sets from that quarter, too; so, take my word for it, we shall have it fine."

"If we were to stop for a minute," said the abbé, "we might, perhaps, have the view from the top; and, in the mean time, look here at this large square stone, one of the traces of a civilization passed away, as great, or, perhaps, greater than our own. We think that the art of printing will prove the elixir of life to our state of beings, and render all our inventions, discoveries, and improvements immortal. A thousand to one the hands which erected these milestones so many centuries ago, thought that the glories of the Roman name had in it as strong a principle of immortality, and that, embalmed in that mighty preservative, all her arts would be transmitted to every after age without decay or loss. 'Tiberius Claudius, Drusi filius, Cæsar, Augustus, Germanicus, Tribunitia potestate quinquies, Imperator undecies, Pater patriæ, Consul tertium, Consul designatus quartum, &c., &c., &c.,'" continued the abbé, reading with antiquarian ease the letters on the old Roman milestone. "The possessor of all these pompous titles, depend upon it, little thought that the pride of Rome would one day be but a page out of a half-forgotten history."

"But at all events," said the viscount, "you will allow, my good friend, that the art of printing is a vast safeguard to all our present discoveries and arts?"

"I really do not know," replied the abbé; "I believe the copies made by hand of many of the celebrated works now utterly lost were as numerous in proportion to the population as those produced by printing; and, if we look into any catalogue of books, we shall find many of them —though printed within a very few years of the present time—which are now scarcely to be procured; some of which there is only one copy known to exist; others, printed less than two hundred years ago, famous in their day and eagerly sought for now, of which only the title has descended to us. No, no; we can perpetuate nothing: there is no such thing as immortality on this side the grave."

"Or on the other," said the viscount in a low tone, as if speaking to himself.

But, nevertheless, Francis de Langy caught the words, and turned round with a sudden start. Monsieur de St. Medard perceived his surprise, and, vexed with himself for having been betrayed into such a speech, walked on, saying, "Come, Francis! Come, Monsieur Arnoux: the carriage will be at the top of the hill long before us, if we stay here discussing old monuments. But you see I was right; the mists have nearly cleared away."

"Would to God they had!" thought the abbé; but he was more careful than Monsieur de St. Medard had been, and uttered not aloud even a word that might shake the respect of Francis de Langy towards the viscount.

He followed slowly, however; while the youth, with his light, active limbs, hurried on before. The abbé's eyes were bent upon the ground, his whole look grave and thoughtful; and Monsieur de St. Medard, pausing for an instant, laid his hand upon his arm, saying, "I forgot myself, Arnoux; but I trust it has done no harm. You know that I would not counteract your efforts by a word."

"I am sure you would not," replied the abbé; "but let me ask once, and only once, my dear sir, whether, feeling, as you do, that such tenets are in themselves an evil you would not inflict on any one you love—whether, I say, it would not be better to endeavour to free your own mind from them?"

The viscount smiled. "It would take a long while, my dear abbé, to give you my reasons," he answered; "but first let me point to you an objection which is unanswerable, that, having discovered the truth, a sane man can never abandon it. His convictions must remain the same, whatever be his inclinations."

"Can truth, then," said the abbé, "ever be an evil a thing, that he, who is perfectly sure of possessing it, withholds it as a poison from those he loves? My friend, I should doubt the genuineness of the drug. I should think that it was some noxious composition, decorated with the title of a precious balm."

"It is the state of society," replied the viscount, "which renders that dangerous which is in itself good; as wholesome food and generous wine are death to a man in a fever."

"Nay, Monsieur de St. Medard," said the abbé, "I have heard you yourself own that there is more happiness, in life and in death, to be derived from what you call the dreams of religion, than from the most calm state of philosophical atheism."

The viscount nodded his head.

"Well, then," continued the abbé, "I will quote the words of one whom you allow to be the wisest man that ever lived, and whom I think wiser than *any man* that ever lived. He told us that you should know a tree by its fruit: and I contend, with him, that a good tree will bring forth good fruit. It is worth some thought, my friend and benefactor, for every man to ask himself, with Pilate, 'What is truth?' for it is upon that which depends eternity."

The viscount made no answer, but walked on musing, and at the top of the hill they found Francis de Langy gazing with a look of wild enthusiasm upon the magnificent scene that lay spread out before him. His whole features seemed lighted up, his quivering lips were apart, the glow in his cheek was heightened, his very breath withheld. It was the first time in his young life that he had been strongly affected by the beauty of the earth he dwelt in; and now it seemed to come upon him all at once: the impression of a mighty power in nature which he

had never known before, but which instantly found a responsive spirit in his own heart, and roused imagination within him never to sleep again.

The landscape he looked upon was indeed most beautiful. The mist, rising like a curtain, hid the tops of the hills; but the sun, not yet half way up to the highest point of his course, poured a flood of radiance over the plain, or rather valley, of Limagne, which lay enchased like a rich jewel, reflecting the morning light with a thousand hues, in the midst of the golden mountains of Auvergne.

Who can describe the first sight of that fair land in the early day, with its innumerable undulations, its banks, its rocks, its soft green pastures, its woods, its dells, its castles, and its thousand streams! At that moment, too, it was perhaps as lovely as ever it was seen: various things have since made changes greatly to the diminution of its beauty; many of the châteaux are gone which once topped the hills, many of the old castles have fallen to the ground, the dull, straight walls of manufactories have here and there disfigured the sweetest parts of the valley, and the progress of a destructive revolution, as well as the advance of arts, and the increase of population, have changed its aspect for the worse. Then nature was supreme; and if man's works were there, if the towers of a distant town met the eye in one direction, or the pinnacles of an old country-house were seen in another, they were but as children nestling in a mother's breast; while the decaying walls of feudal buildings on the rocks and mountains, from which their gray and moss-covered stones could with difficulty be distinguished, seemed to blend both nature, and art, and past, and present, together in one sweet harmony. At that moment, too, the dewy mist, from out her jewelled treasury, had scattered glowing diamonds over the whole plain, and the bright sun, triumphing over the retiring vapours, gathered them as spoils while they glittered in his beams.

Light and loveliness were before the young man's eyes; and, as he gazed, a spring bird in its full song of love burst forth from a tree that overhung the road, and added another voice to the grand music of the whole.

The viscount and Arnoux paused by his side; neither spoke for a moment, for to them the wonder and enjoyment of the young bright being before them were as beautiful as the scene, and indeed its climax. It wanted but the sight of such high pure delight to make it perfect.

CHAPTER V.

A few miles beyond Riom the travellers once more descended from the carriage, though at this time there was no picturesque beauty of any peculiar character to attract them. The sole inducements to travel on foot were a steep hill (which the new road avoids), and the relief given by a change of position. The scenery, indeed, was pleasant enough in its way, as the carriage was at the time passing through one of those large woods, so common in France, which, though principally planted for the sake of profit, add not a little to the beauty of the country and the comfort of the traveller. The trees were old and fine; the frequent streamlets of Auvergne rendered the shades musical with the voice of falling waters; and all the little accidents of rock, and broken bank, and rustic chapel, and greensward brake were there, to please the eye as the party walked along.

"That path cuts off half the hill," said one of the postilions, pointing with his whip, and speaking in the *patois* of his country; "it takes you, too, by St. Mary's chapel and fountain, which so many people go to see."

"Well, then, I think we will go too," replied the viscount. "We are for seeing all sights; are we not, Francis?"

"Oh, yes, let us see everything that can be seen," cried the eager youth; and on he went at a rapid pace along the path to which the man pointed, and upon which the viscount and the abbé followed him more slowly. It was one of those small narrow paths through a wood, which, to me at least, are so full of temptation that I can scarcely pass by the end of one of them, and gaze down into the green light and shade that it displays, without being seduced to quit the plain highway, and track its winding course at any risk. Alas, reader! they are, too, like the sweet by-ways that branch off at every step from the common road of life; very, very pleasant at their commencement, but too often rough and dangerous before they close, and leading us to things we never dreamed of, and from which it is very difficult to return.

Such, however, was not the case in the present instance. The path continued even and good; a great part of the steep ascent of hill was saved, and the walk was shady and cool, with the trees close enough to hide the traveller from the sun, but not to impede the free air from refreshing his cheek as he walked along. The ground all round, too, was covered with forest flowers, which are so very much more beautiful in France than in this country; and with the strong, impetuous step of youth, which still hurries forward to the exhaustion of all joys, Francis de Langy sped on before his two more aged companions, and was ere long lost to their sight in the turnings of the wood. They could hear his steps, however, for the hard ground echoed the tread; but in a minute or two the sound of his footfall suddenly ceased, and the next instant a loud shout from his well-known voice met their ear.

"Quick, quick! come hither!" he cried, "come hither!" and, hastening forward, they found him kneeling down beside the inanimate form of a girl apparently about his own age.

She was evidently of the higher ranks of society; and though as pale as death, and in fact to all appearance dead, yet as her head rested upon the arm of the young Baron de St. Medard, with her eyes closed, and the long black lashes resting on her cheek, the beautiful line of the eyebrow clear and defined on the pale marble skin, the rich brown hair falling back from the forehead, the delicate mouth with the bloodless lips apart, and the brilliant white teeth glistening below, a more lovely and interesting countenance was never beheld, even among the ancient statues which she looked so like. Her dress was fine, though simple: a golden cross and chain were round her neck; her bonnet, which she seemed to have been carrying in her

hand, had dropped beside her; and her garments were only so far discomposed by her fall as to display one small foot and beautiful ankle. She seemed to have received no injury of any kind, but appeared to have fallen down suddenly, either dead or fainting.

Francis de Langy was but little familiar with death, and, as he saw her lie so still, he thought that the spirit was gone forever; but the Abbé Arnoux and the viscount were more acquainted with such things, and the former, kneeling down beside her, soon pronounced that she had merely fainted.

"They talked of a fountain," he said; "let us carry her thither;" and, the moment he had spoken the words, his pupil, without waiting for any assistance, caught her up in his strong young arms, and ran on with her along the path.

At the distance of less than a couple of hundred yards there was a little opening in the wood, with a small shrine of an antique date, in a chaste and simple style of Gothic architecture, displaying a figure of St. Mary Magdalen behind an iron grating. At the foot of the shrine, and only separated from it by a sufficient space for two or three votaries to kneel, was a basin of stone, which seemed as if it had once been the upper part of a font in some church of the middle ages; but now, pierced at the bottom to receive the water from below, it formed a beautiful little well, over the edge of which a small perfectly limpid stream flowed away down the rock, and lost itself in the wood.

It was by the side of this fountain that Francis de Langy stopped; and, laying his fair burden down upon the grass, he had sprinkled her face with water before the viscount and the abbé came up. She did not revive, indeed, but a slight movement of the features filled the boy's heart with joy, by convincing him that she still breathed; and when the abbé joined him he exclaimed, "She is living! Oh yes, she is living indeed!"

The good man smiled. "I never doubted it, Francis," he said. "She will come to herself soon. Do not raise her head, she will be better as she is. We must sprinkle her face again with the tears of St. Magdalen, as the people call this water. You rub her hands, Francis;" and, filling his hollowed palm out of the fountain, the abbé cast the cold liquid suddenly on her face and bosom.

A gasp, as for breath, succeeded; and the youth, taking one of the fair small hands in his, chafed it gently, but anxiously, with somewhat new sensations, as he felt that smooth marble-like touch, and gazed upon those beautiful features. They were strange sensations, innocent and pure, and guileless—calm and cold, indeed, as that soft hand itself, but different from anything that he had ever known before. He had loved his father, his mother, and him who had adopted him; he had felt deep interests towards them—affection, tenderness, gratitude; but it had always been with a looking up, with a reverence for, with a dependance upon them; and, with the heart of man, it is not for those to whom we lift our eyes that we experience the deepest tenderness, it is for those placed a step below us. The sensations of pity, the power of aiding, protecting, defending, supporting, were all new to the bosom of Francis de Langy; and he now felt the thrill of them for the first time. It was as a supplement to the new spirit which had been aroused within him that day by the first sight of Limagne. Imagination! tenderness! what wanted he more of manhood! Love! and that was to come ere long.

Their care was not long in producing its effect: two or three long-drawn sighs, and a slight shudder, soon showed that sensation was returning to the fair object of their solicitude; and, in about five minutes more, she opened her eyes still faintly, and turned them from the one to the other. The first thing they rested on was the soft and ruddy face of youth; the next was the fine countenance of Monsieur de St. Medart, full of calm, grave thought; the next was the mild, benevolent aspect of the Abbé Arnoux; and the poor girl seemed to receive from each some especial comfort and assurance, for a gentle smile came upon her lip as she raised herself slightly upon her arm.

"Lie still, my dear young lady, lie still," said the ecclesiastic; "you will soon be better. You are among friends."

She suffered her head to droop back again upon the grass, and once more closed her eyes, which were of a deep, deep blue; but the increasing colour in her lips, and the faint rose that began to spread over her cheek, like the first blush of dawn in the pale morning sky, showed that the heart was beating more freely, and sending the warm current of life through the veins from which it had been withdrawn.

Oh! how beautiful did she look; and with what intense admiration did Francis de Langy gaze, as the change took place! It was like the statue of the Greek sculptor, when, warming to the prayer of love, the cold limbs softened into life. In a few minutes she once more opened her eyes, and her lips moved. "I am better," she said; "thank you, I am better. I can get back again home now."

"Nay, nay, stay a moment," replied the viscount; "try your strength first, young lady; and, when you are quite recovered, we will aid you home. Is it far?"

"Oh, no," she answered, raising herself again upon her arm, and looking down the path by which they had come with somewhat anxious and apprehensive eyes; "it is very near, not a quarter of a league; but I can go on now, and I would fain get back to the chateau."

The viscount and the abbé aided her to rise; while Francis de Langy stood near and gazed, for a sudden timidity had come upon him, he knew not why. But at length he burst suddenly forth, on seeing her look around as if seeking for something; and exclaiming, "Oh! we left it behind where we found you—we forgot it," he darted down the path.

Some sudden emotion, however, seemed to seize their fair companion, and she cried, "Oh, no, no! Do not go, do not go! Not that way!" while her cheek turned pale again, and a look of terror came over her whole countenance.

"What is the matter?" demanded the viscount. "Is there any danger there?" Has any one injured or attacked you?"

"No," she replied, in a broken and confused manner, "no: I saw something that frightened me, and—and—I fainted, I suppose; for I felt sick, and then everything disappeared."

"Perhaps playing the truant a little, my child?" said the abbé.

"Oh no!" she answered, colouring, and turning her dark blue eyes full upon him. "My mother sent me. I often walk through all these woods alone."

"What was it frightened you, then?" asked the viscount. But she cast down her eyes; the colour left her face; and, before any more questions could be put to her, Francis de Langy was seen coming rapidly back, carrying her bonnet in his hand.

"Now, my child," said the Abbé Arnoux, "take the arm of Monsieur de St. Medard, and let us guide you home. You must direct us on the way, however, for we do not know it."

"Either path will take us to the chateau," replied the young lady, "but we had better take this one;" and, receiving her bonnet from the hands of the young baron, she thanked him in a low voice, while she raised her eyes to the face of Monsieur de St. Medard, as if asking, "Shall we go on?"

The viscount led her on the path before them, while the abbé, seeing that she still walked feebly, supported her on the other side; and Francis de Langy followed. His uncle, however, turned his eyes from time to time to their fair companion's face with a thoughtful and contemplative look; and at length, just as they were coming within sight of the high road, he said, "I cannot but think, mademoiselle, that, by a strange chance, this pretty hand that leans upon my arm is near akin to some I deeply love. May I ask whose child you are?"

She looked up in his face with an expression which was not explained for many years, and replied, "My mother is the Countess d'Artonne."

The viscount took her hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it.

"I thought so," he said; "at your age she was very like you."

"Oh, but she was very beautiful!" cried the girl; "I am sure she was very beautiful!"

The viscount smiled, and so did the good Abbé Arnoux: but the former only answered, "She was indeed;" and then observed, "You speak of your mother only; but your father is alive, and well, I hope. He was so not a month ago, for I heard from him then."

Once more she had turned somewhat pale; but she replied, "Oh yes, my father is well, and here."

The viscount marked the changing expression of her countenance, and he asked himself, "Can D'Artonne be a harsh father! he, who was so full of deep, I may almost say, passionate fondness for those he loved! Oh no, that can never be," he added in his own thoughts; and then, turning to her again, he demanded, "Is the chateau, to which you are now returning, the one you usually inhabit, Mademoiselle d'Artonne! I thought it was on the other side of Clermont."

"No, we always live here," she answered. "I recollect once being at Capelet, but it was only for a month. The Chateau d'Artonne is here above, and the village lies down there below. I have just come from it;" and, after having spoken, she fell into thought again, till the viscount stopped by the side of the carriage, which was waiting for them at the mouth of the little path.

"It will be better, fair lady," he said, "for us all to get in and drive up to the chateau; for I have long promised your father a visit, and intended to-morrow to go to his house from Clermont."

Mademoiselle d'Artonne made no objection; and, the whole party being seated in the vehicle, the postillion drove on quickly, and, in five minutes more, were in the court of the chateau.

On visiting the house of a French gentleman of the present day, if the door be open, which is very frequently the case, one may very often walk into an empty hall, and knock at half a dozen different doors, without finding any servant to answer inquiries, or conduct a stranger to the master or mistress of the house. Such, however, was not the case before the Revolution; and it is necessary to compare the two periods together whenever we wish to estimate the proportion of Americanism that has been infused into the habits of Frenchmen. I say Americanism advisedly; for republicanism is a very different thing, and does not imply a rejection of refinement in the higher classes of society, or want of due attention and respect for those who employ them in the lower. In those days, in the house of every gentleman of wealth and distinction, two or three servants in full costume were to be found waiting in the vestibule to receive any visiters who might appear, and to answer all inquiries. If they were not much better than the servants of our own times in France, they were not much worse, and certainly were very much more pleasant in their demeanour. In the present instance, no sooner did the carriage stop at the door, than two of them instantly presented themselves, but appeared not a little surprised on seeing their young lady handed out by two strange gentlemen.

Mademoiselle d'Artonne had now recovered herself completely; and mixing timid inexperience, not ungraceful in itself, with habits of ease and youthful confidence, which are always graceful, she led the viscount and his companions forward, through the vestibule and the hall beyond, to a small painted and gilded room where her mother usually sat.

The countess was there, as her daugher expected, but rose, on seeing three strangers, and gazed with an inquiring eye upon the face of Monsieur de St. Medard as he advanced. The next instant, however, her whole face lighted up, and she exclaimed, "Charles de St. Medard, is it you! This is indeed a pleasure. Julie, call your father. Call him quick, my love."

The colour had fluttered upon the cheek of Monsieur de St. Medard, like that which we see coming and going in the face of an inexperienced girl at the sudden presence of some one whom she loves; but he stayed Mademoiselle d'Artonne as she was about to go, saying, "You had better send a servant, dear lady; my fair young friend here needs repose and care. We found her fainting in the wood; something had frightened her."

All a mother's anxieties were instantly in arms, and the countess questioned her daughter eagerly as to what could have created such alarm. Julie either would not or could not tell, however. She blushed, turned pale, and faltered: "She could not say," she replied, "'twas something in the bushes—she saw it but faint-

ly;" and her reluctance, while it excited her mother's curiosity, was evidently too strong and too painful for Madame d'Artonne to press her more at that moment.

She turned then to Monsieur de St. Medard, asked him manifold questions regarding his fate and happiness during the last seventeen or eighteen years, welcomed the Abbé Arnoux and his young charge, and, gazing in the face of Francis de Langy, remarked, turning, to the viscount, "He is very like your elder brother."

While she was still speaking, the door opened, and a fine, tall, powerful man, of the middle age, dressed in a hunting-coat of green, with some gold lace about it, entered the boudoir, and instantly clasped the hand of his friend St. Medard, saluting him and his two companions after the ordinary habit of France.

"Julie has been frightened, D'Artonne," said the countess; "frightened by something, she will not say what, and fainted in the wood."

The count turned to his daughter with a look of eager anxiety. "Indeed, my dear Julie!" he cried, holding out his arms towards her; "come to your father, my beloved child. I have scarce seen you to-day. Come to my heart, my Julie, come!"

Julie hesitated, turned pale, then red, and then, casting herself into her father's arms, burst into tears; while the count pressed her to his bosom with tenderness and warmth, which left no doubt of the strength of his affection. Both father and mother now applied themselves to soothe her, and she soon regained her tranquillity; but the Countess d'Artonne thought it would be better for her to lie down to repose for a few hours; and she left the party in the boudoir for that purpose. The count mused as his daughter quitted the room; and the countess said, "It is very strange what can have alarmed Julie in this manner! She has, in general, such firm nerves. Some bear, or some wolf, perhaps; but then why not say so?"

"Very likely an ideal terror, madam," observed the Abbé Arnoux; "and the fear of being laughed at may perhaps be the cause of her silence."

"I know not," anwered the countess, "but she has usually no terrors of any kind. However, it is very strange, and I will question her closely when she is somewhat recovered."

"You had better not, my dear wife," replied the count. "Leave the sweet girl to her own discretion. In our house, St. Medard, we all trust each other; and we have none of us ever had cause to think that trust misplaced."

"Confidence is the first duty of noble minds," said the viscount. "It is only the weak and the narrow-minded who, from the somewhat hard lessons of the world, acquire the false wisdom of doubting those who have never deceived them."

The count gazed at him with a bright smile. "That is so like the St. Medard of other days," he exclaimed; "but the St. Medard of other days is the St. Medard of to-day also. I see you old bachelors are made of hard and unchangeable stuff; but we, who bring domestic sweets about us, get softened and kneaded into new forms. But come, St. Medard, you shall stay a month with us, and see whether the pleasant spectacle of home and family happiness, even in France, may not teach you at length to try your fate in the same way.'

The viscount laughed, and shook his head. "Nay, nay," he answered; "two and fifty years, D'Artonne, are quite sufficient to harden one, as you call it, into a crust that nothing can soften. Besides, here is my son already; and I am afraid that my good friend, the Abbé Arnoux, must supply the place of the lady of the mansion. But we will spend a week with you, D'Artonne, and see all the fair things of Auvergne, if you will show them to us. After that, we must speed on upon our way, for I must take Francis here through one half of France before the winter sets in. The other we must visit next summer."

The count smiled, and vowed that he would detain them no longer; and to this conversation succeeded the arrangement of rooms, the unpacking of the carriage, and all the little bustle of an arrival.

People dined early in those days, especially in Auvergne; and some change of dress and other preparations had scarcely been made by the viscount and his companions, when they were summoned to the dining-room. Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne were alone, their daughter being still in her chamber; and it would seem that the slight illness which had befallen her, and the fear which occasioned it, weighed upon her father more than he liked to show; for, though he affected gayety, and displayed every sign of being rejoiced at his old friend's visit, he fell more than once into a deep fit of thought, and his brow grew gloomy and sad. When dinner was over, and the dessert on the table, Madame d'Artonne rallied her husband upon his gravity. "You are anxious about Julie," she said. "There never was so apprehensive a father, Monsieur de St. Medard. I will go and see how she is, to satisfy you, Alphonse."

"Nay, I will go myself," replied her husband, rising from table. "I will be back in a moment."

But he was gone near half an hour. When he returned, his face bore a look of relief, and he said, "She is better, she is much better; but she is not inclined to say what it was that frightened her, and I do not wish her to be questioned farther on the subject."

"Oh, very well," replied the countess; "I suppose it is as Monsieur Arnoux suggests, some girlish fright that she is now ashamed of."

"Perhaps so," replied the count, and the conversation dropped.

After sitting for a short time, the whole party moved out into the grounds that surrounded the Chateau d'Artonne, and which some skilful artist of the line-and-rule school had laboured zealously, about forty years before, to deprive of everything like picturesque beauty. The fine old woods were cut into stars and crescents, affording, it is true, some beautiful views, every now and then, of the surrounding scenery, with shady walks and pleasant places of repose innumerable, but still quite unsuited to the character of the country round, and to the chateau itself, which had probably been built in the days of Henry IV., or perhaps before. They were, however, the pink of perfection, according to French taste, at the period of which I speak, and received their climax from what was called a jardin

Anglais, which was unlike anything that ever was seen in Great Britain between the Land's End and Ultima Thule. What rendered the park, however, certainly very delicious at that period of the year, was the multitude of streams and fountains that it contained, the waters of which were disposed with great taste, affording a pleasant coolness to the air at every turn, with pleasant sights to the eye, and murmuring sounds to the ear.

After the party had sauntered through the park for about half an hour, the Count d'Artonne was called away by a servant, and Monsieur de St. Medard walked on by the side of the countess, talking over old times. The topic was one which seemed to interest them both deeply; and many a little incident and scene of the past was recalled, which was spoken of with a feeling, one may almost say a tenderness, which had something peculiar in it. They were both grave and calm, two friends conversing upon things that were gone; but yet it seemed as if sensations that were gone, too, mingled with the stream of thought, and gave it a softer, perhaps a sadder character.

There is no reason why I should keep the reader in any doubt upon this subject. Monsieur de St. Medard had been deeply attached to the Countess d'Artonne before she had become the wife of his friend. What had been her own sentiments towards him he did not now, for he had offered his hand and been refused by her parents, who softened the disappointment, as far as such disappointments can be softened, by telling him that they had long before promised their daughter to the Count d'Artonne. St. Medard had instantly quitted the pursuit; and, feeling that his sensations might be more than he could control if he indulged them at all, he had absented himself altogether from the society, not only of the lady whom he loved, but of the friend whose wife he became. Whether d'Artonne was aware of his affection or not, he never knew; and, though it had not been disguised from the countess herself before her marriage, he had too much delicacy of feeling even to refer to it now, though their conversation turned upon the very days when it was at its height. The only glimmering of that tenderness which shone through the shadiness which memory seemed to cast over their conversation, appeared when Madame d'Artonne observed, with a sigh, "Those youthful days are, indeed, happy ones, Monsieur de St. Medard, whatever one may think at the time. But it was very wrong of you not to come to see us long ago."

"Nay," replied the viscount, with a sigh; "nay, dear lady, it was very right."

The moment after, Monsieur d'Artonne rejoined them, with a grave air. "Madame de Jansac," he said, speaking to his wife, "has sent to inquire whether Martin is here. His dog, it seems, has returned alone. Some new folly or vice, I suppose."

"He owes one half of them to his mother," replied Madame d'Artonne, "and is as much to be pitied as blamed. But to dream of our giving him Julie is something too preposterous."

"That could never be," said Monsieur d'Artonne, in a tone so stern and altered, that his wife started, and turned to look in his face.

It was calm, though grave; and Madame d'Artonne continued, addressing the viscount, "You recollect Henriette de l'Orne?"

"Oh! quite well," replied Monsieur de St. Medard, "both married and unmarried; and so the fair Henriette, it seems, has lost none of her amiable qualities."

Madame d'Artonne looked down, and smiled, with a very meaning look; but the count answered, "So far from it, St. Medard, that she has added to them many another, which were, perhaps, indeed concealed in the girl, but are very apparent in the woman. Capricious, coquettish, vain, weak, and false she always was; but now—"

"Hush, hush, hush, my dear Alphonse!" exclaimed his wife; "for pity's sake, do spare her a little. Recollect, my friend, she is a woman, and our near relation."

"A bad woman is worse than a bad man," said the count.

"You think so because they are more rare," replied his wife, laughing; and the party returned to the chateau.

CHAPTER VI.

An hour or two before nightfall, Julie d'Artonne rejoined the party, which had now assembled in the library of the chateau, a fine old room with deep windows, lined up to the ceiling with ancient volumes in rich but faded bindings. The declining sun was shining through the tall, square casements with some portion of the glow of evening in his light, and the warm colour that he cast upon her beautiful features and graceful form seemed to add to her loveliness, as, entering the room with a timid yet graceful step, Julie d'Artonne approached the table where her father and mother were seated conversing with the viscount, conscious that she would be an object of attention and interest to all.

The little embarrassment, however, soon passed away; her father spoke calmly and kindly to her, her mother gayly and cheerfully, and Monsieur de St. Medard, mingling a certain degree of courteous gallantry with fatherly tenderness, soon made her feel as much at home with him as if she had known him from her youth. Francis de Langy said nothing to her, for his was that particular age when there is a sort of timid consciousness of stronger affections yet undeveloped, which ties the tongue by the first influence of the passion, afterward so eloquent. He stood in one of the windows, however, and gazed on her, as she entered, not only with admiration, but interest. Admiration, indeed, forms but a very small part of love; and the boy was, in truth, advancing by very easy steps towards that passion. The Abbé Arnoux was standing near him, examining the illuminated title-page of a book which he had taken down; and the eyes of Julie d'Artonne, when—after speaking to her parents and the viscount for a moment or two—they turned in that direction, might be either looking at the instructer or the pupil.

"You should thank our young friend the baron, Julie," said Madame d'Artonne, "for it seems that it was he who first found you this morning

in the wood, and was your first physician, carrying you to the fountain and sprinkling your face with water; a skilful doctor, truly, for one who has so lately commenced practice."

Julie smiled, and, advancing towards Francis, gave him her hand, expressing in graceful language the thanks her mother told her were his due. Girls of that age are almost always less timid than young men, but Francis de Langy, thus encouraged, would not, and did not, let the opportunity pass; but, forcing himself to do what he knew was courteous and right, he told her how happy he was to have rendered her any assistance. In the mean while, the conversation between the rest of the party had turned to other subjects: the Abbé Arnouz had advanced to speak with the Count d'Artonne; and Julie and Francis remained in the window, talking together for nearly half an hour. The ice was broken between them from that moment, and such a cold commodity had never anything to do with their after intercourse through life.

How long their conversation would have continued is not for me to say; for most young people are fond of sweet things, and they found it very pleasant. But it was interrupted, at length, by the voice of Monsieur d'Artonne, exclaiming, "Come hither, come hither, and hear what we have determined. Monsieur de St. Medard will spend a week with us after his return from seeing all the fair sights of Auvergne—"

The face of Francis de Langy looked very blank; for, to say the truth, he thought he had already seen the fairest thing that Auvergne could produce, and he loved not to be hurried away from it. But the subsequent words of the count soon cleared his countenance again.

"This is by far the best arrangement," continued Monsieur d'Artonne; "for it will give us an opportunity of sharing his tour, showing him all the wonders of our province, and afterward talking them all over under the shade of our own trees."

If one might judge by Julie's face, she was not less satisfied with the arrangement than the rest of the party; and her father, remarking the look of pleasure that his announcement called up, added, with a cheerful smile, "We must all take our part in doing the honours of Auvergne, and to you, Julie, I commit the charge of guide, interpreter, and instructer to your young friend there; so, if he be not able to answer a complete catechism upon the beauties, antiquities, and natural productions of the province, and to speak, with the accent of a native, our own round harmonious Auvergnat, I shall call you to account for it."

"Give me time, give me time," said Julie, whose spirits, naturally light and cheerful, were beginning to rise again; "give me time, and I will answer for the rest."

"Oh! you shall have time," replied Monsieur de St. Medard; "we do not travel as some people do, hurrying from object to object without affording them a second look or a second thought: we go really to see, really to think, really to observe, in short; and we wish the impressions of to-day to be gathered as not only memories for to-morrow, but as treasures for the time to come."

"We will all early to bed to-night," said the count, "that we may be up with the sun to-morrow morning. Old Pierrot, who rode courier for us, Elise—do you recollect?—some seventeen years ago, shall go on before and prepare horses for us, and rooms, and dinners, and suppers, and all the comforts of this life; for in Auvergne, you know, St. Medard, one cannot travel as one does in other parts of France, trusting to the providence of innkeepers to have everything ready, even if a whole army were to arrive."

So went on the conversation for some hours, in the course of which the whole arrangements were made for their journey; and the evening passed pleasantly enough. The count evidently exerted himself to show his friend how sincerely rejoiced he was to see him; and though, from time to time, he fell into a fit of deep thought, yet it was never of long continuance, and he roused himself to be as gay as ever. Twice, indeed, during the course of the evening, one of the servants announced that Madame de Bausse had sent to make inquiries if her son had been heard of at the Chateau d'Artonne; and the count answered somewhat impatiently, saying, "Pray, tell her he has not been here. You may add, too, that I have had friends with me all day, or I would have ridden down to see her."

"The man who has come up, sir," rejoined the servant to whom he spoke, and who was an old and privileged person in the family, "the man who has come up, sir, says that his lady thinks the young marquis has been murdered; and she has had his valet, who was out all the morning, arrested whenever he came home."

"Nonsense!" cried the marquis. "I dare say, by their rash acts," he continued, speaking to his wife, "both mother and son have made themselves enemies enough in the country; but by accusing an innocent person of murdering her son, before she knows that he has been murdered at all, she will not effect anything to discover him."

"I doubt not in the least," said the countess, "that the first thing heard of him will be that he is at Paris, overwhelmed with debts and follies. If you remember, Alphonse, it was so just eighteen months ago; and nothing would bring him home again till he was sent back by the king, for some cause, I do not well remember what."

"He drew his sword upon one of the gardes du corps," replied Monsieur de St. Medard, "on the terrace at Versailles; a very gross misdemeanour indeed. In former days he would have been punished more severely."

"Oh he will be found in Paris," exclaimed the countess. But her husband said nothing, and Julie sat in silence, with her eyes bent down upon the ground. Francis de Langy had remarked the words which Madame d'Artonne had used, during their morning's walk, in regard to the pretensions of Monsieur de Bausse to the hand of Julie, and he now asked himself, "Is she pained to hear him thus spoken of? Or is she anxious respecting his fate? Can she, though so young, have felt love towards this man? Perhaps it is so;" and he experienced those sensations rising up in his own bosom, which, whatever may be their primary source in the human heart—whether vanity, pride, or any other modification of selfishness—most men of fine minds have experienced towards those they

ove; a degree of jealousy, not so much of acts
s of thoughts and feelings; a jealousy that ex-
ends, not alone to the present and the future,
ut to the past. He felt that, if love be the tree
f life to the heart of man, the value of the gold-
n fruit is injured if any touch but one's own
rushes away even the first bloom. Young
minds, however, dwell not long upon such
hings, and very soon, the conversation taking
nother turn, the Marquis de Bausse and all con-
erning him passed away from the minds of the
reater part of the persons there present, and
he evening went by cheerfully till they sep-
rated to rest.

The Abbé Arnoux sat for about a quarter of
n hour in the chamber of his pupil, for he was
very conscientious man, and sought not alone
o store the mind of Francis de Langy, but to
rain it; and every night he conversed with him
or a short time over the events of the past day,
ommenting upon all that had taken place in a
ild and pleasant, though grave tone; seeking
s much to induce a habit of self-examination
n the mind of his young friend, as to draw in-
truction and counsel from the occurrences past
nder review. But upon the present occasion
he admonitions of the abbé were less success-
l than usual, though they were as wise as ever,
nd given more in the manner of quiet conver-
ation than of serious instruction; but the truth
as, that Francis de Langy had two worlds now
o deal with, the world without and the world
ithin, and of the latter the good abbé could see
ery little. Like the globe which we inhabit,
at world had been called into existence in one
ay, and Francis de Langy, the Adam of his
wn paradise, longed to be alone to examine all
at it contained.

When the abbé was gone, a servant presented
mself; but he was more easily disposed of;
r, after having taken the dressing-gown from
s hands, his young master told him he wanted
othing more, and sent him quickly away. Then,
asting himself into a large arm-chair, he gave
imself up to thought, while his eyes wandered
ound the wide old chamber, lined with black
ak, and floored with smooth and glossy tiles.

His feelings were certainly strange; for, as
e have said, a new world had opened to him,
world of sensations altogether fresh. It seem-
d as if that one day had given him more than
ll the rest of life. It was one of those changes
f existence which affect men of eager and en-
rgetic character almost always suddenly. Up
o that morning, his life had been comparatively
nerely animal: the intellect had been awake, it
s true, to think, to reason, to act; it was the
oul that had slept—the soul, whose task is to
eel. His existence had been that of the chrys-
lis; but now one gleam of summer sunshine
ad burst the cold husk around him, and the
ght creature of air had put forth her wings,
ever to sheath them again on this side of the
omb. Oh, beautiful symbol of the Greeks!
ow well dost thou represent man's agitated
pirit, fluttering, wandering from hour to hour,
eeking thy honeyed food from all the bright
hings of God; yet frail and delicate as the
owers on which thou restest, wounded by a
ouch, defaced by a drop of rain, blown hither
nd thither by a breath of wind, crushed by the
irst wintry storm! Oh, beautiful symbol of the Greeks, thou art indeed too sadly like the soul!"

He sat for an hour trying to disentangle his own thoughts; but finding them still one bewildered maze, and at length impatient with the fruitless effort, he determined he would cast himself down to rest. There, too, he was disappointed: no sleep would visit his eyelids; and after tossing for half an hour, gazing, by the light of the lamp which he had left burning on the table, at some quaint old heads grinning on the sculptured cornice around, he rose, threw on his dressing-gown, and saying, "I will get a book," he quitted his chamber, and descended the short wooden staircase which led to the ground floor of the house.

He knew the door of the library well; and, crossing the hall towards it, he opened it suddenly and went in, expecting to find it dark and untenanted. To his astonishment, however, he perceived the Count d'Artonne walking up and down the room with his hands tightly clasped together, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. It was but for an instant that he beheld him in this attitude; for the opening of the door made the count look up immediately, and a glance of anger crossed his countenance. When he saw who it was, however, the expression of irritation passed away; and, as Francis de Langy was withdrawing, he called to him to come in.

"What! my young friend," he said; "are you a passer of sleepless nights? I thought that the hours of youth had a hallowed charm against watchful care; and that it was manhood alone, with its anxieties, and disappointments, and satieties, and steril aspirations, that was bound to keep the weary eye wide open, or to close it in vain during the long vigils of the night."

He spoke almost bitterly; but Francis de Langy had neither right nor inclination to inquire farther into the misanthropical tone of his host, and he merely replied, "I know not how it is, but I have not been able to fall asleep. I have seen so many things to-day that I cannot get them out of my head, and so, after trying for some time, I came down to seek for a book to amuse myself."

"And an excellent way, too," answered the count; "I never thought of it. But what book will you choose? Here are plenty of every kind. Here is Corneille; will you take him?"

"No," replied De Langy; "that is not a book to go to sleep upon."

"Voltaire!" said the count. "He is a great favourite of your uncle's."

"Nay," answered the young man; "I did not know that. I have read much of his poetry, but not much of his philosophy; I did not like it."

"Ha!" exclaimed the count: "how so?"

"Why, it seemed to me," said Francis de Langy, "though I am not very competent to form an opinion, that he was always trying to put the universe in a spoon; I mean, that he appeared to think his own mind could comprehend everything, and that, from the little he could see upon this earth, he could judge of the boundless power and wisdom that created it."

"Ha!" cried the count thoughtfully, "ha! Your uncle surely does not teach you such things?"

"Oh no," replied the youth, "he leaves me to follow what course of reading I think best; and,

indeed, I never heard him speak upon the subject."

"And the Abbé Arnoux," said Monsieur d'Artonne, "does he prohibit Voltaire?"

"Oh no," replied Francis de Langy. "The only thing I ever recollect he said upon the subject was, that people should beware in reading him, lest they should take a jest for a reason, and receive a doubt where they can get at a certainty."

"He was right," answered the count: "he was right; and yet what is there certain in this world?"

Francis de Langy looked down for a moment, and then said, in an inquiring tone, "I thought many things were certain, the first principles of all things, such as that there can be no effect without a cause."

"You have dabbled in metaphysics," replied the count, smiling. "But, as every cause must be an effect also, we only remove the difficulty by tracing one cause to another."

"I do not well know what difficulty you mean," rejoined Francis de Langy; "but, as each cause may have many effects, we might, perhaps, by tracing back numerous effects to fewer causes, resolve the whole into one cause, which, being the cause of everything, would also be the cause of itself, or, in other words, be self-existent—the first attribute of God!"

The count paused, and looked down upon the ground for at least a minute without reply; and then, turning to one of the book-shelves, he said, "Well, if you will not have Voltaire, here is good Montaigne, the book of all others for a sleepless night. His quiet, mild simplicity makes me always feel, when I open his pages, as if I were sitting over the fire on a wintry night with an old friend. He tells all his feelings with so much frankness that one can scarcely refrain from telling him one's own in return. Take him, then, my young friend: if you have never read him before, you will be delighted; if you have read him before, read him again, you will be sure to find something new in every line."

Francis de Langy took the book, and, thanking the count, was turning away, when Monsieur d'Artonne added, "This good Abbé Arnoux, he seems a very sensible man, I think."

"He is indeed," replied Francis de Langy warmly; and then continued, with a feeling of diffidence in his own opinion, "As far as I can judge, he is a most sensible man; and my uncle, as well as many others, have often told me that they never met a man of better judgment."

"And no bigot?" asked the count.

"Oh! anything but that," replied Francis de Langy; "I have often heard him declare that skepticism itself is scarcely more opposed to true religion than bigotry, and does it less harm."

"He is right, he is right," said the count. "I must have some conversation with him. He does believe in a God, then?"

Francis de Langy started, and gazed for a moment in the count's face with infinite surprise. "As he does in his own existence," he replied at length.

"Ah, my young friend," cried the count, shaking his head, "there is many an abbé and many a priest in France who believe in no God, no soul, no futurity."

The young man laughed. "Then they must be rogues as well as fools," he said; "which does no great honour to their creed. I have heard of such things as atheists, it is true; but I should think there was room in the madhouses of France to hold them."

The count gazed at him for a moment with a very meaning smile; and then, holding out his hand to him, he said, "Good-night! I, at least, shall now go to my bed, and perhaps may sleep the better from having seen you: try you the same plan, and lay old Montaigne down by your bedside. The best of such friends is, that they are nowise impatient. He will wait till you are ready to hear him, without pressing for an audience." Thus saying, he led the way out of the library, and each retired to his own chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

At a very early hour on the following morning the whole party from the Chateau d'Artonne, accompanied by a number of servants, and carrying with them such provisions and luxuries as might be supposed necessary in a very savage country, but in no other, set out for the baths of the Mont d'Or. Their first halting-place was at Clermont, where they stopped to dine; but, as they intended to revisit that town on their way back, they paused only for the meal, and then proceeded on their way in two vehicles, the large, oldfashioned travelling carriage of Monsieur de St. Medard, with its straight sides, but comfortable interior, and a *chaise de poste* belonging to the Count d'Artonne, much in the shape and form of a large, roomy cabriolet. The count had arranged the party according to his taste, declaring that they would take it in turns, two and two, to journey in the *chaise de poste;* and, during their first day's expedition, the countess, the viscount, Francis de Langy, and Julie d'Artonne, occupied the travelling coach; while the count himself, perhaps in consequence of his conversation over-night with his young guest, took his place in the *chaise de poste* with the Abbé Arnoux.

Hard must be the heart, or stiff the exterior, cold the feelings, or very rigid the education, of those persons who can travel together along rough roads and through picturesque scenery without casting away from them the husk of reserve, and becoming familiar, nay, intimate, with their fellow-travellers. Long years of acquaintance, indeed, make us less friendly with another being like ourselves than some forty or fifty miles over stony causeways and amid bad inns. All the little inconveniences that one has to suffer, all the little acts of kindness, attention, and assistance that one has to show, remove everything like distance and stiffness, and create those minor interests, those small gratitudes, those pleasant courtesies, which soften wonderfully the way for regard and intimacy. If Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne, when they began their journey that morning, recollected at all that they were a young lady and gentleman approaching that age when early freedom is to be abandoned for the sober proprieties of society, they had both forgotten, be-

fore they reached Clermont, that they were anything but boy and girl; and, when they set out again, after a hasty and unceremonious dinner, were wellnigh calling each other Julie and Francis.

If ever the reader have travelled from Clermont Ferrand to the baths of the Mont d'Or, he will know that the road, though, perhaps, not the finest in all Auvergne, is, nevertheless, full of rich and picturesque loveliness; and every one who has passed through the age, or reached it, of love and tenderness, will know what an effect is produced upon the minds of two young persons of different sexes by the grand and beautiful objects of nature, what new sensations, what fresh and happy sympathies are awakened by the sight of splendid scenery with persons of tastes, and habits, and feelings like ourselves. The worst of it is, too, that sympathies, when once set vibrating, extend their influence to all sorts of neighbouring sensations, as the shaking of an earthquake runs along the basaltic strata for an immeasurable distance round the spot where the volcanic shock was given. Oh! it is wonderful how many doors, leading to the most secret chambers of the heart, will be cast open, like that of the Arabian robber, at the sound of one or two magical words!

Such was the case with Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne, though they themselves knew nothing of what was going on within them. The reader may look surprised, and exclaim, "What! are you going to make a boy and girl of sixteen or seventeen fall in love with each other—actually in love?"

Dear reader, it is past your power or mine to prevent it. They did!

The day was beautiful: there was no fog, as on the preceding morning; but a light white cloud every now and then swept over the sun, and cast a slow floating shadow over the mountains and the valleys. Every half league of the road made a change in the scenery; some new *puy*, or tall, volcanic mountain, starting up at each turn, and, as the road wound round its base, presenting strange and varied forms, such as no other country in the world can produce. Sometimes it was a green and velvet slope, stretching up to the foot of the Alpine giant that rose tall and blue behind; sometimes it was a black mass of lava and cinders poured down to the very verge of the road. Here and there appeared a wood fringing the mountain's base; and then, again, a rocky precipice with a thousand streams trickling over its broad face, or a long, dim valley with a white cataract rushing down in foam in the distance.

At every two or three hundred yards Julie had still to cry, "Look there, look there! Is not that beautiful? That is the *Puy* de Laschamps. That is the village of Salien. Now we are passing the pretty little Sioulet, which rises up that valley. Now we shall have to ascend for some way, and then down to Rochefort."

"Let us get out and mount on foot," said Francis de Langy; "I should like to make every journey through a beautiful country on foot or on horseback, and only get into a carriage when there is nothing to be seen."

Julie was very ready to agree to his proposal; but Madame d'Artonne *declined the fatigue*, and remained in the carriage with Monsieur de St. Medard. The *chaise de poste*, however, which led the way, stopped also, and the count and the abbé descended to walk up the hill; but François de Langy and Julie d'Artonne, with their light young limbs, far outstripped the other two, although they stopped every now and then to gaze at the scenery around.

Onward they went, talking cheerfully and lightly of a thousand things, and suffering each subject that presented itself to carry them away into its manifold collateral branches, so that Heaven only knows where their young thoughts wandered before they reached the top of the hill. At all events, when the rest of the party came up, they were both in deep meditation; and both had to rouse themselves, to re-enter the carriage and proceed on the way. The journey was a somewhat long one for the roads and customs of that day; and, consequently, at Rochefort they stopped to examine the curious little town, built, as it were, in the cleft of a rock, and the hill with its old chateau, now, I believe, destroyed, and the basaltic columns in one of the two neighbouring valleys.

Each party had its comment, and its enjoyments of the scenes they witnessed, according to age and circumstances. The elder four looked back to the feudal times when Auvergne had lords of its own, and to the strange changes in the state of all things which had taken place within the last century.

"How much greater a difference," said the Count d'Artonne, "has been made by the passing of the last hundred years than by that of any two or three ages before!"

"It has been effected," replied Monsieur de St. Medard, "by the reign of Louis the Fourteenth."

"And by the government of the Regent Duke of Orleans," added the Abbé Arnoux. "Luxuries and vices effect greater changes in society than even the lightning of war, or the earthquake of political convulsion."

"As the chemists show us," rejoined Monsieur de St. Medard, "that a few drops of acid will corrode and dissolve the steel which the hardest blow could not penetrate."

"Anatomists, too, tell us," observed the abbé, "that, when soft things and hard are placed together, it is the soft that always mould the hard to their own shape. Thus, bones have been affected by the pressure of the muscles."

"Ay," said the Count d'Artonne; "and here, in Auvergne, we see that the waters have everywhere channelled the solid rock to suit their own convenience, making themselves valleys for their course, as we make ourselves roads to travel on."

What was the conversation of Julie and Francis de Langy? It was of the beauty of the scenery, the loveliness of the day, the clearness of the stream that sparkled by, the happiness of the dwelling among such sights of loveliness, where Francis said, truly, that he could remain forever. There mingled, however, with the rest many a wild flight of fancy, many an image and many a thought which poets might have been proud of, springing from the best fountain of poetry that the world possesses—deep feeling, a fountain which is only, perhaps, found very bright and pure before the dust and ashes of

earth have fallen upon it and troubled the waters thereof.

So well were they contented with the little town of Rochefort and its wild scenery, that they almost regretted when the time came to journey on to the Mont d'Or; but, as they had some way still before them through a mountainous country, they could not linger long; and, entering the carriages again as the shadows were growing long, they set out, and reached the inn at that famous watering-place just as night was falling.

The two young travellers saw the deep shadows gathering on the hills with regret, but the rest of the party were well pleased to close the pleasant labours of the day in a place which the care of the good old courier, Pierrot, had made as comfortable for them as possible. Everything had been prepared for the most cheerful meal of the day, and about half an hour after their arrival they were all seated round a well-covered table. But, strange to say, all were more grave and thoughtful than during the journey. Once or twice, indeed, as they had driven along, Julie had fallen into a deep revery, but the ever-changing objects had called her quickly from herself till the day's enjoyments and excitement were over. Then she grew sad again, and Francis de Langy also was more pensive. The conversation took a serious turn; and, as he had been encouraged by his uncle to do on all occasions, he mingled with it, though modestly.

Julie listened to him with attention and with surprise, as perhaps the reader might, if we were to pause in order to relate all that he said. It would, indeed, be almost worth while to do so, had we space; for the mixture of youthfulness, almost boyishness, which he showed in all matters where feeling and imagination were concerned, with the deep thought and clear reasoning which had been gained by an education among men, was not a little curious in itself; and it might suggest the question, whether in general with young people we do not make a mistake, and whether it be not necessary to instruct the heart and the mind at the same time, and keep the one in its knowledge upon a par with the other. But we have much before us, and we must go on, closing this chapter here, as the next records an adventure which ought to have an apartment to itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

Several days had passed, and seldom had Time, whose wings, in moments of happiness, are always those of the swallow, darted on more rapidly than he had done with Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne. Julie, for her part, seemed now to have forgotten whatever was the cause of those passing clouds, which, as we have shown, hung upon her when first she was brought before the eyes of the reader. The light-heartedness of character natural to her age and her disposition had all returned, everything like the reserve produced by newness of acquaintance had passed away, and she and her young companion were as old friends as if they had known each other twenty years. It may be asked if Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne saw all that was going on, and if they approved of it; if Monsieur de St. Medard marked the boyish fondness of his adopted son for the beautiful girl with whom he now passed his whole time. The answer is very simple: they all saw it; they all approved of it; they all desired the union of Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne. It was to some far future day they looked, it is true; but still it was a pleasant scheme, which had struck them all the moment they had seen those two bright young beings standing side by side in the window of the chateau. Madame d'Artonne had whispered it to her husband; the count had laughed, and told it to St. Medard; and the viscount had grasped his friend's hand, and replied, warmly, "With all my heart!"

Never did the flower of love, which, frail and delicate as it looks, will grow up amid storm and tempest, and bud and blossom, how fairly and how often, amid wintry desolation, never did the flower of love first rise under a warmer or more genial sunshine, with a promise of a brighter and a fairer summer. But it may be often remarked, that, when it comes forth under such favourable circumstances, when an unseasonable warmth nurses it from the ground, and everything promises it a fair and happy season, the flower seldom lives to cast its petals and to change to fruit. Either, sickly and delicate in itself, it fades speedily; or else it withers in the fire of the sunshine in which it was born; or else some summer-day tempest comes upon it with thunder and with hail, and beats the broken blossom to the earth from which it rose. Seldom, very seldom, does it live long; but, if it does, it affords to us human beings one of the few bright proofs that we have of such a thing as happiness being possible upon earth.

All then smiled upon the kindling affection of Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne; they were all delighted to see that an alliance, which they so greatly wished, would have in it an ingredient so seldom found in the marriages of France—love. Monsieur de St. Medard had known that passion, and had been disappointed; he therefore longed to secure the child of his adoption against that bitterness in the cup of life which he himself had tasted. Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne had also felt love—love for each other—and, knowing the greatness of the blessing, they eagerly sought it for their child. Thus they gladly saw, as I have said, the future union of Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne founded upon the basis of early attachment, and they had so far yielded to the custom of their country as to determine on it without consulting them.

The love of boys and girls is an object on which gray-bearded men vent much spleen and scorn; but depend upon it, reader, where it exists in reality, it is the sweetest thing that ever life knows; it is the violet of our short year of existence. The rose is beautiful, richer in hues, full of perfume and brightness, as she flaunts her gay bosom in the ardent sun of June: but give me the violet, the dear early violet, that scents with her odorous breath the air of unconfirmed spring; the soft, the timid violet, retreating from the gaze with her blue eye cast down; the first sweet child of the sweetest season, the tenderest, the gentlest of all the

flowers of the field, the emblem of earnest and innocent affection.

No, there is nothing like it! In all after years we may lay our hand upon what joy we will—pure and innocent it must be, to bear the comparison for a moment—but I say, we may lay our hand upon what joy we will in after existence, we shall never find anything on the earth like the first flower of the heart.

Thus it went on, then, with every encouragement that it could receive from all who beheld the growing love of the two young people who have been placed before the eyes of the reader. The encouragement was not open, indeed; that is to say, there were no words spoken, no hints given of that which was in contemplation between the two families; but every facility for being together was afforded, and every opportunity for enjoying in the society of each other those calm but high-toned pleasures which might so entwine their mutual love with bright and everlasting memories as to add to the mortal passion those feelings which seem born for immortality.

Madame d'Artonne was not a prudent woman; she was something far better, a good one. She was one of those who preserve in their heart, notwithstanding some intercourse with the world, the brightest of the three jewels which form the crown of Charity—the thinking no evil; and, as the greater part of her life had been passed at a distance from the court of France, the shackles which that court and its habits imposed, even upon the education of a daughter, had not taken hold of her mind. Thus Julie, as we have at first shown her, had never, in the midst of her wild native mountains, been subjected to the constant superintendence of the *gouvernante* or the *bonne;* but had roamed about at large, guarded by principles which had been carefully instilled into her young heart, and trusted by her parents entirely to the supervision of the best of all guides and rulers—conscience. The same course was pursued still; and neither her father nor her mother thought it at all more necessary that they should have a watchful eye upon her, because Francis de Langy was her companion.

The short visit of the party to the baths of the Mont d'Or had been completed; everything in that neighbourhood which could be seen had been examined; and sweeping round—with various excursions to different points—from the eastern to the western side of the hills, and making a considerable part of the journey on horseback, they had reached the little town of Pontgibaud, on the road from Aubusson to Clermont, not without some fatigue to the elder part of the family.

"Well, Monsieur Arnoux," said the count, as they sat discussing their plans for the following day, "business will take me to Pontaumur, and Monsieur de St. Medard accompanies me in the *chaise de poste;* so we must have you either to stay and entertain Madame d'Artonne, who is too tired for any fresh expeditions, or to find something curious to show these two young people, and accompany them to see it."

"That will be easily done," replied the abbé, "for one of the most remarkable objects in Auvergne lies in this neighbourhood. Francis must visit it, but I do not know whether Mademoiselle d'Artonne may not find it too fatiguing."

"Oh no, no!" cried Julie, eagerly, "I will not be left out of the party."

"We shall have to ride a considerable part of the way," said the abbé, "and the rest of the journey must be performed on foot, unless, indeed, they have improved the paths since I was here before. You will have a walk of two good hours, Mademoiselle d'Artonne."

"Oh, Julie is the best walker in the province," replied the countess.

"Besides, Monsieur Arnoux," cried Julie laughingly, alluding to some mistakes which Monsieur Arnoux had made at the Mont d'Or, "what would you do for an interpreter if I were not with you? You would never get back to Pontgibaud: whenever any of our good Auvergnats told you to go to the right, you would think he meant to the left. No, no; you must have your interpreter."

So was it settled. Three of the small horses of Auvergne were hired at Pontgibaud on the following morning; and, at an early hour, the abbé, accompanied by his pupil and Julie d'Artonne, set out in the direction of the little village, or rather hamlet, of Chalucet, for, when I saw it, some half dozen houses of an extremely poor character were all that it contained; and probably it was not a place of much more importance at the time of this tale, though I remember having seen some old walls, half fallen down, which indicated that there had been more and probably better houses in the place in times long past.

However that may be, beyond Chalucet the horses could not go; and leaving them in the care of one of the peasants, whose jargon was perfectly incomprehensible both to the abbé and Francis de Langy, the former asked, through the interpretation of Julie d'Artonne, whether they could not have a guide to accompany them. The old man, for such he was, replied that every one was out tending their herds in the fields. "If you go down to the valley," he said, "and you cannot miss your way down that path, you will find a man fishing in the stream. He can show you about, I dare say.; for, though he's a stranger here, he seems to know the country well enough."

"I am afraid," said Julie, laughing, after she had translated this reply, "I am afraid that this is your only chance, for our good people of Auvergne are not fond of quitting their flocks."

"Oh! I can find the way myself," said the abbé; "it was only for greater security; so let us go;" and down the steep path they accordingly proceeded, winding in and out through some of the most curious scenery that they had yet seen. Rocks of black lava swept round on every side, and large detached blocks here and there seemed resolved to obstruct the forward progress of the path; which, nevertheless, like the perseverance of a quiet but firm spirit among the difficulties and obstacles of the world, pursued its way onward unceasingly, turning round those obstructions which it could not surmount.

"Hark, Francis!" said Julie, stopping, and laying her beautiful hand upon his arm, after they had gone some way laughing and talking; "hark, Monsieur Arnoux! do you not hear a loud sound? It cannot surely be thunder! If

so, we had better seek shelter immediately, for our storms in these mountains are not like those of any other place. Many people and cattle are destroyed by them every year."

"Oh no, it cannot be thunder," exclaimed Francis de Langy: "there is nothing but a light cloud here and there, and, besides, it goes on."

The abbé had listened to what they said with a smile. "It is a singular sound," he replied, at length, "and one I never heard anywhere but here. Is it not like the roaring of a volcano?"

"Oh! I know what it is," cried Julie: "it is the noise of a cascade."

"No," answered the abbé, "it is simply the murmuring of the River Sioule, which, flowing over a bed of lava, and winding in and out among a thousand rocks of the same resonant material, seems as if it were imitating, for us of modern days, the voice, which it must have often heard, of the fierce volcano at the foot of which it runs. The sound rises, however," he added, "and seems to gather its greatest strength about this point, for it becomes much fainter when you reach the bank of the river below."

As he spoke, he led the way on, and in a few minutes they reached the valley of the Sioule, which presented to their eyes one of the most extraordinary, wild, and interesting scenes that it is possible to find on earth. On one side of the valley rose a stupendous mountain of granite, round the base of which flowed a beautifully clear stream, scarcely more, at the time I speak of—which, it must be remembered, was in the middle of summer—than a foot in depth at any place, and in general not above five or six inches. But few trees, and those scattered at great distances upon small patches of vegetable mould, stood out from the cold, gray mountain, serving in their insignificance to afford some measure of its tremendous height.

On the other side of the valley appeared, however, the object for which the abbé had brought them thither. This was one of those enormous masses of lava which characterize Auvergne: a mountain in itself, completely hiding from the eyes below the still higher mountain behind it. On its strange wild face were seen several deep caverns, blacker than its own blackness; at least, so they appeared as the sun then fell; and from them, distinct and clear, as if actually pouring forth in molten fury, were several tremendous streams of lava, now hardened into rock, but marked out from each other by wide, irregular slopes of the fern and heath which carpeted the mountain. Two of these streams especially caught the eye of the travellers, sweeping round upon the right and left, like the ruined walls of some vast amphitheatre, and apparently bounding the irruptions that had taken place, for all the lesser torrents of lava seemed embraced within those two gigantic arms.

As if to form the strongest contrast possible with the magnificent wildness of the mountain scene above, the banks of the stream on either side were covered with exquisite soft turf of a vivid green; while the clear waters between those velvet banks sparkled with the brightness of a diamond over the fragments of dark stone that formed its bed. Julie and Francis de Langy gazed with astonishment, wonder, and awe; and although the abbé had seen this extraordinary spectacle before, he could not behold it even a second time without being strongly and strangely moved by a sight which has, perhaps, no parallel in nature.

But one object in the whole prospect diminished the effect upon the mind, which was the figure of another human being. It was a scene which required perfect solitude to bring out all its beauties, and that one object undoubtedly detracted greatly from the general effect. Neither was his occupation one of those the nature of which at all harmonized with the objects round. He was casting the dull line into the clear water; and certainly, whatever charm beautiful scenery may give to the sport of fishing, the sport itself adds nothing to the poetical beauty of the scenery. A shepherd, a goatherd, any of the objects of pastoral life, might not have jarred so harshly on the sight; but when the abbé, after gazing round for some five minutes in perfect silence, at length said, in a low tone, "There is our guide, I suppose," Julie could not refrain from exclaiming, "I wish he were away; he spoils the landscape sadly."

"He does, indeed," replied Francis de Langy; "neither is his costume particularly picturesque. The plain brown cloth of Auvergne would suit such a scene as this better than that smart-looking Parisian frock."

"We must speak with him at all events," rejoined the abbé; "for although, as I said before, I believe I could find the way about the place myself, yet it may save you fatigue, fair lady, to have the shortest road pointed out to us."

Thus speaking, he advanced towards the stranger; but, ere they had taken half a dozen steps, Julie exclaimed, "Why, that is strange; 'tis surely Jean, one of the servants of Madame de Bausse."

Intent upon his fishing, and his ear filled with the murmur of the stream, the man had not remarked their approach. When he did so, however, a sudden look of surprise passed over his countenance, perhaps not altogether unmingled with alarm. If there was any such feeling, it passed away in an instant; and, pulling off his hat as he recognised Mademoiselle d'Artonne, he said, "Ah, Mademoiselle Julie, is that you! Who would have thought to see you here!"

"Or you either, Jean Marais!" she answered. "How is it that Madame de Bausse has parted with you!"

The man paused for a single instant ere he replied, but he then said easily, "Why, Mademoiselle, the young marquis being away, you know she had no great use for me; so I took a day's holyday to bring these sleek gentlemen out of the Sioule;" and he pointed to some fine trout which lay upon the bank.

Julie made no answer, but cast her beautiful eyes down to the ground and remained in thought for a moment or two, at the end of which period Francis de Langy perceived that her cheek turned very pale. A painful feeling that he could not define to himself came again over his heart; and, the abbé being at that moment in conversation with the servant in regard to his capability of guiding them over the mountain, the youth resolved he would satisfy himself at once, and put a question which no age after seventeen would have ventured to utter.

"You seem greatly interested in this Marquis

de Bausse, Mademoiselle d'Artonne," he said. "I suppose you are much attached to your cousin?"

Julie started, and replied, with the same youthful frankness which had characterized his question, "Oh no! I dislike him very much;" and the colour mounted in her cheek again. "I was only thinking," she said, "that all this is very strange;" and again she fell into thought.

In the mean time, the abbé had asked the fisherman to quit his occupation for the moment and guide them over the hill; but the valet laughed, saying, "I don't know ten steps from the banks of the stream, so that it would but be the blind leading the blind, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"You must be better acquainted with the country than we are," rejoined the abbé; "for I am the only one of the party who has ever visited it, and that was twenty years ago."

The man, however, seemed unwilling to give up his sport; and the travellers, after wandering for some way along the course of the valley, turned to take another view of the precipitous steep from whose caverns, unnumbered centuries ago, poured forth the torrents of fire which have left such extraordinary vestiges behind them. What was the surprise of Julie and Francis de Langy to behold, from the point at which they were now placed, the scene entirely changed! For an instant they could scarcely help believing that the dead volcano had suddenly rekindled into angry life, for several of the caverns in the mountain—while some still remained sombre and dark—had assumed a fiery glare, as if flames and torrents of lava were about once more to burst forth.

The abbé saw and enjoyed their surprise. "It is from this side only," he said, "that you really see the caverns; before they were cast into deep shadow, and the red ochreous colour, which has been produced by combustion, was concealed till we got into this position."

Julie gazed almost awe-struck. "It is beautiful," she said, "but very fearful. What a sight it must have been to behold such furnaces in activity!"

"It looks like the mouth of the infernal regions," said Francis de Langy.

"And doubtless," replied the abbé, "from some such scene as this the poet took his picture of the entrance to Pluto's kingdom. It is, indeed, sublime. But what think you, Mademoiselle d'Artonne? You are a good climber; will you venture up to the caves themselves? It is a difficult and not a very safe ascent, if I recollect rightly."

Julie laughed. "Oh! where you and Francis go, Monsieur Arnoux," she answered, "I shall find no difficulty. Mine are mountain feet, more accustomed, a great deal, to tread the rocks and lava of Auvergne than the terraces and streets of Versailles and Paris. I should not wonder if I had to help you both; but whatever we do must be done quickly, for I am afraid there will be a storm before night."

"Oh no," said the abbé, looking up to the sky, "I do not think so; and I am a meteorologist, you know," he added, with a grave smile at his own pretensions.

"But I am an Auvergnate," answered Julie, laughing; "and we all learn these things in our country, *Monsieur Arnoux*. We have plenty of practice in marking the changes of weather, I can assure you; for we often see three completely different climates in one day, and very seldom have the same for three days together. However, if a storm did come on, we could find plenty of places of shelter here, for Nature has provided us with houses in the rock."

"As she almost always does," said the abbé, "wherever there is an evil or a danger, affording a remedy or an escape; even as God," he added—always willing to inculcate a lesson—"even as God never suffers us to be tempted without affording us a warning and offering us a resource. But come, my dear children, the easiest way, if I recollect, lies round that large stream of lava: there is a little path runs through the heath, which carries us easily half up the ascent."

The road was readily found, and the greater part of it presented no serious obstacles. In the end there was, indeed, some difficult climbing to be accomplished; but, as Julie had foreseen, her mountain habits rendered the ascent more easy to herself than to either of her companions. Francis de Langy, it is true, full of youth, vigour, and activity, surmounted all the impediments in the way without much trouble: the only difficulty, indeed, that he met with proceeded from his employing more strength than was needful, and by a bolder spring or heavier tread displacing here or there a mass of the lava, which went rolling down into the valley below. The good abbé, however, found that twenty years had made a great difference in his agility, as most men do who try; but proceeding slowly and cautiously, he went on without danger, refusing all aid from his younger companions.

Often, indeed, was he obliged to stop for a moment, but yet the good man would look up well pleased to the rock above him, where they stood waiting his coming; while Julie's eyes sparkled with pleasure and excitement, and her fair cheek glowed with exercise; her small, full lips panting all the while with the pure breath of youth, and the curls of her hair driven back from her forehead by the quick blast of the mountain wind. Even age, the sad diluter of all admirations, could not prevent the abbé from saying in his own heart, "Well, for a being of this earth, she is certainly very lovely."

Monsieur Arnoux, however, was not the only one who admired; and Francis de Langy, as he stood beside her, or made an excuse to render her aid where she needed it not, gazed with deeper and more glowing feelings still upon his lovely companion, and, plunging into the whirlpool of thoughts which their situation suggested, soon lost himself amid a thousand bright but vague sensations.

Thus going on, they at length reached the mouth of one of the first caverns, and there paused for some short time to rest themselves, studying curiously, as they sat upon a block of lava which had taken the form of a natural bench, the innumerable curious lichens and mosses which had gathered in the shadier parts of the rock. The next they came to was all bare; and the entrance, which was exposed to the heat of the sun, was so scorched, that the lava, which has a peculiar property of absorbing and retaining heat, actually burned the hand that

rested upon it. The air in the inside of the cave, too, was suffocating and oppressive; and Julie, when she felt it, again shook her head, saying, "We shall have a storm, Monsieur Arnoux."

Nevertheless, forward they went upon their way, examining all the curious objects that surrounded them, comparing them with other creations of nature or productions of art, and in the sportive revelry of unrestrained imagination deriving a thousand beautiful figures, a thousand wild speculations, a thousand bright conceptions, from the world of wonders through which they passed. Circling round the front of the great volcanic mass, they at length reached the very summit, and then saw that it was but as the first step to another giant mountain behind, apparently of granite. But a different object instantly attracted their attention: an immense heavy cloud rolling from the base of that other mountain towards them, and seeming to sweep the little plain on which they now stood.

"We shall have a fog, I think," said the abbé.

"No, no," replied Julie, with a look of apprehension; "there is a storm coming, a storm of hail, I think. Let us get down to one of the caves as fast as possible; we might be beaten to death by the hailstones."

There was no time for delay; for, almost as Julie spoke, a bright flash of lightning blazed over the face of the dark-gray mass; and, running down as fast as possible, the whole party made their way, not without danger, towards the last cave which they had quitted. To say the truth, it was not that which seemed likely to afford the best shelter, being formed principally by a mountain of scoria, cinders, and earth, which appeared to have been driven back by an advancing stream of lava, with which it was partly mingled, and from which it was partly detached. They had no choice, however; for, before they reached it, the hail began to fall with a degree of violence of which neither of the two men had any previous conception. Unprepared for what was coming, Francis de Langy, though young, strong, and active, staggered with the blows; but, almost at the same moment, Julie put her hand to her head, and fell. Tenfold strength seemed to be given to him in a moment; and, catching her up in his arms, he bore her into the cavern, which, though not twenty steps distant, she might hardly otherwise have reached alive.

"Julie! dear Julie!" he cried, as he placed her in safety.

"I am not hurt," she exclaimed; "I am not much hurt. But the abbé? Poor Monsieur Arnoux!"

Francis de Langy darted out of the cavern, and rushed towards the spot where the good ecclesiastic, with his face and hands bleeding, was crouching under the rock, which only in part sheltered him. Half carrying, half dragging him along, his pupil at length got him into the cave, though not till both were terribly bruised.

"Oh, Monsieur Arnoux!" cried Julie, "you are sadly hurt, I fear."

"No, no, my child," replied the old man. "It is but a little blood; one of these dreadful hailstones has cut my lip and my cheek. But you! you fell too, my child; and poor Francis has suffered more than either."

Julie gazed at her young companion with anxious and inquiring look; but he replied, with a light laugh, "Oh, no, no! I am not hurt. I nothing. If you two are safe, I trust to h many a worse beating than this before I Let me wipe the blood from your face, M sieur Arnoux. Julie, are you sure you are hurt?"

"Oh no!" she cried, "no: the hail made stagger, and I stumbled over some stone, I fan but I am not hurt, only a little bruised."

As she spoke she clasped her hands over eyes, for just then came another awful flash lightning, which seemed to fill the whole va with fire.

"Good Heaven, what hailstones!" exclaim Francis de Langy; "they are absolutely mas of ice. That poor fellow in the valley will killed!"

"I trust not," replied Julie; "he knows A vergne well, and would never go far on such day as this without having marked out so place of shelter. I am afraid you are m hurt, Monsieur Arnoux," she continued, as s saw the good abbé bending down his head up his hands.

"No, my dear young lady," answered t abbé, after a moment's pause; "I was thankin God that I am not much hurt. Turn your ey from the lightning, my son; it might blind you."

"Come away, Francis; come away," ex claimed Julie d'Artonne, laying her hand upon the arm of her young companion, who was gazing out from the mouth of the cavern upon the strange but magnificent sight afforded by the valley at their feet: "do not stand rashly there in the full glare."

There are few dangers to which Francis de Langy would not willingly have exposed himself to hear such words as those; and, drawing back with Julie into the farther part of the cave, they seated themselves on a pile of volcanic fragments near good Monsieur Arnoux. The storm every moment grew more and more terrible; the flashes of the lightning were incessant, and of a fearful vividness, glancing round and round the cave, and exposing to the eye all the grim features of those innermost recesses which the light of day never revealed. Julie d'Artonne drew closer and closer to her lover's side; and, as fear ever makes one of us weak beings cling to another, breaking down all the barriers which custom places between man and man, she put her arm through his, and in trembling apprehension hid her eyes upon his shoulder, while he soothed her with all those tender caresses which nothing but the terrors of the moment would have imboldened him to offer. He supported her with his arm, he kept her hand clasped in his; and though he could not but feel that it was a dreadful hour, the termination of which to all of them no one could tell, he tried to persuade his dear Julie, as he called her, that there was no danger, and that the storm would soon pass away.

"One could fancy it the end of the world," said the Abbé Arnoux; and so, indeed, one might have done; for the rocks and mountains of sonorous basalt, which had multiplied the low murmurs of the Sioule till they had sounded like thunder, now echoed the voice of the thunder itself from rock to rock, and cavern to cavern,

ll the very mountain seemed to shake, and one ould feel the vibration of the air upon the cheek well as on the ear. The falling of the hail ded to the roar, and the gush of accumulating aters mingled therewith, so that never, proba- y, did the ear of man, except in some of those st convulsions which, with intervals of un- mbered ages, change the face of the whole obe, hear such a combination of terrific sounds then echoed through the valley of Chalucet.

Sheltered as they were, however, the hail was o longer to be feared, and the thunder was ore awful than dangerous; but a greater peril an any they had yet undergone awaited them, ven at the moment when they thought them- lves secure. The hail gradually became min- led with rain; then ceased, and gave way to a eluge that poured down from the sky. The rge lumps of ice, which lay piled up more than foot in height at the mouth of the cavern, be- an to melt. Large drops of water, percolating hrough the arch of the cave, dropped with a eavy splash upon the ground; some pieces of the rock of the vault fell likewise; and at the ame time a rushing sound, differing from all which had been heard before, came suddenly upon the ear. A rivulet was first seen trickling along the path at the entrance of the cavern, driving away the hail before it; and then, with a hissing, foamy rush down from the hill above, swept an actual torrent, rising, as it passed, somewhat above the level ground of the cave, and pouring in with an eddying whirl so as to cover the feet of the poor travellers with water. Not calculating how high it would rise, Francis de Langy caught up Julie in his arms, preparing to rush forth with her; but paused instantly, seeing that it must naturally flow down the hill, and could not inundate the place of their retreat above a few inches more.

At that instant, however, the abbé started up, exclaiming, "Quick, Francis; quick, my child! Away, away! the cave is falling in!" and on he darted towards the mouth.

He reached it not, however; for, before he could do so, a torrent of falling cinders and scoria poured down from above, and struck him to the ground. There was a sad and terrible cry, the mouth of the cavern was at once blocked up, and all was darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

We must now return for a time to the banks of the stream, and to the somewhat discourteous fisherman, who had chosen to follow his solitary sport rather than accompany the travellers over the mountain. The name by which Julie addressed him must have already made the reader aware that he is not a new acquaintance; but, from the description which we gave of his person when at the *Ferme Godard*, he certainly would not be recognised at the period of which we now speak. The tall, well-formed, active stripling of fourteen or fifteen had grown into a man of immense powers of body: not much above the ordinary height, being about five feet eleven, but displaying a frame of great breadth; deep-chested, long-armed, thin in the flank, and without the slightest approach to fatness, but muscular to an extraordinary degree. His features were short and small, but good; his forehead large and capacious, but with the back of the head perhaps still more so, and with those parts of the scull in which phrenologists suppose the organs of observation and calculation to lie developed in a remarkable manner. To speak by the card, and employ the technology with which our phrenological friends have furnished us, we will point out, that the organ of reverence in his head, though not absolutely wanting, was very small indeed; but that the organ of benevolence was large and protuberant. Thus, if we might judge by what was on the outside of his scull of what was in the inside, and from both of what was the character of his mind and disposition, we should have a very curious compound of qualities. Considerable intellectual powers, with strong animal passions; not much respect for anything, but a good deal of kindness of feeling. A few more traits, dear reader, would make it a perfect Frenchman.

The expression of the countenance—in which, to say sooth, we put as much faith as in phrenology—bore out these indications perfectly. There was a shrewd, intelligent, keen, and rapid look, with no ferocity or harshness in it, but a great deal of determination; and that sidelong, half-averted glance, which we noticed in him as a youth, was now altogether gone, the place thereof being supplied by a sort of impenetrable, nonchalant aspect assumed upon certain occasions.

The reader must not suppose that any great change had taken place in his character, thus to vary the expression of his countenance. The fact is, that when a youth, though not educated by any of his relations with the soundest principles in the world, yet his faults and vices—and they were not a few—were new to him; and the belief that they must be apparent to and condemned by every one he met with, gave him that downcast look which we have before mentioned.

He had disposed of it, however, in the most natural manner possible; and having discovered two things—first, that his fellow-men were not near so sharp-sighted as he had imagined; and, secondly, that there were a great many as bad as himself, and a great many very much worse, he got somewhat conceited, not exactly of his bad actions, but of the dexterity and courage with which he committed them.

We have said that he was not conceited of the actions themselves; and, in truth, his tendency was rather away from them; for, in reality, they were committed more from a general want of principle than an inherent inclination to wrong; and, as the desires and passions of youth, the love of adventure, and the recklessness of consequences, diminished by slight degrees with years, the temptations were diminished also; and he would just as soon have employed his wit in doing what was right, if the opportunity had presented itself, as in doing what was wrong. Habit, indeed—habit was a strong counterpoise; but a man of good intellect, and not very corrupt inclinations, generally discovers, sooner or later, that the weight of worldly advantages lies on the side of good conduct, as well as all the moral inducements; and thus there is ever something with a reasonable being to counterbalance bad habit, if unfortunate circumstances do not lead him farther and farther into vice, or society by its severity does not drive him to despair.

The lepers at one time were cast out from all communion with their fellow-men; they could associate but with lepers, and the disease increased

and spread. At an after period men took them into hospitals and cured them, and the malady was gradually extinguished. Might it not be so with the leprosy of the mind?

To return to Jean Marais, however. He remained fishing in the stream till the party by whom he had been accosted began to climb the hill; and then he said to himself, "Now I will get back to Chalucet, and be off as fast as possible. I do not covet the jail at Clermont, particularly after the specimen I have had of it, where, with our good laws of France, I might very likely remain for nine months to come. No, no; I will keep out of the way till something about this young scapegrace has been discovered. And yet the girl did not seem to know anything of my situation; and a nice girl, too, she is: a great deal too good for my vagabond master."

While he thus meditated, or, rather, murmured to himself—for his thoughts took an audible dress—he was busy undoing his fishing tackle; but just at that moment, luckily for himself and for others, his eye lighted upon a remarkably fine trout, the patriarch of the stream, who, lying not far from the surface, with his snout to the current and his fins moving slowly to keep himself in one place, seemed to invite the angler to try his skill upon him. Jean Marais had too much of the spirit of a sportsman to resist the temptation. He put his rod together again, and cast his fly lightly on the surface of the water, within a few inches of the mouth of his destined prize. For some little time the trout was obdurate, and ten minutes or a quarter of an hour were spent in teasing him to rise. At length, however, as if in a fit of irritation, the fish darted at the fly, was instantly hooked, and, conscious of his powers, darted away, nearly breaking the line that held him. Jean Marais was as skilful a fisherman as Isaac Walton; and, though we will not attempt to describe with our quaint old friend's minuteness the sport that ensued, suffice it to say that it cost the angler nearly three quarters of an hour to exhaust the speckled tenant of the stream. At length, however, he succeeded in landing on the bank as fine a trout as ever was taken in Auvergne, a land justly celebrated for them.

When it was fairly caught, he once more began to pack up his fishing tackle; but he did not do so without one or two wistful looks at the sky, and then at the path by which he had come down the mountain. But the first clap of thunder, which our travellers had heard on the top of the hill, warned him in the valley of what was about to take place.

"No time," he said, "no time! I must get to my rock;" and, gathering up the fish he had caught, his rod, his lines, and his basket, without staying to put them in order, he walked through the stream, ran up the green bank on the other side, and made the best of his way to a spot where a large fragment of granite, in rolling down long ages before, had fallen slantingly against an immense mass of lava, so as to form a sort of hut, somewhat like the foundation of a child's house of cards. Some vegetable mould had gathered, by one means or another, on the top of the rock; and a small stunted ash-tree having planted itself in the crevice where the two stones met, like the feather in a warrior's cap, a wild bird was perched in the branches, singing gayly as Jean Marais approached.

It darted out when he came near; and he exclaimed, with a light laugh, "There, away with you! away with you! I give you two minutes to get home; and, if you don't, the hail will catch you."

Thus saying, he bent himself down, and got under the little canopy formed by the two stones, drawing in his fishing tackle and his trout, and crouching himself into as comfortable a position as he could, without exposing any part of his person or his goods to the pitiless pelting of the storm. The aperture of his little stony hut looked directly upon the black face of the volcano; and he gazed up at it, saying to himself, "I wonder where they have got to?"

The moment after, he saw Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne running down the path towards the cave, followed by the Abbé Arnoux. When he beheld the young lady fall, it is but justice to good Jean Marais to say, that his first impulse made him start up, as if to help her; but down he sat again immediately, watching with not uninterested eyes while Francis de Langy carried her into the cave, and then came out to bring in the abbé.

"He's a fine young fellow, that," said Jean Marais. "I wonder who that is?"

As the reader well knows, the limits of a hailstorm are very sharply defined; and, in many districts of France, balls of ice, the size of eggs, will fall on one side of a road, tearing vineyards and cornfields to pieces, while the other side shall be perfectly free in the clear sunshine, without a single hailstone touching it. In the present instance, the storm came sweeping across the valley towards Jean Marais, as if a dim black wall seamed with a number of perpendicular lines were advancing directly against him; and so thick and tremendous did the hail become, that, very speedily, the immense volcanic mountain before his eyes grew indistinct and dark; so that, for full half an hour, the cavern in which the travellers had taken refuge was lost to his sight.

We shall not again describe the storm, which we have already dwelt upon enough in the preceding chapter. The lightning blazed, the thunder roared, the hailstones fell as before; and Jean Marais, well contented with his retreat, looked out, saying to himself, "Now, if I had murdered that young vagabond the marquis, as his foolish mother says, I should be in a great fright, I suppose, and think the devil was going to take me."

In his comfortable place of refuge he amused himself as well as he could; looking at the fish he had caught, rolling up his lines, cleaning his hooks, and taking very little notice of the storm, except, every now and then, to gaze forth for an instant when the thunder was particularly violent, and exclaim, in a mocking tone, "Well, upon my honour!" till, at length, the hail became mingled with rain, the streams began rushing down from the hills, the thunder diminished in frequency and loudness, and the grim features of the opposite rocks began to show themselves more distinctly through the dim gray deluge.

"Ay," cried Jean Marais, "a pretty morning's work, upon my life! But hark! what's that?" and, gazing out again, he saw an immense quantity of stones and scoria, and large masses of rock, come rolling down the face of the opposite precipice, bounding and thundering into the stream.

His eyes instantly ran up towards the mouth of the cave where he had beheld the travellers take refuge. He could no longer see it. He looked to the right, to the left—it was gone!

"Body of life!" he exclaimed, "it must have fallen in upon them!" and, leaving fish and fish-

ing tackle, and everything else behind him, he darted out, rushed through the stream, which was by this time up to his middle, and which, strong as he was, nearly bore him away, and, with the agility of a goat, climbed straight up to where the cavern had been.

The rain was still pouring down in fury, a thousand streams were rushing over all the faces of the rock, but the little path which Julie and her companions had descended to reach the cavern was visible for a considerable way from the top of the hill. Then came a space where everything seemed to be cast into rough confusion, showing clearly where a considerable body of earth and rubbish had slipped down the hill; and then, about fifty or sixty yards farther on, the line of the path could be traced again, winding forward to the mouth of another cave. The cinders and scoria left by the descent of the mass which had fallen rendered the footing between one point of the little way and another both difficult and dangerous. But Jean Marais, without hesitating a moment, sometimes balancing himself with difficulty on his feet, sometimes clinging with his hands and lying almost flat to the face of the mountain, traced on what he conceived the direction which the path had taken, examining accurately every step of ground as if he were looking for some lost jewel. At length, a small projection of the rock gave him a farther hold, and, under a mass of the more solid lava higher up, he perceived a small aperture, scarcely large enough to admit a man's arm. It was somewhat above his head, and the task of reaching it was by no means easy; but at length he accomplished it, and, bringing his face close to the hole, he looked in. All was darkness, however, but he thought he heard something like a low groan; and he exclaimed aloud, "Are you there? are you there?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried a voice from within; "help us quick! Give us air, give us air!"

"I must fetch assistance," replied Jean Marais; "keep up your spirits; do not fear, you shall soon be delivered."

"Give us air!" answered the voice: "give us air! She is fainting, she is dying!"

"Oh, no, no, Francis!" cried another voice; "I am better, I am better now. It was hope I wanted."

"Bring help quick, then," shouted the first voice.

"Stay," said Jean Marais, "stay. I can give you air too, perhaps. Here is a lump of rock I can roll down; but I must take care, lest I go down with it;" and, fixing his two hands firmly upon a large block of stone of more than a hundred pounds in weight, he rolled it slowly over, till, freed from the rubbish in which it was imbedded, it bounded down the hill, rushed over the green slope, and plunged into the stream.

"There is a gleam of light!" exclaimed the voice from below: "look! Julie, look! Thank God, there is a gleam of light!"

"Take courage, take courage!" cried Jean Marais; "I will go and bring the folks from Chalucet, and have you out speedily. I must not miss the spot, however," he continued, speaking to himself. "There! that shall be my landmark;" and, taking off his hat, he set it upon the projecting piece of rock by which he had climed up, put a large stone in it to keep it firm, and then set out for the hamlet at a pace which put his life in danger at every minute.

CHAPTER X.

The most serviceable gift in the ordinary course of life is common sense; but in a career of danger and difficulty there is another, which is, perhaps, but a modification of it, and which is termed presence of mind. I have called it a gift, because I believe that it is perfectly innate, and never to be acquired; but, certainly, if ever any one was born with that combination of ready courage, quick calculation, and promptitude of action which is so termed, it was Francis de Langy. The moment that he beheld the abbé stricken to the earth, he perceived that to pass in time was impossible; and, casting his arms round Julie, he drew her suddenly back from the shower of stones and cinders that was falling, not to the part of the cave where they had previously been seated, but at once, and with a bound, to the eastern side of the cavern, where he had remarked, long before, that the solid lava formed, as it were, one side of an arch, under which he rationally hoped for shelter.

He found it as he had expected; but the very first instant of thought made him almost regret that he had obeyed the impulse, and avoided being crushed under the falling mass. All was darkness; he, and the being whom he loved, were shut in, as in a living tomb, within the hard bosom of the mountain! A long, a lingering, a terrible death was before them! Even if the air which they then breathed was not soon exhausted, famine must speedily reach them. He must have the agony of seeing her die by the most painful want, without the power of giving her the slightest assistance or support. Such was the terrible picture that imagination first presented; such the only fate that he believed was reserved for them. Julie clung to him, trembling violently; and he, pressing her to his heart, lifted up his eyes, as if seeking for that heaven which was shut out from his sight, and which he believed that neither would ever behold again. He would have fain said something to soothe and comfort her, but the words of consolation died away in his heart and on his tongue; and, unable to utter a sound, he pressed his lips upon her cheek, as if it was the parting kiss of two beings doomed to speedy death.

At that moment there was a low groan. "Ha, Julie!" he exclaimed; "there is the poor abbé! Perhaps I can extricate him and bring him here. Stay for a moment. I will try."

"Oh, it will fall upon you and crush you, Francis!" cried Julie.

"Nay, nay, I must try, dear Julie," he replied; and, feeling his way forward with his hands, he soon grasped the good man's cassock. His arm and his head were free, for he had been cast backward in falling; but his chest was covered with a large mass of loose shingle, heaped up in a pile, and his legs, up to his knees, were buried in a mass which blocked up the mouth of the cavern.

Francis de Langy easily removed the pile that was resting on his breast; but when he attempted to disengage the rest of his frame, a shower of small stones and cinders fell thick upon him, and wellnigh suffocated him. He persevered, however; and another low groan, as he did so, told him that the abbé still lived. The earth was loose and light; and, as he laboured to clear it away, with his hands, from the body of his poor tutor, a hope sprung up in his bosom of being able to save himself and her he loved.

In ten minutes he had succeeded so far as to

be able to draw the body of the abbé away, though another shower of stones upon his head was the consequence; but exclaiming, gladly, "I have freed him, Julie, I have freed him!" he bore the old man slowly and cautiously over the plashy floor of the cave towards the spot where he had left her.

"Julie, dear Julie!" he said, as he approached, though the sensation of the air growing thick and warm almost deadened the hope which had arisen, "there is yet a chance; keep up your courage! The earth is soft and light, and easily moved; I can pull down some part into that side of the cave, and perhaps throw the rest down into the valley."

She made no answer; and Francis de Langy, becoming alarmed, put out his hand to feel if she was there. It rested upon her fair soft neck as she bent her head down upon her hands. Her young lover's heart sunk, and he thought, "The air is growing close, she may faint and die before I can accomplish it."

At that moment, however, a loud voice, coming down apparently from the upper part of the cave, shouted, "Are you there? are you there?" And, oh! was there ever sound on this earth so joyful to the ears of man?

The reader knows the reply, and knows, also, that, in a moment after, a gleam of light broke in upon the weary prisoners in their rocky dungeon. It was like hope; it *was* hope; and, oh! what is not hope to man? the vitality of vitality, the life of his life, the great motive power of all exertion, the strengthener, the consoler, the stay, the great battle-sword that cleaves through the armour of all adversaries, the conqueror that strikes down opposition, tramples on reverses, bursts open the gates of the tomb, and treads upon the neck of death!

Hope came to them; and though the ray of light was so faint that they could not even see each other's faces by its aid, looking merely like a dim star high up in the blank space round, it was sufficient for support, ay, and for joy; and, casting his arms round Julie, Francis de Langy exclaimed, "Thou art saved!"

Those words, reader, put, as I have put them, in the second person singular, mean more in French than they do in English; but in any language they would have been sufficient to show to Julie d'Artonne what were the feelings of her young lover's heart, that she was his first thought; that her safety was the object first desired; her danger, the anguish far more felt than his own.

"And thou too, Francis!" she said; "and thou too!" and she leaned her forehead on his bosom.

Never did love before or since find its first voice among such scenes and circumstances.

A long hour succeeded—the passing of which we will not attempt to describe—ere any farther sounds gave notice to the young prisoners that their deliverance was near. At length, however, the tones which they had heard before again reached their ear, asking if they were all well.

"No, anything but well," replied Francis de Langy: "the abbé is much hurt; dead, I fear, or dying."

"Matin!" cried the man; and immediately the sounds of pickaxes and spades rang through the cavern, with voices directing and commenting as the work proceeded.

A moment or two after, some of the earth and stones rolled down into the cave, and the aperture through which the light appeared was considerably enlarged. Julie and Francis de Langy turned their first look upon each other; but their second was to the poor abbé; and by the dim glimmer, which was all that yet reached them, they knelt down beside him, and gazed upon his features. His cassock was soiled by mud and dirt, and a good deal of the loose ashes was adhering to his hair; but, as far as they could distinguish, his features were calm and placid, and it was evident that he still breathed, though the groan which had once or twice burst from his bosom had ceased.

The rushing sound of falling earth was now clearly distinguished, mingled with the rolling of large masses of the rock down the face of the precipice. The light grew clearer, the heavy air more free; and soon the arms and chest of a man labouring hard with a spade could be discerned, with the blue sky behind him. The cheerful sunshine, too, shone upon his shoulder and his hand, showing that the storm had passed away entirely; and, oh! what a bright and beautiful sight did that simple gleam seem to the eyes of those who had thought that they should never behold it again! But we must not pause farther upon their sensations. It required the labour of four men, during at least three quarters of an hour, to enlarge sufficiently the small aperture, which the mass of falling earth had left in its descent, for a human being to pass in and out: some masses of stone, which had come down with the rest, obstructing the labour, and requiring both skill and strength to remove. Jean Marais, however, worked like a slave, and, by his better sense and knowledge, effected as much, at least, as all the three good Auvergnats together. At length a sufficient passage was opened; but still it was not an easy one, for the loose shingle and rock had rolled down into the cave, filling up nearly two thirds of the space; and when Jean Marais himself entered to give assistance, he fell twice before he reached the bottom of the mound.

"I will carry her, I will carry her," cried Francis de Langy.

"If you do, I shall have to carry you," cried Jean Marais; but the youth caught Julie up in his arms as lightly as if she had been a child, and, with that strength and power which strong and resolute feeling generally gives, he bore her out, while the stout Picard followed him close, steadying the young gentleman with his arm whenever the stones rolled under his feet.

"Thank God!" cried Francis de Langy, when he once more set his fair burden down in the fresh air. "Thank God!"

But the sudden change was too great for Julie d'Artonne; she turned pale, her head drooped, and she fell back fainting, with the first breath of the wind upon her cheek.

When Julie reopened her eyes, she felt herself gently borne along in a large rough, brown cloak, at that time in use among the Auvergnat shepherds, which had been stretched upon two poles, so as to make a sort of litter for her. A contrivance somewhat similar had been applied to carry the poor Abbé Arnoux; and, two or three of the herds from the mountains having been added to the party who had dug out the travellers, Mademoiselle d'Artonne and the good ecclesiastic were carried by the shortest and most convenient paths to the little hamlet of Chalucet. The women of the village and the neighbourhood instantly surrounded the sufferers; and the abbe was soon stretched upon a bed, with kind female

hands tending him, and every simple means applied to recall him to consciousness. As such accidents often happened in the mountains, the treatment of Monsieur Arnoux was not so unskilful as might have been expected, for experience is the best teacher of medicine. On Julie, too, the good women would fain have tried their powers; but she had quite recovered from her fainting fit ere she reached the hamlet, although she felt too weak and exhausted, after all she had gone through, to ride back to Pontgibaud.

For his part, Francis de Langy resolved not to quit her; and all that remained for him to do was to send a messenger to Pontgibaud to seek a surgeon, and to communicate the disasters they had met with, and the state they were in, to Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne. For this double purpose Francis de Langy determined to employ Jean Marais, and accordingly went out of the cottage to which Julie had been brought, in order to look for him. As some time had been spent, one way or another, since their arrival, he found their deliverer with his fishing-rod in his hand, a basket on his back, and a small parcel of clothes crowning the whole, apparently setting out upon some distant journey.

The first words the young gentlemen addressed to him were thanks, and, luckily for his purpose, one of the expressions which he used was, "I look upon it that Mademoiselle d'Artonne and myself owe our lives entirely to you; but you must do us another service, Monsieur Marais. I wish you particularly to mount one of the horses which brought us here, and, riding it to Pontgibaud, send the best surgeon you can find as speedily as possible. I should then feel extremely obliged if you would go to the little inn called the Demie Lune, and communicate, in the gentlest manner you can, to Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne that we have met with a frightful accident, but that Mademoiselle Julie is safe and uninjured. Perhaps Monsieur d'Artonne may not have returned, but you will certainly find the countess there."

The man looked down with a hesitating, or rather calculating, expression, and began his reply by saying, "Why, you see, Monsieur—" but suddenly stopped, and then asked, "Can you not send one of these other men?"

"I can do so, certainly," answered Francis de Langy, somewhat surprised at his reluctance; "but I wish some one to bear the intelligence who will break it with gentleness. Besides, I think you are very well deserving of a high reward for saving our lives, and I am sure Monsieur d'Artonne will be glad to give it when he is aware of the circumstances."

The valet took off his hat and made him a low bow, replying, with a comic air, "Rewards are pleasant things, sir."

He then fell into thought again; but the moment after he roused himself, and put his hat upon his head with an air of mock determination, saying, "Well, I'll dare the adventure! I may want a good friend just now to help me at a pinch. Come, sir, I will do it."

Francis de Langy was totally unaware of those particular points in Jean Marais's history which made him hesitate to go to Pontgibaud and present himself before the Count d'Artonne; but, in replying at a venture, he hit the mark aright, saying, "If you do want a friend in need, depend upon it you will find one in the Count d'Artonne, after saving his daughter from a lingering and horrible death. *Nor will my uncle—I may call him* father—the Vicomte de St. Medard, be less grateful to you—"

"Monsieur de St. Medard?" cried the man. "Ah, bon Dieu! Is it possible? are you little Francis de Langy, whom I have had upon my knee a hundred times? Well, that is strange enough!"

An explanation, such as the reader may conceive, now ensued; but Francis de Langy made it a short one, although he was not a little interested in the account the man gave of himself, and of his own early years at the *Ferme Godard*. No farther difficulties were made by Jean Marais; and mounting the horse, which was speedily made ready, he set off at as rapid a rate as the bad road would permit, and reached Pontgibaud in little less than an hour.

As he went—according to a habit that he had—he held a good deal of conversation with himself upon his own situation and prospects. "Well," he said, "I am certainly the luckiest of all unlucky dogs; for no sooner do I fall into a scrape, from which there seems no escape—except to be set free, after many months' imprisonment on account of a crime I never dreamed or thought of—than I stumble upon two powerful protectors, and secure their certain good-will by the merest accident in the world. Well, now, I must manage this matter delicately, and break the tidings to these people as one breaks the top of an egg, little by little. Let me see! how shall I do it? I have it, I have it! But we must send the surgeon first to take care of the good old gentleman in the cassock, though he'll be as dead as a sole before the doctor gets there. There's not as much life in him now as in an empty tinder-box. But sometimes miracles are performed still, and so we'll send the surgeon."

Thus murmuring to himself, rode on Jean Marais, till he reached the little oldfashioned town of Pontgibaud, where he speedily found out the only surgeon that it contained, and who was, consequently, a great man in his way. He despatched him to Chalucet as fast as a horse could carry him, telling him that a count, a countess, and the Bishop of Clermont, had all tumbled down the rocks together, and half broken their necks. He then directed his steps to the inn, where at the door, which looked down upon the stream of the Chalamont, stood a postchaise, with smoking horses, apparently just arrived.

Walking into the kitchen, Jean Marais was in two minutes quite intimate with the host and hostess, the cook, and all the servants, male and female; and it luckily so happened for his purpose that none of the attendants on the party of travellers were at that moment in the peculiar apartment he had selected for his *début*.

"Now, Monsieur Malot," he said, taking down the load from his shoulder, "I know you have got some guests of quality here, and I have brought you a basket of as beautiful trout as ever you saw to entertain them with. Here are seven magnificent fellows, none of them less than a couple of pounds; and for them you shall give me dinner, supper, a bed, and a breakfast."

The host admired the trout with his eyes, and was taking up the last and largest one which had been caught, when Jean Marais laid his hand upon it, exclaiming, "Not that one, not that one; he is not included. Why, he weighs four pounds if he weighs an ounce, and I destine him as a present from myself to the Count d'Artonne. So give me down a dish, Madame Malot, and I will carry it up with my own hands."

The good hostess very willingly obeyed his injunctions, knowing that the fish must be dressed for her guests to eat it, and that she must make the sauce—which repays a French innkeeper as well as to set brilliants recompenses a jeweller—and, a large dish having been brought down, Jean Marais was ushered up to a room tenanted for the time by the Count and Countess d'Artonne and their guests. He entered in great state, bearing the magnificent trout before him, and found the two gentlemen standing beside Madame d'Artonne, and talking with her on the proceedings of the day.

"Ha! Jean Marais?" cried the count, when he saw him; a shade coming over his countenance, not exactly of displeasure nor of suspicion, but rather, apparently, of sadness. "They told me that you were in prison."

"So I was, sir," said the valet, bowing low, with a smile at the double meaning of the words he was about to use. "So I was, sir, for three days; but at the end of that time they let me out; and, as I have been fishing about the country, and heard you were here, I have brought you this fine trout, as the most acceptable present I could offer you."

"It is a very fine trout indeed," replied the count, looking at the fish; "why, it must weigh four or five pounds. We will have it dressed for dinner to-day, Elise."

"Nay, sir," said Jean Marais, gravely; "I hope you will have it stuffed, and put under a glass case."

Monsieur de St. Medard smiled; and the count replied, "No, really, my good friend; though it is a very fine trout, I do not think it is worthy of quite so distinguished an honour as that."

"Now, really, I think it is," answered Jean Marais; "for this very fish, noble sir, once saved a young lady's life."

The whole party looked at the speaker with some astonishment, and were all silent for a moment.

"You are a jester, Jean Marais," cried Monsieur d'Artonne, at length. But the countess interposed, with a cheek somewhat pale, saying, "He means something, Alphonse. When did it save a young lady's life?"

"This very day, madame," answered Jean Marais.

"Julie!" cried Madame d'Artonne, immediately; "he means Julie! Good God! where is she? what has happened?"

"She is quite well, madame," replied Jean Marais, "and quite safe at Chalucet; but if it had not been for my staying to catch this fish, she would have now been buried in the heart of the mountain;" and, the worst being told, he proceeded to relate all that had occurred.

"Luckily," said the count, when he concluded, "it is to you we owe her safety, Jean Marais, not to the trout; so that we can reward her deliverer. Poor girl! what she must have gone through! And poor Monsieur Arnoux, too! I regret him as much as if he were a brother."

"While there is life there is hope," answered the viscount. "I could spare my right hand better than I could that good old man. Come, D'Artonne, let us go at once to Chalucet, and see what can be done."

"I will go too—I will go too!" cried Madame d'Artonne.

"I fear the road is only practicable for horses," replied Monsieur de St. Medard.

"I will ride, I will walk, I will do anything!" exclaimed the mother; "but I must see my child!"

"You can get within less than a quarter of a league in the carriage," said Jean Marais; "and it may serve to bring mademoiselle back again; for she was not at all hurt, but only faint and exhausted from terror."

His plan was adopted: horses were again put on to the carriage, and in a short time Julie d'Artonne was clasped in her mother's arms; while Monsieur de St. Medard grasped the hand of Francis de Langy, and advanced with him to the bed on which the good abbé was stretched. The surgeon was sitting beside him, and made a sign for the viscount to keep silence; but Monsieur Arnoux was able to look up as he recognised his friend's step, and acknowledged his presence by a faint smile.

CHAPTER XI.

The expedition, which had begun in joy and expectation, ended in sorrow and anxiety, as so many others have done. The poor Abbé Arnoux, crushed and bruised, hung for three or four days between life and death, and perhaps was only saved for the time by the unremitting attention of his pupil and Monsieur de St. Medard. Julie also suffered, though but slightly in comparison, from the terror she had endured and the scenes she had gone through; and, when Francis de Lagny every morning walked or rode over from the little hamlet of Chalucet to Pontgibaud, he had the satisfaction of seeing the colour come back warmly into her cheek, and health sparkle up in her eyes once more.

Having said so much of the principal personages of the tale, we must turn for a moment or two to our respectable friend Jean Marais, who, the second morning after the adventure in the mountains, stood before Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne, giving an account of himself and his proceedings, the whole of which would doubtless prove both interesting and instructive if we had space to lay it before the reader. We can, however, report but a part, and that must be the portion which refers to the present story.

"Why, you know, Jean Marais," said the count, "you know very well that you are a great rogue."

Jean Marais made a low bow, replying, with the most perfect self-satisfaction, "How should I otherwise be fit for the office of *valet de chambre* to a noble gentleman like the Marquis de Bausse?"

"Well, Jean," replied the count, "in regard to this accusation against you, which I am quite sure is false, and which you say you can prove to have been made without even ground of suspicion, I will take care that the matter be fully investigated, as you desire, within four-and-twenty hours after our arrival at Clermont; and you shall have every opportunity of establishing your innocence, so as not to be detained one moment longer than is necessary. You shall also have a reward of some kind adequate to the service which you have rendered me; but indeed, my good Jean Marais, as to my taking you into our service, that, I fear, is quite out of the question. You know very well that, besides the love-making to the maids, which would be endless, you would do nothing but cheat me from morning to night."

Jean Marais laughed, without showing the slightest symptom either of shame or indignation.

"On my word of honour, Monsieur d'Artonne," he said, "you make a very great mistake. Every man has certain principles upon which he acts, and mine would prevent me from cheating you even of a sous. The matter is very different, indeed, when I am with such a master as the Marquis de Bausse. It was a part of my duty to cheat him, else I render the old proverb of no avail. 'Like master, like man,' noble sir, is much more universally true than people believe. If my master leads the way, as a matter of course I follow; and if he runs very fast, he must not be surprised at my treading on his heels; but with you the matter would be different. I should never think of practising on you any such tricks as are every day played by the fashionable valet on the fashionable master. I would not go out in your clothes and call myself by your name, nor half empty your snuffbox every night into a jar lent me by the tobacconist on purpose to keep my earnings fresh against the time for returning them to his shop. You would never lose four or five canes in a year, and be persuaded that you had left them in a *fiacre* or in a friend's house. Your shirts would not be frequently mislaid by the washerwoman; your stock of pocket-handkerchiefs would not daily decrease; you would not have an opportunity of seeing how well your own cravats look upon the neck of your valet, nor admire your gloves upon his hands before they had been twice on your own. If your purse remained in your pocket when you went to bed, every Louis would answer to the muster-roll next morning; and the sous would rest in peace upon the edge of the scrutoire. I can assure you I should be perfectly exemplary, unless I saw you begin to gamble or cheat at cards, or say sweet things to madame's *femme de chambre;*" and he bowed reverently to the countess as he spoke.

"A pleasant picture you give, certainly, of a valet's life," said Monsieur d'Artonne; "but I am afraid, my good Jean Marais, that, even if there was a probability of your keeping all your promises, I could not grant your request, for my servants are old and faithful friends, whom I am not likely to part with, and I have fully as many of them as I want."

"Happy Monsieur d'Artonne," exclaimed Jean Marais, "and unhappy I! But it is always so in life; when we want to escape temptation, we find the door shut upon us: so I shall have nothing to do but to go on with sweet Monsieur de Bausse when he comes back again, which, of course, will be the case when he has spent all his money; or else to get myself a new place with some other noble gentleman of the same kind, where, in duty to myself, I shall be obliged to cheat him from morning till night, or lose my character forever among my friends and companions."

"Well, well, Jean Marais," replied the count, "we will see what is to be done for you; perhaps I may be able to find you a better place than you have; but remember, if I do so, and you dishonour my recommendation, I will cut your ears off with my own hands."

"Sir, they are perfectly at your service," answered Jean Marais, making him a low bow; "but, in the mean time, I may look to you to get me clear of this charge."

"Nay, my good friend," cried the count, "I did not *exactly say that; I merely promised* that *you should have an opportunity of* establishing your innocence at once, if you can do so, and should not be kept for months in prison, as is too much the custom in France, whether an accused person be guiltless or criminal."

"That is all I want, that is all I want, sir," replied Jean Marais; "for I know that there cannot be even a cause of suspicion shown against me; and, to tell you the truth, sir, I am afraid of my morals in that place."

"How so?" demanded the count; "I should think, my good friend, that your morals were very safe."

"Oh! you flatter me, sir," answered Jean Marais; "but I can assure you that a prison in France is not the best school of virtue that one can be in. It is only on the outside of the walls that one protests one's innocence; in the inside each one rivals the other in telling how many crimes he has committed."

Jean Marais might, perhaps, have gone on for some time longer entertaining the count with his views of society; but at that moment Monsieur de St. Medard entered, and the valet withdrew. The viscount came to propose a new arrangement, although it had only been that morning determined that they were to stay for three or four days longer at Pontgibaud, in order that the good Abbé Arnoux might be the better enabled to bear a journey.

"You will think me somewhat whimsical," said Monsieur de St. Medard; "but the truth is, I begin much to doubt the skill of our worthy surgeon here, and I am anxious that the abbé should have more scientific advice and better care. We can easily have a litter made, in which his bed may be laid, and he himself carried to Clermont without any fatigue."

"Oh! if he arrives at Clermont," cried the countess, "he must not stop short of the Chateau d'Artonne; and the better care and tendance he will have with us will make up for the short additional distance."

Thus, then, was it settled. The remainder of that day was passed in constructing the litter, and rendering it as comfortable as circumstances would allow; and early on the following morning the whole party set out upon their return, the sick man being borne on the shoulders of four stout Auvergnats, with a relay of bearers following; by which means he was brought without much fatigue to Clermont, and thence to the Chateau d'Artonne.

The viscount and Francis de Langy accompanied him on horseback; but the count and countess, with Julie, had gone on, and were ready to receive their guests on the terrace before the house. While Monsieur Arnoux was carried up to the comfortable chamber which had been prepared for him, and Julie lingered for a minute or two with Francis de Langy in the gardens looking at the setting sun, Monsieur de St. Medard followed his host and hostess into the chateau to examine the contents of a large packet which the count said had been waiting for him for several days, but which the servants had foolishly neglected to forward.

The moment the viscount read the first lines, he exclaimed, "This is very unfortunate! A summons to Versailles, my dear D'Artonne, to give his majesty information regarding Pondicherry. It has reached me somewhat late, and there must be no more delay; we must depart to-morrow without fail."

Julie and Francis were entering at the very moment that he uttered the last words, and

would be difficult to describe the look of consternation which came upon those two young faces at the tidings they heard. Madame d'Artonne marked it with a smile, and exclaimed at once, "But the abbé cannot go; and Francis shall not, I declare!"

"Leave him with us, St. Medard," said the count; "he is in duty bound to stay and nurse his tutor. We will keep him, too, as a pledge that you yourself come back, and fulfil your promise to us of staying at least a week."

Monsieur de St. Medard looked towards Francis de Langy; and though the young man cast his eyes upon the ground, and expressed no wish of any kind, yet it needed little skill to perceive that his inclinations turned not towards Versailles.

The matter, then, was settled as the Count d'Artonne proposed; and although we have not said much hitherto of Julie's feelings in regard to Francis de Langy, yet it must be acknowledged that her young heart beat joyfully with sensations she never thought of inquiring into. The age had not come with her for shrinking from the first approaches of love, for trembling at the presence of the new spirit within her. At that age love assumes not his form of power and might, overawing the heart and mastering all the senses; but, on the contrary, he comes in the sweeter and gentler form of the winged child, his quiver hidden, and his bow behind his back. Young, happy friendship is the name he takes; and all Julie thought she wished to keep was the kind companion whom chance had thrown so fortunately in her way. Perhaps she might think it a little strange that she was so very, very glad he was going to stay; but then that was easily accounted for: he was so noble, he was so kind. He was the first companion, too, whom she had ever had; the first to whom her heart and mind had opened, the first who had entered into all her thoughts and feelings, the first who had taught her what it was to have a brother. All these reasons were summed up in a moment in the mind of Julie; and so little idea had she of what was beneath them all, that she expressed her joy warmly and openly; while Francis, on the contrary, said not a word, though his looks were quite sufficient.

A messenger had been sent forward for the most skilful surgeon in the neighbourhood; and in about half an hour he arrived at the chateau, much to the satisfaction of Monsieur de St. Medard, who was anxious to hear some really good opinion upon the case of the poor Abbé Arnoux. Unwilling, however, to give any bias to the man of healing, he suffered the surgeon to visit his patient alone, and waited in a neighbouring chamber for his coming forth for nearly an hour.

When the surgeon at length appeared, his opinion of the case was very doubtful. "I have hope," he said, "I have much hope that a perfect recovery may be effected. But still, I will by no means assure you, sir, that such will be the case; the injuries received have been very severe, the consequences will be long and difficult to deal with, and the result, I must say—though I hope for the best—is uncertain."

"Do you believe that conversation may be hurtful to your patient?" demanded the viscount; "for, as I am unexpectedly obliged to go to Versailles, I should like to sit with him for an hour to-night."

"Oh! you may do so," replied the surgeon; "it will not injure him, if you leave him whenever you see he is becoming fatigued."

CHAPTER XII

It was between nine and ten at night when Monsieur de St. Medard, having been told that the Abbé Arnoux had obtained an hour's sleep and was much refreshed, entered his room to bid him farewell before his departure for Paris. Approaching his bed with a quiet and cautious step, the viscount sat down on a chair at his side, and, looking at the calm and placid though worn features of the good ecclesiastic, he said, "You look better, Arnoux; your journey seems to have done you good."

"I feel much better," replied the abbé; "I feel much better, my dear friend. I seem to breathe more freely here. I thank God for it most sincerely, Monsieur de St. Medard; and I can assure you, whatever you may think, that it is the greatest of all comforts to be able to bless and thank God for any happiness or any mere relief that He sends us."

The viscount smiled. "I admire religion very much, you know, abbé," he said, "and think it an excellent thing; but yet I cannot see how it makes any difference. A man is happy, or unhappy; he suffers pain, or is relieved; but it matters very little to him, methinks, whence the relief or the happiness comes."

"Not at all!" replied the abbé, with a degree of eagerness which conquered his corporeal weakness: "it matters in the most essential degree. The higher and the finer emotions of the heart are all of them the sources of our most intense delight, and none more so than gratitude. A slight difficulty of breathing is easily borne, and to be relieved from it is a very ordinary comfort looked at abstractedly; but when we trace it up to the mercy of God, and look upon it as a fresh motive for thankfulness to Him who has given us a thousand others, a more expansive joy takes possession of the breast. The satisfaction is doubled by gratitude to the hand whence the relief comes; ay, and moreover, in each indication of mercy towards us, we find the materials of confidence, hope, and expectation."

"My good abbé," said the viscount, "you know I never like to talk upon these subjects; not because I wish in any degree to shut my own ears, but because I never like to say one word which may shake the faith of other people—a faith in which they are happy, and which I have no right to disturb. But when you speak upon this subject, one must answer you; and I will only point out that you, good devoted gentlemen, are like our loyal grandfathers in the time of Louis the Fourteenth, who used to go to the Bastile with the most humble resignation, and experience all the pleasures of gratitude when they were let out again after two or three years' imprisonment. He who has now sent you relief rolled down the rocks upon you; your gratitude in the one case would be naturally counterbalanced by your indignation in the other, if you did not regard God as a despotic king, like our Grand Monarque in the eyes of our countrymen a century ago."

"We regard Him as an all-wise one," said the abbé; "and that, my dear friend, makes a very great difference. Those who look upon a mere mortal as all-wise commit a very great sin, taking from the only Being who can possess such an attribute a part of his glory to robe a human idol withal. But if, in our belief of God's infinite wisdom and infinite goodness, we feel our hearts raised with joyful thankfulness for every act of

mercy, the same convictions bring resignation, and deep confidence, and humble hope, at every act of chastisement which He may perform. Thus, every pleasure is heightened, and every pain diminished, by tracing each to the same great Source of wisdom and goodness."

The viscount paused thoughtfully for a moment or two. The truth of what the abbé said was apparent, but he would not grasp it, as Monsieur Arnoux wished, and he ended his revery by replying, "Yes, I know it is a very pleasant thing; I always thought so, and ever wished that I possessed it; but one's will has no power over one's convictions, my dear abbé, and my mind has been made up many years."

"But upon good grounds?" demanded the abbé. "How many changes in our views, Monsieur de St. Medard, take place in twenty years; how do our powers of reasoning become acuminated by time and exercise? Do you think that the same arguments would convince you to-day that convinced you a quarter of a century ago?"

"I really do not know," replied the viscount; "I am very hard to convince, my dear abbé, and am growing more and more so every day of my life. But what I wished to talk to you about," he continued, very willing to change the subject, "was quite another affair. I came to tell you that I have received a summons to Versailles, and may not return for a fortnight or three weeks. In the mean time, Francis will remain here with you; and, at my return, I hope to find you perfectly well again."

The abbé shook his head. "Francis was here a minute ago," he said: "he told me you were going; and that is the reason, my dear friend, that I venture to speak with you upon a subject very near my heart. Pray, listen to me for a few moments patiently. I believe, St. Medard, that we shall never meet again: I had wished that you might see me die, for I believed that the sight of how a fellow-being can meet the approach of death in Christian hope and faith might produce at least a new train of thought which would lead you to quit the fatal errors which you have imbibed, and which render the grave a dark and gloomy abode indeed."

"You mistake, my dear friend," answered the viscount; "we philosophers, I can assure you, do not look upon the approach of annihilation with the horror that you, perhaps, suppose:* believing that death is but a more complete sleep, I could lay my head down to-morrow in the grave with as little care as upon my pillow this night."

"And without the hope of awaking?" demanded the abbé.

The viscount nodded his head.

"And with no fear of that waking?" said Monsieur Arnoux.

"None," answered his friend.

"I am sorry for it," replied the abbé: "what hopes do you not exclude yourself from; what glorious expectations do you not shut out; what sources of high and generous feeling do you not batten down and forcibly repress? I speak merely of this world, even supposing that there were not another. By the loss of its promises, its principles, its objects, you lose fully one half of the joys which man may derive from the abundant springs of felicity in his own mixed nature."

"I am inclined to believe that we do, my dear abbé," said the viscount: "at all events, we lose a great deal; and, among other things, we lose those barriers, and those inducements, which supply the place of a fine moral sense to at least three quarters of mankind. It is for this very reason, because I believe religion to be both a very happy and a very beneficial ingredient in the cup of life, that I never give voice to my own opinions, and would very willingly see the promulgation of such doctrines prohibited by law."

"Then what," asked the abbé, in return, "what do you hold to be the origin of all religion? How did it arise; whence did it spring? Here is what you acknowledge to be a principle which gives happiness and virtue; which is strong enough to supply the place of moral sense, where it is wanting; which is beneficial to society, and excellent for man himself; and yet it is altogether false, wrong, absurd! If it is a falsehood, it is an immorality; and by your own rules, as I have heard them a thousand times expounded, that which is immoral must be baleful in its effects. Whence did this extraordinary and anomalous excellence spring?"

"According to my belief, my dear abbé," replied the viscount, "from the heated imaginations of the East, fashioned afterward into a peculiar form by some very wise and very good men, and receiving additions and alterations, from time to time, as the necessities of society required such changes."

"And all these very wise and good men," said the abbé, "while every one of them condemns the slightest deviation from truth, is engaged in promulgating falsehoods, ay, and in manufacturing them wholesale."

"But for the very best and greatest purposes," cried the viscount, a little heated.

"What!" exclaimed the abbé; "the good and the wise are to have a monopoly of falsehood, according to your code, and to use it for their purposes, and theirs alone? I am afraid, my dear viscount, that your ethics somewhat halt, and that your idea of good and wise men teaching lies, and at the same time denouncing lying, is not a bit less anomalous and inconceivable than that of a whole system of falsehood and absurdity unworthy of the belief of any reasonable man, producing, when called religion, the happiest effects for individuals and society. One proposition or the other must be true: either religion is false, wicked, and detrimental, and those who framed it shameless impostors; or it is beneficial, blessed, and excellent, with God for its origin, and truth for its foundation."

"My dear abbé," replied Monsieur de St. Medard, after musing thoughtfully for a moment or two, and apparently finding a difficulty in reconciling the admissions he had made with the conclusions naturally deduced from them: "my dear abbé, it is not for me to explain how these things are. You asked me how I thought religion arose: I say what I suppose to be possibly the case; I do not mean absolutely to assert that it is so. If I am to be convinced, you must bring forward proofs to show that what you believe is true, and not attempt to puzzle me by making me explain a state of things I see exist, but to the origin and history of which I have paid but very little attention."

"My first object, my dear friend," replied the abbé, in a low tone, "is to puzzle you. Nay, answer me not with a jest, St. Medard! You unbelievers have a great habit of jesting with your own minds, killing an argument with a sarcasm, and dismissing an unpleasant truth

* Very nearly the same words have been ascribed to Gibbon; but such opinions were common just before the first French Revolution.

with a sneer. My first object, I repeat, is to puzzle you; or, in short, to cast your preconceived notions upon these subjects into confusion. I know that you will not leave them so; I know that your first task will be to search, to inquire, to examine. Your mind is too clear, too precise, too strong to rest in doubt; and I believe that in the search, if you can but throw the prejudices of years behind you, you will find truth—that which man should seek beyond anything else."

"Indeed, my dear abbé," replied the viscount, "you cannot love it better than I do; but I will not suffer you to go on to-night, such discussions are too much for you."

"Nay, nay!" cried the abbé, eagerly, raising himself up on his arm, "you must, indeed, hear me to-night, St. Medard, or you will leave me unhappy; you will darken my bed of death. Only give me a little of that drink, and hear me."

The viscount gave him the glass, and sat down again by his bedside; and, after a momentary pause, the abbé went on again.

"My object," he said, "is to prompt you to search—to search with a mind devoid of prejudice, with a heart clear of passion, with a spirit full of humility, with a mind open to truth. In the first place, then, I have sought from your own principles to make you doubt that religion springs from the imaginations of men, moulded into certain forms to suit certain purposes by men of genius. I think I *have* made you doubt it."

"You have," said the viscount, gravely; "and I will examine into that matter."

"Do," rejoined Monsieur Arnoux; "and the more you examine, the brighter will be the light that breaks upon you. You will find religion in some shape in every age and tribe of intellectual beings. You will find it becoming purer and purer as it approaches nearer to that grand stream of doctrine which all who have dispensed it assert to flow direct from God. You will there find everything imbodied that morals can require, and the whole concluded and distinguished by the doctrine that God is truth. I call upon you, as a reasonable man, to satisfy your own mind of how religion rose in the human heart, of how this peculiar religion which Christians profess was first received, and how it has been transmitted. Remember, I speak of the religion itself, and not at all of the comments of men, which have sometimes, perhaps, elucidated, but often embarrassed it. This is my first object—to make you doubt and examine. If you find that you have not been right upon this point, you may perhaps doubt and examine some others; and then the first great inquiry, on which rests all others, will of course present itself once more to your mind, 'Is there, or is there not, a God,' who has given this knowledge of his existence to every tribe of earth; and who, it is asserted, has revealed himself, his attributes, and his will to some particular nations?"

"And why not to all?" demanded the viscount.

"That you may discover," replied the abbé, "as you go on; though I do not say that every question which you ask may be answered."

"And why not?" inquired the viscount.

"Because, my dear friend," replied the abbé, "there never yet was a man upon this earth whose mind could comprehend a thousandth part of the phenomena that are going on in this little globe—still less of those which are taking place in all the millions of worlds that roll in what we *call the sky*—still less in the Infinite beyond. *When you* can comprehend all these things, explain, discuss, and judge them, it will be then time for you to say to the God who made them, 'Why didst thou thus, and thus?' but not before."

The viscount paused for a moment, fixing an intense gaze upon the blue star-lit heaven, which might be seen through the window of the sick man's chamber, and to which he had pointed as he spoke.

"That would close all inquiry," said Monsieur de St. Medard, at length.

"Not so," replied the abbé; "not so. You must first learn to believe in God before you can justly reverence him. All I seek is to make you approach that inquiry with the humility and the awe that are becoming; not to start away at vague objections, but to see whether there be not sufficient proof that there is a God—proof irrefragable, demonstrable; and, having arrived at that point, your mind is too logical to reject the notion of his existence because you cannot comprehend the motives of his actions."

"Certainly, certainly," exclaimed the viscount: "once afford me a clear, satisfactory proof that there does exist a God, and to his governance of the world we must bow without inquiry. Give me a proof of his existence, that is all that I require."

"It is in every herb and every flower," replied the abbé; "in every fruit and every seed, in every being and in every thought, in every limb and feature, in every bloodvessel and every nerve, in every grain of sand and in the universe, in every part, and in the whole! Search, search, my dear friend; go forth and search, and God will meet you everywhere. Whenever the heart of man demands, in sincerity and truth, 'Where art thou, God?' the Almighty answers, 'Here!'"

"I do not exactly understand you," replied the viscount, "although I perceive that you mean to impress generally that God is to be traced in what you call his works. I see not how you will prove that all the phenomena that we behold are not attributable to any other self-existing cause. Why should I at all suppose that what is to-day was not yesterday? Or, if there has been a change, as we know there has, in society and other things, why should I not attribute that change to the ordinary operation of one material substance upon another? We know that motion is produced by substances in certain relations to each other, and with motion and matter the whole seems to me to require no other explanation. There is nothing observable in the whole world that cannot be referred to these two causes."

"Yes," replied the abbé; "there is the most important of all."

"And what is that?" demanded Monsieur de St. Medard.

"Design," answered his friend: "the adaption of particular means to a particular end, which is observable in every part of the universe, but more especially in the highest classes of organized beings: which proves, beyond all possibility of doubt, the existence of an intellectual Agent proposing a particular object to be attained in the construction of a certain being, and arriving at that object by the most complex and wonderful machinery that it is possible to produce—machinery which shows in every part some of the attributes of God, his almighty power, his infinite wisdom, his unceasing love for the creatures that he forms. Design, my dear friend, design, that is the proof of the Godhead, which you cannot attribute to matter and motion."

The viscount remained in deep thought for several minutes, and at the end of that time he replied, "I will search, I will examine, my dear abbé. One should always hold one's mind open to conviction; and if I do find proofs of design, so conclusive as to convince me that the ordinary self-arrangement of matter in motion has not produced the effect, it will go far to make me believe there is a principle of some kind, which you, perhaps, may call God, and which imagination may invest with various attributes or qualities; though I, perhaps, may look upon that principle as an established geometrical law, without passions, feelings, sensations, but operating through all nature by fixed rules."

"I will never cavil at words," replied the abbé; "and I understand what you mean: though the very difficulty of expressing your views—nay, the impossibility of making them clear, without a contradiction in terms—should in itself lead you to believe that, in flying from some difficulties, you plunge into still greater. You speak of a law: where was there ever a law without a lawmaker? You talk of a rule: who laid it down? You have no answer to any of these questions, but that it was an inevitable necessity! Inevitable necessity does not design, does not adapt means to an end; and if you admit, as you must and will do, that there has been one great Creator of all things, you will soon see his attributes issuing as a natural consequence from his existence, and displayed in his works. You, who look upon intellect with such high and proud esteem, will not be long, after you have admitted the existence of a God, in admitting also that he must be the perfection of intellect; and that he who raises you yourself above the brute by so many noble qualities must possess in himself the acme and essence of all those gifts with which he has endowed you. But I have now gained my object; you have promised to search, you have promised me to examine. I require nothing more, unless it be that you examine with humility, and remember how very little of the whole subject you can comprehend; although every man can comprehend fully enough to perceive that—whatever be the truth in regard to a thousand accessory circumstances—the grand doctrines of religion must be true. I speak as a dying man, my friend; as one who, in all probability, is about to part with you here forever, but one who, nevertheless, hopes to meet with you in another world, where time, and doubt, and change will all be at an end."

The viscount pressed his hand kindly, saying, "I will not continue the subject with you now, my friend, for in your zeal you have somewhat already exhausted yourself; and I, who, unhappily, entertain little hope of that meeting in another world, would fain enjoy your society a little longer in this. The surgeon, however, gives me good hope of you; and you must try all you can to live, abbé, in order that you may guide my researches: for it is a wide and trackless ocean that lies between this world and another, if there be such a thing; and the ignorant voyager much needs some one better instructed to give him a chart."

"It is, indeed, a wide ocean," said the abbé, "full of waves and dangers, storms and tempests; and, like the Atlantic before the adventurous Genoese first crossed it, no one comes back to tell us what is beyond. But as to the eye of Columbus, enlightened by true genius, it was self-evident that, to harmonize with the known world in which he dwelt, there must be another continent beyond the wide Western sea; so, to the eye of the religious man, enlightened by revelation, it is self-evident that beyond the ocean of time there must be another world to equalize all that is unequal in this."

The figure that the abbé used, though an imperfect one, had fully as much effect upon Monsieur de St. Medard as all the rest of his reasoning: for so constituted is the mind of man, that it with the greatest difficulty grasps abstractions, even when the most accustomed to their consideration; and an immense number of mistakes in metaphysical reasonings are to be traced to man's tendency to employ material facts, or the terms that represent them, as a sort of covert illustration of abstract ideas; for metaphysical science has not even yet an accurate technology.

However, the viscount once more repeated, "I will examine, my friend; and, should I find that I have been mistaken, I will not scruple to own it; for if it be a credit to any man to overcome the prejudices of others, it is still a greater credit to overcome his own. But now, my dear abbé, I will leave you, trusting most sincerely that you may be restored to health, and that I shall find you well at my return."

"Farewell!" replied the abbé: "it may be so; and if it be, I trust that it will be for the purpose of seeing some fruit rise from the seed that has been sown this night."

Once more the viscount pressed his hand, with a faint smile at the good man's zeal, and left him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"As you please, my dear Francis, as you please," said Monsieur de St. Medard, with his foot upon the step of the carriage; "the fellow is a rogue undoubtedly."

"I know it," replied Francis de Langy; "but I think his roguery only goes to a certain extent; and a valet de chambre, my dear uncle—"

"Must have a certain quantity of roguery," said Monsieur de St. Medard, "as a hair-dresser must have a pot of pomatum; ha, Francis? Well, my dear boy, I leave it entirely to yourself: only let him be perfectly cleared of this other business, let there not be the slightest doubt upon that score; and then if, out of gratitude for the service he has rendered, you choose to take him as your personal attendant, do so. Some reward he must certainly have, but consider the matter well, and you have my full authority either to receive him as your valet, or to give him a hundred Louis as his recompense."

"Perhaps," answered Francis de Langy, after a moment's thought, "perhaps the best plan will be to offer him his choice, whether he will take the hundred Louis or the place."

"Oh! he will take the hundred Louis," replied the viscount.

"Then I shall be the better satisfied not to give him the place," said Francis de Langy; "and it will be some sort of test of his character."

"But scarcely fair, I think," rejoined Monsieur de St. Medard: "you owe him a recompense of some kind, Francis; and now, though every office is venal in France under the government, it has not become so in gentlemen's houses, and we do not put for sale to the best bidder at charge

were no sombre looks, there was no air of despair, there was nothing of the dark and hideous aspect of imprisonment about them. Loud and uproarious laughter was ringing through the court; every group was grinning, chattering, talking, sporting; and, if it had not been for the prison-dress, the soiled and ragged coat, half-gray, half-black, which many of them wore, and the indescribable, but not to be mistaken, expression of habitual vice which appeared in the countenances of the greater part of those there present, one might have supposed them a party met for merry-making. Everything upon the superficies, in short, was not only cheerful, but gay; the misery was in the heart, and they kept it there. Too often, indeed, do we see it so in life. I recollect an old picture in which one had a sort of allegorical section of the earth; and what is below? The upper half showed a beautiful landscape, and gay groups dancing, with some of the follies and some of the faults of life; the lower half represented the grave and hell, with corruption, remorse, and punishment; and I never see reckless gayety in a bad man without thinking of that picture, and asking myself, What is below?

The group in front of the prison-yard consisted of four or five men, sporting together with somewhat rude jocularity: one suddenly leaping over the head of another; his companion, again, tripping up his feet; a third, almost a giant in size and strength, lifting the least of the party from the ground by the waistband, and holding him out at arm's-length, as men hold out a lap-dog; and all of them, though sometimes receiving a bruise or a cut, and swearing at each other with foul and blasphemous oaths, resuming the tone of sport the moment after, with as much good-humour as if they had never injured a fellow-being in their lives. A little farther on, a small monkey-faced man, perched upon an inverted pail, seemed holding forth to a large auditory with a great deal of extravagant gesticulation, but with the gravest and most solemn countenance possible; while all his hearers were rolling, convulsed with immoderate fits of laughter, and even a guard, who was standing near on duty, grinning from ear to ear. As Francis de Langy passed by them, he found that the mimic was preaching, as he called it, to his dear flock; parodying a sermon with a torrent of filth and blasphemy such as was never heard by man but in a similar place.

A number of other groups were scattered abroad; but the eye of the young gentleman at that moment fell upon one in the corner of the yard, consisting of three or four persons, whereof Jean Marais was one. Here, too, all was gayety; and Jean seemed to be entertaining his hearers by some story fully as much as the preacher was amusing his by the sermon. Two of his companions, however, deserve a brief description; and they shall have it. The first was a tall, athletic young man, probably not more than two or three and twenty, with a frank and open countenance, but a certain sort of daring and determined expression, which augured no great scruples in following out his own views and purposes. There was, indeed, a look of thought about his eyes and brow, which was visible even through the laugh which he was bestowing upon Jean Marais's tale; and as he sat in the shade *with his hat* on his knee, twisting round and *round some* eagle's feathers which were stuck in *the front of it*, Francis de Langy fancied that his mind would fain have wandered away to other things, if it had not been for the sort of conventional indifference which men in his situation believe themselves bound to assume.

He was not dressed in the prison garb; he another, who was seated by him, displayed indication of some serious offence. He was so tall as the other by nearly three inches, was gigantic in depth of chest and breadth shoulders. His countenance, which was somewhat pale, with a dark bluish beard, wore a and good-humoured expression, without slightest trace of care or anxiety. He laughed loud and merrily; and the only thing which could show that the mind was not in a state perfectly placid repose, ready to submit itself implicitly to any pleasant impression that might offer, was the wandering glance of the keen eye, which seemed continually searching for something that it did not find. The face of Jean Marais was turned obliquely from Francis de Langy, so that the worthy *valet de chambre* did not see the young gentleman approaching; and he went on with his narrative in the same tone he had been using, in order to rise above all the multitudinous sounds with which the court of the prison was ringing. The ear of the visiter thus caught several sentences, and Francis was not a little pleased to find that there was none of the profane and ribald licentiousness in his conversation which he had just heard poured forth from the mouth of the man who was preaching. Jean Marais was relating his early adventures in the house of Madame de Banasse, and the picture he gave of that good lady herself, her frivolity, her malice, her affectation, was so clever and so droll as to compel an unwilling smile upon the lips of his unperceived auditor. The subject was, at that moment, the marchioness's first anxiety at the prolonged absence of her son; and Jean Marais mocked her tone, and her words, and her looks, as he described her calling up all the men-servants, one after another, to communicate her apprehensions to them; hinting, moreover, that her vanity was not insensible to the admiration of the lowest footboy in her household. He took off, too, her whole demeanour: he wriggled, he hemmed, he panted, he rolled his eyes about, he sighed, he fluttered, and, laying his hand upon his left side, he exclaimed, in the shrill treble of mock sensibility, "Ah, my poor heart!" Then starting up, he prepared to tear his hair; but suddenly perceiving the young gentleman standing near, he stopped, crying, "Ah! Monsieur le Baron, you have woke me from a delicious dream; I was just then Madame de Banasse, enjoying the excitement of her son's disappearance."

Francis de Langy now took him aside, and gave him the information he had been sent to communicate; at which Jean Marais seemed a little pleased, saying, "I shall be glad enough to get out, for we have not the best school of morals here, sir, and my virtue is of a somewhat delicate constitution; yet, after all," he added, "I am not sorry I came in again, seeing that I met with that poor lad, who sits there with his hat in his hand, and who wants a little counsel and consolation. I wish, sir, you could speak to the Count d'Artonne about him."

"Who is he?" demanded Francis de Langy, eyeing the man with the eagle's feathers in his hat; "who is he, and how came he in here?"

Jean Marais drew him a little farther away

and then replied, "He is a poor devil who has been brought in for poaching—upon the count's lands, too. I am very much afraid he's guilty; in fact, he does not deny it."

"That is a serious offence," said Francis de Langy, who naturally entertained the prejudices of his class and his times in regard to the rights of the chase; any infringement of which was at that time regarded in France as a crime nearly equal to murder, and certainly very much deeper than the breach of some commandments in the decalogue.

"It is, indeed, sir," replied Jean Marais; "and yet it is a wonderfully tempting thing to see a nice, soft, gray roebuck within forty or fifty yards of the muzzle of your gun. However, this lad has a better excuse; and I am sure, if he did not poach, I don't see what he was to do."

"How so?" demanded Francis de Langy. "What excuse has he to allege?"

"Why, in the first place, sir," replied Jean Marais, "you know there are certain provinces in France where every one has the right of killing and eating whatever wild animals he likes, and this young man came from one of those. In the next place, you see, poor devil! there was nothing else for him to do: he and the rest of his people, some two years ago, took a little farm belonging to Monsieur d'Artonne, up among the hills; but, being Huguenots, the people around, who were all Catholics, would have nothing to say to them. They are in a state of complete excommunication, though they are as good souls as ever lived. Late in the spring, and during the summer, there is plenty of work upon the farm; but during a great part of autumn, all winter, and two thirds of the spring, there is nothing to do in that country but to walk about the hills and woods with a gun. He kept himself from bears, and wolves, and beasts of prey, for a long time; but it is hard to refrain a shot at a buck or a doe, a hare, or a wild boar, especially when a man's hungry and is fond of venison."

"It is," said Francis de Langy; "and I will speak to Monsieur d'Artonne about him. I should not think he was inclined to deal harshly with any one. Was he apprehended by the count's people?"

"No, sir," answered Jean Marais; "he was apprehended by the *maréchaussée*. They caught him with a roe over his shoulders, and took him in the fact. It was on a part of the count's ground so far distant from the chateau, that Monsieur d'Artonne takes no pains with the game upon it."

"I will speak to him, I will speak to him," said Francis de Langy; "and, if he has any power, I doubt not he will have him set free. Who is that other man with whom you were talking just now? He has not the air of an Auvergnat."

"Oh, *pardie*, no!" replied Jean Marais: "he is from the north; one of the *écorcheurs* you may have heard of; a *brave garçon*, nevertheless."

Francis de Langy heard him with some surprise; for, perhaps, among all the bloodthirsty villians that Europe has produced, there never was a race so remorseless and sanguinary as the *écorcheurs* of France in the eighteenth century. "I should suppose," he said, with a grave and displeased expression of countenance, "that there was nothing good to be found in such a man, and no advantage in his companionship."

Jean Marais smiled. "Not much, perhaps, sir," he answered; "but, when I am put in a place like this, I am obliged to choose the best society it affords; and the prison of Clermont, sir, is not the saloon of Versailles, or even the *salle-à-manger* of the *café* Regnard."

"But you do not mean to say," cried Francis de Langy, "that he is among the best that you could have found here?"

"In good truth, I do, sir," replied Jean Marais. "The three men with whom I was talking are the three most respectable people in the place. We four are the only part of the congregation who do not talk blasphemy and obscenity from morning till night, which is none the wittier in my ears because it is wrapped in *argot*.* Now, we four have amused ourselves by telling our histories in good plain French, laughing a little at our betters, perhaps, but saying nothing here which we should be ashamed to say in any other place; though some of us might not like, indeed, to make such full confessions. As to the *écorcheur*, he is one of the best born and best educated among us; the son of a great farmer in Picardy, who bred him up to the trade he followed, and taught him to cultivate the fields by day and to rob houses and passengers by night. All we Frenchmen have very little care for human life; we don't much mind losing our own, or taking that of another; and Jacques Braye assured me, not an hour ago, that he never thought there was any great harm in what he was doing, till his father was broken on the wheel about three months ago, and he himself escaped with difficulty into Auvergne. He then began to fancy that it was not quite right, after all, to take men's money, and, perhaps, their lives too; though the only thing he had ever objected to before was once when his father broiled an old Jew alive, in order to make him confess where he had hidden his money. It is very shocking, sir, I acknowledge; but yet, if you will compare him with the other men in the place, you will find him one of the honestest persons in it. I will answer for it, that, except the four who were sitting in the corner there together, there is not a man who repents of anything that he has done in the past, or proposes anything for the future, but to be revenged upon society by some new crime as soon as he can get out. Now, poor Jacques Braye does repent very heartily, though he'll be broken on the wheel within a fortnight from this time, if they bring him to trial. But, at all events, I can assure you, sir, that a man who has committed even a very great crime, but has not long habits of vice, is a less dangerous companion than one who has worn away every good feeling as well as good principle in the practice of small delinquencies, and is only prevented from doing something worse by fear or caution."

Francis de Langy thought there might be some truth in Jean Marais's observation; but, before he could reply, his companion gave him a hint that it would be better to get out of the court as fast as possible.

"That old foul-mouthed Escrve," he said in a whisper, "has had his eye upon you for the last minute, and he is now whispering with some of his companions. I know what it means very well, and in another instant you will be stripped of everything that is worth having upon you."

While he spoke, Francis de Langy moved towards the door; and, luckily, at the same moment the guard crossed over towards them; for there

* Otherwise *slang*.

was a sudden movement among the prisoners in that direction, which showed that their operations were about to commence. A howl of mortification and derision met the young gentleman's ear as he entered the passage leading away from the court; and with not a little satisfaction he quitted the den of thieves, in which his future valet had been placed for the completion of his education.

CHAPTER XIV.

The most corrupt invention of the corrupt race to which we belong—and we certainly did for many generations go on from one stage of moral putridity to another—was devised in France. It was neither more nor less than the venality of the officers of justice. All posts, in fact, were venal during several centuries in that country; and, although one might have expected that common sense and common honesty would have preserved the magistracy from such a taint, alas, it was not so! and those who were destined to administer the law among their fellow-subjects purchased their offices as they would a farm. Now, if a man chooses to buy the right of being shot at, and wearing a red or a blue coat, either by land or sea, there can be no great harm in letting him do so, especially where his appointment to any important command depends upon persons responsible for their conduct; but to sell the office of a judge is but in other terms to sell justice, and we may be very sure that the article will be adulterated before it comes to the general market.

The intendants of justice, police, and finance, as they were called, were personages sent from Paris into the various provinces of France to preside over certain districts with a curious, somewhat indefinite, and very extensive power. They were generally chosen from among the *Maîtres de Requêtes*, and were but too frequently subjected to any other influence than that of Themis. Corruption, as a machine, indeed, does not always work so ill as men may imagine; and though at first sight one would suppose that a system, in which an officer, purchasing his post at an enormous sum, and very often obtaining leave to purchase it only through the interest of a harlot, was sent down to dispense justice in a large district, must necessarily soon come to a stop by the general abhorrence, disgust, indignation, and resistance of those upon whom he exercised his functions; yet the thing went on for many years, and men were found—ay, men of gravity, station, and wisdom—to say of this, as of more than one iniquity in our own country, "It works well!"

Little less than kings in their own particular provinces, the intendants lived sumptuously, fared luxuriously, and had magnificent houses; and into the saloon of one of those dwellings, in the town of Clermont, we shall introduce the reader, in order that he may see and hear Monsieur d'Artonne and the intendant of that generality chatting over the events which brought the former thither. Nothing could be more exquisite and luxurious than the furniture of the apartment. Every article had been brought from Paris, and an artist of celebrity had come from the capital for the express purpose of painting and gilding the panels of the wainscot. It was not difficult, in short, to fancy one's self in one of the royal chambers at Versailles; and as Monsieur d'Artonne looked around him when first ushered into the saloon, which was then vacant, he could not help asking himself, "How is all this splendour obtained?"

In a moment or two after the intendant himself appeared. He was a man of about forty-five; thin, but well formed; with keen, dark, black eyes, an atrabilious complexion, and raven hair without a single thread of silver mingling with it. His manner was calm and mild, but impressive; his step noiseless, but firm; his voice sweet in tone, but very penetrating; his words well chosen, but studiously indefinite. One was convinced that he was a man of great abilities, yet one knew not why; one was pleased with his demeanour, yet felt that he was unapproachable. There was nothing repellent, indeed: you might see him; you might question him, you might argue with him, without any fear of a rebuff, but you would discover nothing more than the outside. He was like some object encased in crystal, which you may handle and look at forever without being able to touch. On the present occasion he was dressed, as usual, with the most scrupulous neatness, but all in black. He was a man full of proprieties, and would not for the world have appeared either in a garb of a gay and glittering character, or in one in the least degree discomposed, or inferior to his station. His coat was of the richest and most expensive velvet, fitting his person beautifully, without ply or wrinkle. His black silk stockings were the finest that could be made for money; his buttons were of jet, with a small diamond in the centre of each. The very hilt and hangers of his sword were of the same grave hue, but exquisite in their workmanship; and it was clear that he looked upon his functions as too important and solemn not to require a dress and demeanour perfectly harmonizing therewith.

Approaching the count with quick but easy and regular steps, he made him a low and ceremonious bow; then took his hand, and assured him, with a face which expressed fully as much pleasure as if it had been sparkling with smiles, that he was delighted to see him; and Monsieur d'Artonne had every reason to think that it was so; for the intendant, ever since that officer had come down to Clermont—now somewhere about a year and a half—had shown him the most marked respect and attention. Indeed, nobody in the whole surrounding country had received such testimonies of distinguished regard; and, to say the truth, as the count was unaware of any power to serve or please that great personage, his civilities seemed somewhat extraordinary to the object thereof.

We may as well let the reader into a part of the secret, however. The intendant, on being despatched to that district by the king, had made accurate and scrupulous inquiries as to the fortune, character, and family of every gentleman in the vicinity. He had found that the count possessed large property, that he was a man very generally loved and respected throughout the neighbourhood, that he was not easily swayed by passions or prejudices of any kind, and that he had an only daughter, who was almost certain of being the heiress of very extensive estates. Now, the intendant might well calculate that, by some one or other of these qualities, the friendship of Monsieur d'Artonne might in future be very serviceable to him. His mind rested with complacence upon the idea of being son-in-law to his noble friend, receiving a rich dower with the count's daughter, and allying himself to an old and distinguished family. Monsieur d'Ar-

onne's countenance and support, too, in the execution of his functions, might be of no small value; and, at all events, pleasant society and friendly intercourse with people in high station were things very desirable in the eyes of one who himself had risen from a family not of the most elevated class, for at that period there were many grades in the French nobility, with some difficulty in stepping from the one to the other.

It must not be supposed, indeed, that he had laid any definite plan for seeking the hand of Julie d'Artonne. He very well knew that under existing circumstances such a thing would not be listened to for a moment; but, to use a not very elegant but expressive form of speech, he always considered what was upon the cards. Thus, there was probably no one in the province who had more influence with him than the count.

After various ceremonial greetings, such as the customs of the day required, Monsieur d'Artonne opened the business which brought him here by saying, "I come to speak with you, Monsieur l'Intendant, upon the case of a poor man who has been charged by Madame de Bausse with the commission of a crime upon apparently the most frivolous and absurd motives. Being not very fond of a prison, and somewhat impatient of the law's delay, he made his escape almost fortunately for me, I must say; for he was accidentally the means, during our late tour, of saving my daughter's life. By my advice, he has surrendered himself yesterday, and I come to request that you would cause him to be examined yourself, would look into the nature of the charge against him, and see whether there is sufficient cause for detaining him in prison any longer. If I could prevail upon you personally to investigate the matter, I should, I confess, be much gratified; for one cannot expect either such discrimination or such decision from inferior officers as from a gentleman of your eminence and authority."

The intendant heard him to an end without any reply, even by the movement of a muscle. With the greater part of the world, men are constantly making some sort of answer, false or true, as the case may be, while another is speaking to them, either by some interjected words, some gesture, or some change of countenance; but every now and then we find an individual who possesses from nature, or has acquired by art, a screen impenetrable to all eyes, by which he shrouds his thoughts from those the most anxious to discover them. The face of the intendant was one of these screens; he listened to whatever was said to him gravely, attentively, but without the slightest variation of look. His eyes even did not wink; and, whether the subject was grave or gay, pathetic or risible, all remained still. One would have thought he was a man destitute of all emotions.

As soon as Monsieur d'Artonne, however, had concluded, he replied, "It gives me the greatest satisfaction, my dear count, to hear any wish of yours, for to hear is but to satisfy. I will have the man brought before me immediately. Madame de Bausse is now in the town, for I saw her carriage pass some ten minutes ago. She shall be sent for too, and the matter shall be instantly investigated. She is, I understand, in sad distress, poor lady! at the disappearance of her son; and you, I think, my dear count, must be somewhat deeply affected by this affair, if report speaks true that an alliance was in contemplation—"

"Report does not speak true, Monsieur l'Intendant," exclaimed the Count d'Artonne, interrupting him with some vehemence. "In disposing of the hand of my daughter, I shall be guided but by one consideration—virtue, honour, and high qualities. I need not tell you that Monsieur de Bausse possessed none of these."

The intendant had quite good enough an opinion of himself to imagine that he had a fair chance, and, of course, his prepossessions in favour of Monsieur d'Artonne increased rather than diminished. His countenance, however, retained its impassibility; no one could have told that the count was not describing to him the building of a cowhouse, so gravely indifferent was his face; and his only reply was, "We had better, perhaps, proceed with the business immediately."

Some attendants were summoned by the tinkling of a small silver bell which stood upon the table, and an order in due form was sent to the lower prison for bringing Jean Marais to the intendant's house. A messenger was then despatched to seek Madame de Bausse through the town of Clermont; after which, the high officer and his guest sat chatting over the news of the day. Scarcely had five minutes elapsed, however, when the doors of the saloon were thrown open, and the Bishop of Clermont was announced, which, perhaps, was not satisfactory to the Count d'Artonne; the prelate being the brother of Madame de Bausse, and one very likely to adopt and support her views, not from any conviction that they were right, but from a tender regard for certain good things which the fair marquise had at her disposal.

We shall not have much to do, dear reader, with the estimable Bishop of Clermont; but, having an infinite horror of all those capricious rules and regulations by which ancient critics endeavoured to tie men down and to prevent them from following the course of the great teacher Nature, I shall take the liberty of giving a full-length portrait of a personage who had, it is true, no great influence upon the fate of our principal characters, but whose class—a class, luckily, now nearly extinct—had a very great influence, indeed, upon the whole world, both in a political and religious manner. In doing this, I repeat, I do but follow Nature: for how often is it in the march of life that a personage suddenly appears before us, strongly engaging our attention, remarkable in every respect, worthy of philosophical contemplation, and occupying the whole of our thoughts and attention for a short period; but then passing away immediately from our eyes, never being seen again, and affecting us in no other manner than by that moral influence which is exercised upon each human creature by the characters of those with whom his mind is brought in contact, either as a subject of their operation, or an active agent itself?

The Bishop of Clermont was a man of good family, some five years older than Madame de Bausse. He was now the head of the house; his elder brother having died childless, but not until he himself had entered the Church, and obtained considerable preferment therein. His family was poor in relation to their station in society; and, consequently, even after he had succeeded to his brother's estates, he experienced no regret at having embraced a profession in which celibacy was obligatory. At first, as a young man, he had felt very little disposed to become an ecclesiastic; for his character was worldly, his

passions were strong, his taste for pleasure acute; and he would have resisted, had it been according to the usages of his country and his times for the son of a noble family to show any choice in regard to the pursuits which lay before him. He had thought it very hard, while at the seminary where he was brought up, to forswear those indulgences for which he felt a strong propensity at an early age; but very soon after he had received the tonsure he made a world of discoveries in regard to the facilities of clerical life, which taught him to laugh at his former objections, by showing him that his pleasures only obtained an extended sphere by the gown that hid them.

As soon as this perception came upon him, he set himself to consider how he might best, in the circumstances which surrounded him, enjoy life and prolong its enjoyment; and, being of a shrewd, keen, and unscrupulous character, he speedily saw that the path had been clearly marked out by personages of his own views and inclinations, so that he had nothing to do but to follow upon a very beaten track. Decency was the first thing to be attended to; and accordingly, though a somewhat zealous director of fair penitents, he contrived to avoid scandal. The inconvenient rules and regulations which abridged the pleasures of the table were, without difficulty, evaded by any ecclesiastic who knew how to make a friend of his cook; so that public abstemiousness was fairly compensated by private indulgence. A number of other little sins, very pleasant to deal with, found a very convenient cloak in the robe of the Church: grasping avarice might allege charity as its excuse, and the hand that swept up louisd'ors might cleanse itself by the distribution of livres; the daily alms covering the daily exactions. Pride, too, might be quietly gratified by sinking the man in the ecclesiastic; and the honour of religion and the Church might be the watchword, when the real object was that for which angels fell.

He comprehended the whole scheme at once, and acted upon it with great skill; taking care, as the very first point of the plan, to smooth down all asperities, and to dress up each of his passions in a garb the most opposite to that which it wore with other men. Slander and malice were unknown to the good bishop; but sometimes they took the form of paternal reproof, sometimes that of benign unguardedness: he would let drop a word, that rankled for years, with a smiling and placid countenance; he would disseminate a calumny with an inefficient expression of disbelief. He would inquire into the most indecent particulars, and regale his imagination with prurient images, from zeal for the purity of his flock; and he would encourage the licentious jest by a tone of gentleness in his reproof. When it was necessary to persecute and to destroy, the spirit of religious fervour would seize him; and when he wished to favour and indulge, Christian charity and moderation were upon his lips.

Nature, however, has always provided herself with tell-tales; and the hypocrite has generally physical witnesses against him, which are difficult to silence. Thus our Tartuffe was "*gros et gras, et se portoit à merveille.*" See him, dear reader! see him as he enters the saloon of the intendant, with that slow, calm, and dignified step, stout, and overflowing with animal health, somewhat corpulent, but not greatly so; his rosy countenance close-shaved and smooth, his fat and luscious lips bearing a pleasant smile, his watery and erotic eyes possessing that peculiar fatness which the inspired writers have pointed out as the characteristic mark of the licentious! Look at the well-furnished double-chin hanging upon his smooth, plaited band; and mark those large animal ears, that rise on either side of his *calotte!* Do not overlook either the large, rounded, weighty calf of his leg, and the fine, small ankle, before he drops his robe over it, as soon as he finds that there are no women in the room; and consider well the graceful benignity with which he salutes the intendant, and the brotherly love with which he embraces his dear cousin D'Artonne! Oh! he is a worthy pillar of the Church! a noble preacher of a religion of abstinence and self-denial! a proper follower of the meekest and mildest of men!

Hark, too, how he declares to the count that the pleasure of his visit to the intendant is doubled by the unexpected satisfaction of finding him there! It is true that his eyes were fixed upon the door of the house from one of the windows of the episcopal residence at the very moment that Monsieur d'Artonne dismounted from his horse; it is true that the servants of that gentleman, each of whom he well knew, were then standing in the square; it is true Madame de Bausse was at that precise time in his own oratory, had remarked the count's visit to the intendant, and had wondered aloud what he could want there! But, of course, wrapped in heavenly musing, the bishop had neither seen nor heard, and was quite taken by surprise at finding his cousin in the saloon.

Monsieur d'Artonne understood him as well, perhaps, as one man can understand another; and, therefore, from the worthy bishop's asserting that he was surprised, the count was naturally led to conclude that he came thither for the purpose of seeing what he was doing. His reception of the prelate's gratulations was certainly somewhat cold—perhaps a little embarrassed. It is not always, indeed, easy to know how to deal with a disingenuous man; but the intendant saved Monsieur d'Artonne any explanations with the bishop, by inquiring, after a few brief words, if he could tell where Madame de Bausse was to be found in the town, and stating the business they were about to proceed with.

"I left her at the *Evêché*," replied the bishop: "I will see in a minute if she is still there;" and, without waiting to give ear to the intendant's entreaties that he would not take the trouble, and offers to send over a messenger to the marquisé immediately, the bishop walked out of the room, bowing, with a thousand smiles, and saying that he would be back again without delay. A considerable time, however, elapsed, without his making his appearance; and before the prelate had returned, it was announced to the intendant that the prisoner, Jean Marais, had been brought up, according to his directions. An order was given to keep him below for a few minutes longer; and in the end the folding-doors were again thrown open, and Madame de Bausse entered, leaning on her brother's arm. She was the picture of a faded coquette: her dress, which was not of mourning, for she had not yet given up the hope of seeing her son return, was in the height of the Parisian fashion, and might have become a girl of eighteen or twenty; nor had anything been omitted that art could do to lighten the load of years, at least in appearance. She was at least forty years of age; and, as her spirit was not the most quiet and gentle, those

forty years had wrought more serious ravages than is usually the case; but still, what between assistance from the perruquier, and abundant, but judicious dispensation of rouge and other pigments, padded additions to various parts of her person, shadings of lace, and ornaments of silk, Madame de Bausse might very well pass for thirty-five at the utmost, and usually called herself thirty-three; leaving in a sort of misty indistinctness the fact that she had a son whose twentieth birthday would return no more, and not attempting to explain the phenomenon. She did, indeed, usually term the young gentleman her boy; but, if his follies were those of extreme youth, his vices smacked strongly of manhood.

On the present occasion she was fluttered and agitated. Her shrewish black eyes sparkled, her thick silk petticoat rustled, and her lip quivered; so that, although she bore a smile upon her countenance, having been exhorted to moderation by her brother as they came, the expression was sour and petulant, and she evidently met Monsieur d'Artonne with not the most placable feelings, seeming to entertain no great gratitude towards him for interfering on behalf of poor Jean Marais. The face and manner of the count, as he met her, were peculiarly grave and serious, so that she could not accuse him of regarding the painful apprehensions which she entertained in respect to the fate of her son with anything like levity; but yet she displayed, in their very first salutation, a degree of irritability which somewhat embarrassed him.

Having greeted her kindly, and inquired into her health, receiving but a peevish answer, the count, as if for the purpose of doing something—which, as the reader well knows, is not very easy under all circumstances—stretched forth his hand to pat the head of a large dog which had followed her into the room, calling the animal by its name, as if familiar with it. The dog, however, seeming to take his tone from his mistress, instantly growled, and flew at him; and was only driven off by a severe kick, and the interference of the servants, who were closing the doors of the saloon.

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame de Bausse, with a bitter smile; "poor Noble knows very well that you were never a friend of his master, Cousin d'Artonne, and that you have come here now to protect his murderer."

The count started, with an angry and indignant look. "I come here for no such thing, Henriette," he replied; "you yourself are not even convinced that any murder has been committed at all; and, if the slightest cause could be shown for supposing the man guilty, I should be the first to require that he be proceeded against in a regular manner. But, from all that I have heard, I do not believe that such is the case. He saved my daughter's life, as I wrote to you some days ago; and all I desire is, that Monsieur l'Intendant may examine into the affair at once, in order that the poor fellow may not be kept in prison, which is in itself sufficient punishment for a great crime."

"Ay!" cried Madame de Bausse, "you think a great deal about your daughter, but nothing about my son; and as for the rest of the matter, I say this man ought to be kept in prison till we can find out who did murder him, and who did not."

"Such will be the course, madame," said the intendant, in his calm, grave manner, "if there is just cause of suspicion against the prisoner. All that the count requires is immediate investigation, and that I feel I have no right to refuse. The inquiry shall be carried on in your presence, and I doubt not that you will be satisfied with the result."

"I think my word might be sufficient," replied Madame de Bausse; "I am not supposed to be a person, am I, Monsieur l'Intendant, to accuse a man wrongfully?"

"Certainly not, madame," answered the intendant; "and it must be very satisfactory to you to have an opportunity of stating the motives of your accusation fully and immediately."

"True, my son," said the bishop: "but you must recollect that this lady may have strong moral causes of suspicion, which do not amount to absolute proofs: she may wish to have time to investigate and develop fully the evidence against this man, without making indiscreet revelations, which might perhaps tend to frustrate the ends of justice."

"The police," replied the intendant, "are the persons best fitted by habit, as well as entitled by law, to carry on such an inquiry; and, in stating the cause of her suspicions to me, Madame de Bausse will put the matter in train for arriving at a just result. She may do so, if she pleases, before the man is brought up, and I will give all due weight to the facts she adduces. Pray be seated, madame, and inform me whether you have discovered anything more than is stated in the first *procès verbal* upon which the prisoner was arrested. I have read the papers, and find it therein recited that, on the day of the supposed murder, he was absent from the house for two hours; and that a spot of blood, or something like blood, was found upon the breast of his shirt. These, I think, are the only facts from which we can infer a suspicion."

"And quite enough too, I should think," exclaimed Madame de Bausse.

"When joined with the unaccountable absence of his master," added the bishop, "the certainty that they went out in the same direction together, the knowledge which we have that all the other servants were in the house, and the fact of my poor nephew having reproved this very person severely on the preceding night, receiving, we understand, a very insolent and threatening reply. Far be it from me, however, to insinuate that he may not be able to prove his innocence; or that my good Cousin d'Artonne suffers himself to be moved by even the pure spirit of gratitude to favour a base assassin, because that man saved his daughter's life. It has been currently reported, it is true, that the count had always a dislike to my poor nephew, that he said at various times very harsh things of him, that he magnified any juvenile follies, and depreciated his many good qualities and virtues; but I do not believe a word of it. I believe that the count may have been actuated solely, in any severity he showed towards my nephew, by high notions of the necessity of restraining and reproving youth; and I do not give the slightest credit, I assure you, to one half of the anecdotes that are told of Monsieur d'Artonne's intemperate expressions regarding the poor boy."

The prelate might have spared his malignant eloquence; it was pouring water upon a rock, as far as the intendant was concerned. That officer heard him tranquilly to the end without the slightest appearance of interest, and then returned to the point. "The chain of facts," he said, "is important, and unless they can be accounted for,

or at least some of them, may afford grounds for such suspicion as to justify the detention of this man; but, as they are all points susceptible of explanation, it is right that we should hear what he has to say upon the subject. If he refuses, or is incapable of giving such explanation, the case will be very much aggravated; and, on the contrary, if his account of all these transactions be satisfactory, the suspicions themselves vanish; and therefore, my lord, we have the strongest motive for inquiring into the matter immediately."

As he spoke, he rang his bell and ordered Jean Marais to be brought in. The first act of the intendant, when the prisoner appeared between two archers, was to gaze at him fixedly for a moment or two with keen, considering eyes, in a manner which might have abashed many a very innocent man. Jean Marais, however, was not a person very easily abashed, and he underwent the scrutiny with the most perfect composure, waiting till the intendant had taken a full survey of his features and person before he made the slightest movement; and then merely bowing to Madame de Bausse with a placable smile, as he said, "*Bon jour, madame!*" in a tone which certainly implied no malice.

"Ah! don't speak to me, you wretch!" exclaimed the marquise; "I abhor you! Noble, come hither; don't go near him!" But the dog, without attending to her commands, walked up familiarly to Jean Marais, and put its broad nose into his hand.

"Jean Marais, attend!" said the intendant. "You were absent from the house of the Marquise de Bausse for two hours on the seventh day of the present month. Where were you during that time, and what were you doing?"

"I walked into Clermont," replied Jean Marais, without the slightest hesitation; "I went along the bank of the river till I came to the path through the fields, by which I proceeded to Clermont. I met fat Peter Beuvron, and I said to him, '*Bon jour, gros papa!*' to which he replied, '*Bon jour, ganache!*'"

"The walk took you half an hour," said the intendant; "what then?"

"Not quite half an hour," answered Jean Marais; "I go fast, sir, when I put my feet to the ground. But what I did next was, to take my master's hat to have a new feather-band, according to his orders. I gave it to Martin Grange, the hatter; that was the business which took me to Clermont, and he can tell whether I was with him or not."

"That did not occupy much time," said the intendant. "What did you do next, my good friend? You will still have near an hour to account for by your own statement."

Jean Marais paused for a moment, and the eyes of Madame de Bausse glistened at what she thought his hesitation; while the bishop sat with his two hands on his broad knees, and stared in the poor fellow's face with an intensity that had something of triumph in it.

"Well!" continued the intendant, after waiting an instant.

"Well, sir," replied Jean Marais, "if the truth must be told in this reverend society, I spent the missing hour with Jeannette Cottille, the little *couturiere*, whom madame knows, for she makes her gowns for her, and puts in the pads about the breast and shoulders."

Madame de Bausse looked spears and lances at him; but Jean Marais himself was as grave as a judge, and the intendant also. A sly smile, however, stole over the round, rosy face of the bishop; and he gave a sidelong glance to Monsieur d'Artonne, who looked down, and played with the fringe of his sword-belt.

"Will Jeannette Cottille swear that you spent an hour with her on that day?" demanded the intendant.

"I really don't know, sir," replied Jean Marais; "it depends upon whether she is in a humour for telling the truth."

"And when you left her," continued his interrogator, "what did you do then?"

"I walked back again," answered Jean Marais.

"Did you not quarrel with your master the night before?" demanded the intendant.

"No, sir," replied the prisoner, "but he quarrelled with me."

"Give your own account of what occurred on that occasion," said the officer.

"Oh! of course he will tell a fine string of lies!" exclaimed Madame de Bausse.

"No, I will not, indeed, madame," rejoined Jean Marais: "merely out of policy I will tell the whole truth; for falsehood, in a dangerous case, such as mine, is like paint upon an old woman, soon found out, and making that which it rests upon look all the uglier. I did not tie Monsieur de Bausse's cravat to his taste, and he vowed I did it on purpose. I assured him I did not, and we tried it again, but it was worse than before; and then he got very angry, and struck me on the face, which made my nose bleed: so then I told him that I was a servant, but not a slave, and that I would not remain with him."

"'Tis all false together," cried Madame de Bausse, with her eyes flaming and her cheeks red. "I knew you would manufacture a lie; but, if his mere word is to be believed, there is no use of any inquiry at all. It is all false together, Monsieur l'Intendant."

"It seems very like it, indeed, madame," said the intendant, in his usual tone. "It is scarcely possible to believe that the Marquis de Bausse should so forget himself to a servant; and, if the servant made him such a reply, why did he not send him away directly?"

"Because I knew too many of his secrets," answered Jean Marais, in an indifferent tone; "and as for this part of the story, I related every word of it the same night to Morris the lackey. He is now in the town with madame's carriage, for I saw him as I came along from the prison. You can send for him and inquire; he will tell you the same tale."

"If he does, I will discharge him that minute," cried Madame de Bausse.

The intendant looked at her, but said nothing. The expression of his countenance could scarcely be said to change, so slight was the difference; and yet it was easy to see that he thought the lady a great fool.

"I find it asserted here," he continued, addressing Jean Marais after a momentary pause, "that you and Monsieur de Bausse left the chateau together, and took the same road. Where did you part from him?"

"At the end of the avenue," replied Jean Marais. "He stopped to speak with Allard the farmer, and they walked away together on the Riom road, while I went on my way to Clermont."

At this moment the bishop, who had been conversing in a low voice with Madame de Bausse,

rose, as if to take his leave, saying, "As I think that this matter is very likely to affect the man's life, Monsieur l'Intendant, it does not become me, as a bishop of a church of mercy, to take any farther part in the proceedings."

"Stop one moment, Monsieur de Clermont," replied the intendant. "Take away the prisoner, archers, and keep him below for a little. One of you go to the carriage of Madame de Bausse, and bring hither the lackey named Morris, not suffering him to interchange a word with any one by the way. Let another be sent for Jeannette Cottille, the *couturière;* and mind—"

"I really must take my leave," said the bishop; "my time is growing short. I have duties to perform, my son."

"So have I, reverend sir," replied the intendant, holding him by the edge of the robe; "but I really mus: detain you for one minute. Do as I command you," he continued, addressing the archers, who had lingered as if in doubt. "I really must detain you for one minute to perform an act well becoming your sacred character; which is, to persuade your fair sister not to discharge this servant of hers for telling the truth, as she threatens. You will easily perceive that it will give an appearance of injustice and passion to her proceedings, of which they are doubtless totally devoid, and, at the same time, it will be unchristian and unjust. Moreover, I fear, if she do not withdraw the threat, that my office will compel me to take unpleasant measures in regard to a person thus endeavouring by menaces to turn aside the course of justice."

"Oh! it was but an ebullition of anger," replied the bishop, "easily excused in a mother who has lost her son. It was never intended seriously, of course; and I am sure she will refrain from any expression of the same kind in future."

The bishop sat down again by Madame de Bausse to speak with her for a moment, and there he remained, notwithstanding his previous anxiety to depart. What had been his purposes we must not take upon ourselves to assert; but it is clear that, as soon as he found that the archers were too far gone for him to reach the *Evêché* before them, he was less desirous of quitting the saloon than before.

Jeannette Cottille and the lackey Morris arrived at the same time, but the intendant thought fit to examine the fair *couturière* first. She was a pretty-looking young woman, apparently not overburdened with modesty, though frank and simple enough in her demeanour; and, when asked if Jean Marais had lately passed any time with her, she replied at once, "*Ah, pauvre garçon!* I know they have been accusing him of things he never committed, and I'll tell the truth, whatever comes of it; for it can do him no harm, I'm sure, though it may do some to me. The last time I saw him was on the seventh of this month; and then he came and spent an hour with me."

"You have learned your tale, child!" cried Madame de Bausse, in a sharp tone. "How should you recolleet so pat it was the seventh?"

"Oh! I can tell you very well, madame," answered the girl; "I had promised your maid Mathilde to send home, on that day, your false—"

Madame de Bausse waved her hand, impatiently exclaiming, "I dare say you knew all about it."

The seamstress was about to reply, and her rejoinder might not have been much to the satisfaction of Madame de Bausse, but the intendant interposed gravely, demanding, "At what hour did you see him?" and on Jeannette replying, "At twelve o'clock exactly; I know it quite well, for my two girls had just gone to their dinner," he nodded his head, slowly saying, "That will do; you may retire. Bring in the lackey."

Morris was accordingly ushered into the saloon, looking somewhat white at finding himself in the hands of an archer. Madame de Bausse fidgeted upon her chair, and went the length of nodding, winking, and shrugging at him. The intendant, on the contrary, told him to tell the truth, and that he had nothing to fear; adding, with a degree of sternness in his tone, "The slightest prevarication will convey you to prison. Now mark!" he continued, "I find it stated that a quarrel took place between Monsieur de Bausse and his valet, Jean Marais, on the night of the sixth of this month. Do you know anything of it?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied the man: "a quarrel did take place, and a very bad quarrel, too, for—"

His eye caught the expression of Madame de Bausse's countenance at that moment, and he paused and hesitated.

"Were you ever in prison?" demanded the intendant; "if not, you are very likely to be there within five minutes, should you suffer a sign from any one to prevent you from telling the truth. Finish out what you were about to say."

"I say, then," continued the man, "that it was a very bad quarrel, too; for Jean came down with his nose bleeding, and told me his master had struck him."

"Was the blow a severe one?" demanded the intendant; "was it bleeding much?"

"Oh no," replied the lackey; "a drop or two had fallen upon the breast of his shirt, and there was some on his handkerchief, but it soon stopped."

"Do you know if the valet threatened his master in consequence?" demanded the intendant.

"Oh yes," exclaimed the lackey, "he threatened to leave him immediately; at least, so he told me."

"But do you think," inquired his interrogator, "that the marquis had any particular dislike to this man, Jean Marais, which made him strike him?"

"Oh no, sir," replied the man; "he has done the same to us all at different times, but we did not mind it. He once threw a boot at my head."

Not a muscle of the intendant's face moved; but, telling the lackey he might retire, he ordered the prisoner to be brought before him.

"Jean Marais," he said, as soon as he appeared, "you have been accused of a serious crime, and in consequence of that accusation you have been committed to prison till such time as it was possible to investigate the grounds of the charge against you. You foolishly and rashly made your escape from the hands of justice, and might have subjected yourself to severe punishment on that account. But your subsequent voluntary surrender may be received as atonement for the offence; and, the accusation having been now sifted and inquired into, I find that there is not the slightest motive or cause whatsoever for suspecting you of the crime with which you have been charged. You are, therefore, from this moment at liberty, and may go whithersoever you please."

"Mighty well!" cried Madame de Bausse, rising indignantly; "mighty well! So, I am told I have brought an unfounded accusation, am I? Well, I will take care that this is made known. I wish you good-morning, sir! I wish you good-morning! This is fine justice, indeed, when a lady of my rank and station is not to be believed against a valet de chambre."

"Good-morning, madame!" replied the imperturbable intendant, bowing low and calmly; "good-morning, Monsieur de Clermont! Monsieur d'Artonne, I am obliged to you for urging me to give this case immediate attention. Is there anything else I can do to serve you?"

CHAPTER XV.

It was in the afternoon of the same day of which we have just been speaking that Francis de Langy, and his friend the count, stood in one of the oldfashioned rooms of the Chateau d'Artonne, relating to the countess and Julie what had taken place at Clermont. The count touched upon the particulars but lightly, indeed, and came rapidly to the conclusion of Jean Marais's exculpation and liberation. Julie remained somewhat thoughtful; and, though she expressed much satisfaction at the result, Francis de Langy could not help fancying that she was somewhat more grave than might have been expected. The gratification of Madame d'Artonne was much more apparent and vivacious, and the girl of fifteen seemed to have changed places with the woman of seven or eight and thirty.

While the countess was thus congratulating herself upon the deliverance of the person who had saved her child's life, one of the servants, who had not accompanied the party on their tour, entered the room to announce that Jean Marais had arrived at the chateau, according to the orders he had received from Monsieur d'Artonne.

"Send him in, send him in," cried the count; and, the moment after, our respectable friend, Jean Marais, stood bowing before the assembled party, with a face full of perfect satisfaction, and, though respectful, certainly impudent enough.

The count received his thanks with grace and dignity, merely saying, with a slight inclination of the head, "I merit no gratitude, my good friend, merely having fulfilled my promise."

"That is what I am so grateful for, sir," replied Jean Marais; "as it is what no one has a right to expect from another in this world."

"Now, Francis," whispered the count, "let us see the result of your experiment."

And Francis de Langy, with a little of the embarrassed timidity of youth, looked round, and then said, "Well, Jean Marais, Monsieur d'Artonne has acquitted himself of his share of gratitude towards you."

"Not quite," cried Monsieur d'Artonne; "but never mind—"

"I have yet done nothing to show mine," continued the young gentleman; "and I have the permission of the viscount to do the best I can to testify my sense of the service you lately rendered me. You expressed a great wish to enter into my service, or that of the Count d'Artonne. Now it is not convenient for him to receive you into his family, as he has no vacant place; but I will offer you your choice of two things. Here is a purse containing a hundred Louis; I will either give you that at once, as a reward for what you have done, or I will take you as my valet de chambre. But I must warn you that in the latter case, your conduct must be somewhat more strict and regular than, perhaps, it has hitherto been; for Monsieur de St. Medard, though he is a kind and liberal master, and not at all inclined to be severe upon venial errors, is of a determined and immovable nature, and will not pass over anything that he may consider an indication of a bad and depraved heart. Your wages will be the same as those of his own valet; and, having stated the matter fairly to you, you can now make your choice, and either take the place, such as I have represented it, or the gold, and with that little fortune seek another situation, where, perhaps, you may be more at your ease. Will you like some time to consider your determination?"

"Oh no, sir," replied Jean Marais, laughing; "I do not want even a single moment to consider: my determination is made already. First impulses are not always the best, but they are always the pleasantest to follow."

"Then I suppose you will take the purse, and leave the place?" said Monsieur d'Artonne.

"Oh dear, no, sir," replied Jean Marais; "I will do nothing of the kind. The place for me, if you please; and the purse for the baron's pocket."

"I thought so," cried Julie, with a well-pleased smile, little fancying that, to an observant eye, the look and the words, common and meaningless as they might seem, would betray more of the secrets of the heart than she might be very willing should appear.

Jean Marais saw all about it in a moment; and Madame d'Artonne said to herself, "The girl who thinks the situation of his servant so desirable would not very much object to be his wife."

The valet, however, bowed low to the young lady, replying, "Thank you, mademoiselle, for doing me justice. I could not hesitate a moment, under any circumstances, between a good situation, which I hope long to retain, and a hundred Louis, which would be, most likely, gone to-morrow. But besides, I take a very particular interest in this young gentleman, and have more motives for attaching myself to him than one."

"Indeed!" said Francis de Langy; "may I ask what?"

"Oh! sir," replied Jean Marais, with one of his light, but somewhat sarcastic laughs, "they are, first and foremost, because I think you a very charming and excellent young gentleman; and, secondly, because my family are not a little indebted to yours. An excellent relation of mine, now Marguerite Latouches, formerly Marguerite Lemaire, was once femme de chambre to the marquise, your mother, who married her to my good uncle Gerard."

"Indeed!" cried Francis de Langy; "are you their nephew? As you must know well, then, she was, moreover, my foster-mother."

"Exactly," said Jean Marais, somewhat drily; but the moment after he added, in a very different manner, "Ay, sir, and many is the time you have sat upon my knee, when you were a child, and I was a youth younger than you are now."

There is something in the memory of early years and young affections which wakes up in

the breast, even of the hardened and criminal, and still more in the heart of the light, the thoughtless, and the vicious, sweeter and holier feelings; which, however transitory they may be in themselves, still have a purifying influence of shorter or longer duration, according to circumstances, but ever tending, through regret, towards repentance. Those feelings, for the time, too, affect the outward man; and though he may struggle against them, and strive to cover them with the light and sparkling veil of careless gayety, or the thick cloak of dogged resolution, they will still give a more thoughtful or a tenderer character to the look and manner of him who experiences them, and tell the beholder that the heart within is touched. Such was the case in the present instance with Jean Marais; and, as he uttered the words, "Many is the time you have sat upon my knee, when you were a child, and I was a youth younger than you are now," the light air of gay effrontery died away, his tone was softened and saddened, and, dropping his eyes to the floor, he fell into a fit of thought.

"Well," said the Count d'Artonne, after a moment's pause, "all these circumstances will form a bond between your young master and yourself, which, I trust, may lead you to serve him faithfully and well; and now you must make my steward take care of you, while we have still the honour and the pleasure of his company at the Chateau d'Artonne."

"I will serve him, sir, better, perhaps, than he thinks," replied Jean Marais; and, making a low bow, he was retiring from the room, when Francis called him back again, saying, "I must not make my poor service your only reward, Jean Marais; that will not be sufficient recompense: here are fifty out of the hundred Louis for you; and I may promise at the end of the year, if your conduct receives the approbation of Monsieur de St. Medard, he will bestow upon you the other fifty, both as a reward for the past and an encouragement for the future."

Jean Marais took the money without the slightest affectation of reluctance, replying, gayly, "I will be a very good young man, indeed, sir. I have heard folks declare that virtue is its own reward; and, like other hard-working people, she has but poor pay, it is true; but, depend upon it, she never works so well as when she has something to work for."

"I have an account to settle with you, too, Jean Marais," said the Count d'Artonne; "but I really hardly know what to offer you as a recompense. However, if you will think over the matter, and let me know anything that you desire, if it be in reason, I will not deny it to you. Take time to consider!"

"No, sir, I do not want time," replied Jean Marais; "being now a rich man, and well provided for, I have but one thing to ask of any body under heaven, and am only afraid that you mayn't think it quite reasonable."

"Let me hear what it is!" said the count.

"Oh! it's a long story, sir," replied Jean Marais.

"Always an unreasonable thing in itself," answered Monsieur d'Artonne. "However, we have a little time before the intendant comes to dinner; so, if it be not so long as one of Mademoiselle de Scuderi's romances, we shall get through it."

"Well, then, sir," replied Jean Marais, "there is a poor fellow in the lower prison at Clermont, named Antoine Bure, who is charged with poaching on your lands—"

"Oh! I know all about that story," exclaimed the count; "but what is your request?"

"That you would withdraw the charge, sir," said Jean Marais, boldly. "Poor fellow! he is as good a creature as ever lived."

The count waved his hand. "You need not enter into the question," he answered, gravely; "I am sorry to say I cannot grant your request. You must think of something else."

Jean Marais looked down and bit his lip; Francis de Langy turned his eyes upon the count, with some mortification and disappointment in his countenance; and Julie gazed at her father for a moment with evident surprise, but then caught his hand with a gay smile, exclaiming, "He is jesting, he is jesting. I see it on the corner of his lip; he is jesting."

"No, indeed!" said the count, smiling likewise; "I am speaking the plain truth, Julie: I cannot withdraw the charge, because—I have withdrawn it already. It was made during our absence, without my consent; and, as I think the punishment in this country very much too great for the offence, the moment I heard of it I gave orders to stop all proceedings on my part. Jean Marais must, therefore, think of something else; for I trust that Antoine Bure will be at liberty to-morrow."

"I have thought of something else already, sir," cried Jean Marais. "You shall let me carry him the news, sir; and tell him that you did it by your own act, without any solicitation."

"That as you please," replied the count; "but as I see you have not yet decided upon the recompense for saving my daughter's life which you would most desire, take time, as I said before, to consider of it, and let me know when you have made up your mind."

Almost as he spoke, the sound of wheels rolling over the stones of the courtyard announced the coming of a visiter; and, going out with ceremonious politeness to receive him, the count met the intendant at the door of the chateau, and returned with him to the room where the rest of the party were assembled. It is scarcely possible to describe the manner of this worthy officer of the crown as he entered, and paid his respects to the Countess d'Artonne and Julie, without combining incompatibilities. It was perfectly easy, and yet it was restrained; but it was with that sort of restraint which depended upon his own will, upon his own habits: it was not in the slightest degree the restraint of awkwardness or uncertainty. You saw that he was doing nothing by impulse; that in the smallest as well as in the greatest he had a guard upon every word, and look, and movement; that his mind was present in everything; that he did all that he wished to do, and yet did not do one half that other men would have done who sought to make themselves agreeable. I am not sure that there is any English expression by which I can convey to the reader exactly what I mean, and even in French I must do it by negatives. To borrow an expression from that language, however, he had no *abandon*; and yet there was something powerful and striking in the very quiet mastery of himself which he seemed to possess. All that is deep and unapproachable, whether moral or physical, is generally impressive. It matters not much whether it be great or whether it be little, whether it be pleasing or

whether it be displeasing; the very act of baffling our efforts to penetrate it implies power, and the idea of power is almost always more or less productive of the sublime. Sometimes, indeed, the smallest image which can be presented to the human mind, when combined even remotely with the fact of power, gives birth to the sublime in the highest and most overwhelming degree; and, of all the images by which the Hebrew prophets and poets have endeavoured to convey to narrow humanity some conception of the Almighty, the most awful is found in "the still small voice."

But to return to lower things. In seeing the man we speak of, one felt from his very aspect that there was a mind of no ordinary power beneath. There might also be violent passions: one suspected it: one fancied that it was so; and yet one could not tell why. It was, in fact, as when one gazes on a tiger walking calmly and majestically up and down his den, with a step as noiseless as that of a cat; we see the terrible strength that lies in those gliding and easy limbs, and divine the fierce and bloodthirsty spirit that dwells in that tranquil and graceful form.

We cannot pause upon all that took place during dinner, nor give even any specimen of the conversation that passed between the parties there present. With every one but the intendant the reader is already well acquainted, and therefore it is upon his conduct that we must principally dwell. He did not speak much; but what he did say was always to the point, clear, accurate, and sometimes brilliant; but the most sparkling things he uttered were so easy in manner, that the hearer was impressed with the conviction that he could say more sparkling things still; and so little did he seem to value the powers which he displayed, that one felt inclined to suppose he showed but a small part of the treasures of his mind. To Madame d'Artonne he paid marked and peculiar attention, listened to her with that silent flattery which is so captivating, and answered but briefly, more in comments on what she had said than by observations of his own. To Monsieur d'Artonne his demeanour was the same as we have depicted it in the morning. With Julie he conversed only once or twice, but then with a bland smile and look of interest. Of Francis de Langy he took no notice whatsoever, and he did so on purpose. If the young gentleman spoke upon any occasion, he never interrupted him, he showed him no rudeness whatsoever; but, the moment Francis had done, he broached some new topic, as if he had not heard a word the other had uttered, or judged his observations unworthy of any attention.

Had Francis de Langy been of a vain or conceited character, he would have been bitterly mortified; as it was, he was not pleased. But though he was by no means self-sufficient or arrogant in disposition, yet he felt within his own breast powers of mind and energies of character which the supercilious inattention even of a man of great intellect could not keep down. To him the dinner passed off unpleasantly. But let us inquire what was the effect upon the mind of Julie d'Artonne. It was very strange; in listening to the words of the intendant, in marking his demeanour, there was something that she shrunk from, she knew not what; and yet she could not help listening, she could not help observing with *eager interest*. There was a sort of fascination about him unpleasant, yet strong; stronger, perhaps, than if he had paid her marked attention, and mingling in some degree admiration with dislike. It was like the fabled fascination of the serpent upon the bird, and was, in fact, painful; yet, though she strove to withdraw her attention, she could not do so.

But let not the reader suppose there was anything uncommon in her feelings; the same effect is produced every day by the same qualities, though perhaps not always to the same extent: it is woman's nature to look up, and great powers have always great command over her. Whether there be such a thing as animal magnetism or not, there is certainly such a thing as mental magnetism; but it happens, sometimes happily, sometimes unhappily, that in the breast of woman love and admiration are two perfectly distinct things. They may be combined, but, far from being always so, are very often separate; and the man whom a woman admires the most is not unfrequently the one of all others for whom she could feel the least tenderness.

Did Julie, then, admire the intendant? After a certain fashion she assuredly did; she did so more than he deserved, but not in the way he would have liked. It was the admiration of astonishment rather than of pleasure; nor was it unnatural that, while she gave him little credit for qualities of the heart, she should give him too great credit for high qualities of the mind. The fair and soft companions of our troublous path are, by Nature's will, beings of trust and confidence; they need hard teaching in the ways of life to make them think that things are not as they seem. Where man will pause till he has examined, will try talent and genius by a thousand touchstones, and not be satisfied till he is sure that it is gold indeed, woman will but too often take unweighed, uncriticized, a gilded bauble, and hold it as a jewel of high price, till it tarnishes under her touch, and she finds too late how worthless was the thing she valued. The air and the assumption of great abilities, unless the hollowness of the pretence be very apparent indeed, is generally enough for her; and it is not wonderful that in this case, where there was indeed an intellect of great power, Julie should give him who possessed it credit for more than really belonged to him, and take upon trust all that he assumed. But she never dreamed that any other feeling could ever be supposed to have a share in her breast towards a man some thirty years older than herself; and, luckily for them both, neither did Francis de Langy. He disliked the intendant with that sort of keen distaste which a young man of genius always entertains towards a supercilious though talented man of the world who under-estimates his abilities, with that longing for strife with him, either physical or intellectual, which an eager spirit always feels towards the arrogant assumption of superiority; but jealousy had no share in his sensations. He was glad, however, when the intendant retired, which was about an hour before nightfall; and still more glad when Julie d'Artonne reminded her mother that she had promised to walk round the gardens and the park.

Each sensation of the human heart seems naturally to require some peculiar and appropriate place for its full development, and none more eagerly than love. The counterfeit passion may reign in gay saloons and lighted halls, or in darker and more confined dwellings, and revel amid noise and confusion, the vain clatter of tongues,

and all the empty luxury of art, feeling itself there most at home where nature is most excluded; but the pure high love of the young and unperverted heart always longs for the presence of calm and sublime things—the free air, the wide sky, the sunny verge of the sparkling ocean, fields, mountains, woods, and all those objects that make the soul thrill with vague memories or fancies of an earlier and a holier state, when love was the brightest flower of paradise. The narrow and confined walls of houses built with hands seem to oppress and keep in the divine spirit within us, and Francis de Langy longed to be with her in the midst of the splendid scene that surrounded them.

Madame d'Artonne replied that she was too much fatigued, but bade the two young people go themselves; and Monsieur d'Artonne promised to follow them soon.

They went out together, the lover and the beloved—so young, so very young, to feel such emotions, and yet experiencing them strongly, deeply, truly, with no difference between their sensations and those of manhood's love, except the purity of early youth. They wandered on, they saw beautiful scenes, they heard the sweet sounds of evening, they gazed upon the glowing sky, and, drinking in from the cup of Nature deep and congenial draughts of Heaven's own poetry, they lived for a brief space in that dreamy enjoyment in which there is no current of thought, no distinctness of idea, but that mere sensation of enjoyment which perhaps may approach near to the happiness of an after state, when all the glory of God shall give full fruition to the unfettered souls of the blessed.

They were seated side by side upon a fragment of basaltic rock, with a wild ash-tree waving its feathery branches above their heads, the giant mountains of Auvergne stretching blue upon the left, the gorgeous setting of a summer day's sun, flooding with rosy light the glowing sky before them, the sparkling stream glistening in the valley beneath, love in their hearts and tranquillity all around, when Julie's father approached, seeing them before he was seen, and looking upon them with the mingling tenderness of memory and hope. When they did notice him, neither of them moved, for they had nothing to conceal, nothing that shunned the eye of those whom they revereneed. Julie held out her hand to her father as he came near, asking, "Is not this beautiful?" and replying, with more than one meaning in his words, he said, "Beautiful indeed, my dear child!"

Monsieur d'Artonne sat down beside them, and gazed in silence for several minutes over the prospect. At length his eyes filled with tears, for it is only to the breast of youthful innocence that such moments bring enjoyment unmingled with regret. Each step that man takes forward in life tramples down some flower; and, when he pauses for a moment to look around him, he must needs give a tear to all which those footsteps have destroyed.

The emotion was transitory, however, from whatever cause it sprung; and, banishing all memories, the count joined with the two young beings beside him in the enjoyment of the present hour. He gave himself up to happiness; and, when he turned to walk back with them towards the chateau, a feeling of repose and peace reigned in his breast, as well as theirs.

How rarely in this life is such a sensation anything but the harbinger of agitation and care! Whether it was, or was not so in the present instance, the reader who goes on with me will know.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Rest you merry!" says one of our friends in Shakspeare; but, assuredly, it would have been a very unnecessary benediction if addressed to our good friend Jean Marais, for his was a nature in which merriment was so inherent, that it would have needed an ocean of sorrow, and a bucketful of philosophy, to drown out the sparkling flame of his gayety.

"Not at all, not at all," he cried, as he sat in a chamber of the Chateau d'Artonne, which served the purposes of what we call the servants' hall in England, with Madame d'Artonne's pretty lady's-maid beside him, a somewhat grim-looking valet de chambre opposite, and three or four other servants round. "Not at all, my good friend; fortunate, instead of unfortunate, in having been in a prison without deserving it. It shows one life, and makes one love liberty the more. Besides, what has been the result? If the bird had not been in a cage, it would never have escaped from a cage, and I should have been jogging on in the service of Madame de Bausse, as dull and plodding a fellow as thyself, Peter."

The other servants chuckled; and Peter himself, with a grim and not very well pleased smile, replied, "Plodding, but not dull, Master Jean Marais, as you may some day discover."

"Discover!" cried Jean Marais, laughing aloud, and turning a merry glance at the femme de chambre, between whom and the valet there existed an unconfirmed *tendresse*, which was likely, unless nipped in the bud, to bear the fruit of matrimony. "Does the fellow take me for Christopher Columbus? No, no, I am no discoverer; and if I did go upon such a voyage, it would be into some deeper sea than your brains, Master Peter."

"The discovery may come upon you, whether you like it or not," replied Peter, significantly, and with a good many of the passions that we pray against very busy in his breast, for no man is insensible of the danger of being ridiculed in the presence of a woman whom he loves. But Jean Marais was not a person to pay the slightest attention to either hostile hints or glances; and the only effect which the valet's indignation had upon him was to make him commence a series of very decided, and, to say the truth, somewhat successful gallantries towards the pretty lady's-maid, which kept the blood of his rival in a vehement ferment for the next half hour.

Now this Peter, as he was called, otherwise Peter Neri, was by no means a despicable opponent in point of personal strength. His father had been an Italian, settled in France in days of yore, and exercising the worshipful trade of posture-master and sword-player—some said, indeed; that he had added other vocations, which did not so much covet the light; and from his happy union with a femme de chambre, who had, to use a familiar phrase, feathered her nest somewhat better than might be expected, sprang the individual who now occupied the important post of valet de chambre to the Count d'Artonne. He was a tall and sturdy personage, possessing united the high qualities of his father and his

mother; but, at the same time, it must be acknowledged to his honour, that in the service of his master, which he had graced now for nearly ten years, he had shown no greater inclination to pilfer than was justified by the customs and privileges of his calling. He was of a sullen and somewhat morose disposition, and, as many men are found to be in this world, unattachable by any feeling but one, and that an animal feeling. Thus, as may be supposed, he was not greatly loved by any one in the household except the lady's-maid, whom he had singled out for the object of his solitary affection; and the other servants were glad to see him annoyed, while her partisanship was neutralized by the gay blandishments of Jean Marais.

The reader, if he have seen even but little of the world, will very easily conceive the gradual progress of a quarrel from taunts and irritation, through various stages, to the climax of a corporeal encounter; and, at the end of half an hour from the time at which we opened the scene whereof we now treat, Jean Marais walked round the table and seized Monsieur Pierre by the throat. The women screamed and called out, all the men talked and endeavoured to part them, and they themselves struggled together with a fierceness and vigour which threatened speedily to end the contest by knocking the brains of either one or the other out against the wall. The room in which this scene took place was a long, narrow hall, with a door at one end and a window at the other; which window looked out into a little green patch shaded by lime-trees, and separated from the rest of the park by a road which led up towards the hills.

It so happened that, in the very height of the contention within, Julie, Francis de Langy, and the Count d'Artonne were walking slowly and thoughtfully along this very road, on their return to the chateau; and, the windows being open, the mingled yell issued forth and reached their ears.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried the count; "our quiet house is seldom disturbed by such noises as this. Go on, I will follow you directly;" and, approaching one of the innumerable side-doors which decorated the French chateau of that period, he entered the house and walked straight to the hall. For a moment the belligerent parties did not perceive his presence; but a cry of "The count! the count!" from the rest of the servants made them pause for an instant, and Jean Marais took his hands from his adversary's throat. Peter Neri, however, thought he had gained an advantage by this movement which was not to be lost, and darted upon him again like a tiger, under the very eyes of his master. But he had made a mistake. Jean Marais was perfectly prepared to receive him; and, catching him by the middle, he lifted him from the ground, and cast him headlong back upon the pavement, with a fall that left him giddy and bewildered.

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded the count, who had observed the whole.

"Why, simply, sir," replied Jean Marais, "that my good friend Peter, here, is very hospitably inclined towards me, and commenced his civilities by kindly telling me that I was unfortunate in having been put into prison and accused of murdering my young master, for that *the charge* would stick by me all my life; and *he just* now ended his kind speeches by calling *me a thief* and a jail-bird."

"I did not," said Peter, rising surlily from the ground.

"Oh yes, Peter, you did," cried the lady's-maid.

"I heard him! I heard him!" exclaimed several of the other servants.

"Well, I spoke no more than was true, if I did," muttered Peter.

"Silence, sir!" said the count; "you have behaved very ill, and I will not have you insult the servant of a gentleman who is staying in my house. I shall speak to you farther upon the subject to-night; and, in the mean time, I insist upon your behaving civilly to him. If I hear that you utter one offensive word, I will discharge you. You know me, and I will keep my promise." Thus saying, he turned, and quitted the hall.

About an hour after the party in the saloon broke up, and the count retired to his dressing-room; where, in a few minutes after, he was joined by his worthy valet; and the count immediately bestowed upon him a very severe admonition in regard to his conduct towards Jean Marais, saying that he had a great mind to discharge him. The man smiled, with somewhat of a sarcastic turn about his lip, which surprised Monsieur d'Artonne and excited his indignation; nor was his anger at all assuaged by the reply which accompanied this expression of countenance, and which was to the following effect:

"I don't think you will discharge me, sir."

"And, pray, why not?" demanded the count, controlling his feelings.

"Oh! sir, you know I have been a long time in your service," answered the valet with an indifferent air; "and an old servant always gets into his master's ways—and into his secrets. But I was going to ask you, sir," he continued, as if to change the subject, "whether I had not better sponge your *habit de chasse* all over, for the drops of blood that you washed out about a month ago, on the day that Monsieur de Bausse was first missed, still show a little."

The count turned as pale as ashes; but, commanding himself, he replied, after a momentary pause, in a calm and cold tone,

"Oh no, there is no need of that; it will soon be spotted in the same way the first time I go out to shoot. But take notice what I have said to you about this man, Jean Marais; for, if I find that you behave any more as you have done this night, I will discharge you as sure as I live."

The valet smiled again, but made no farther reply; and the count soon after dismissed him for the night. When he was gone, and the door closed, Monsieur d'Artonne clasped his hands together, and then struck his clinched fist upon his forehead. The next moment he cast himself down upon his knees, and, leaning his arms upon the seat of a large arm-chair, he buried his eyes in his hands, and remained thus for nearly half an hour, while the agitation of his mind might be traced by the heaving of his chest and the writhing of his whole frame. Then came an instant of comparative calm; and rising up with a face pale, sunk, and death-like, he waved his hand sadly, saying,

"It is gone, it is gone forever; there is no more peace for me on earth."

CHAPTER XVII.

In the summer season of our lives, as in the brightest period of the year, there come days full of soft and sleepy balminess, when the happy heart, moved by no fierce desires, seems to fall into a dreamy slumber, and the hours flit by us almost unmarked as they go. Who has not known them so sweetly present, yet so rapidly gone, that we have awaked from the pleasant vision, and doubted whether it were true or not?

Thus passed the few following days to Francis de Langy and to Julie d'Artonne: the only thing that even brought a shadow over the sunshine of the latter being to observe a heavy shade upon her father's face; while, with Francis de Langy, the only interruption of his dream took place during the hours which he spent in the chamber of the good Abbé Arnoux. In the mean time, the abbé himself made some slight progress towards convalescence: it was very slight indeed, for although he improved a good deal one day, he fell back again the next; and his recovery still seemed doubtful, and promised, at all events, to be slow.

It was the seventh evening after the departure of Monsieur de St. Medard, when the courier from Paris, passing through Riom, among other letters addressed to the chateau, left one for the Abbé Arnoux, in the handwriting of the viscount; and we must beg the reader's permission to give it here, protesting against the supposition that this work is a novel or a romance, a tragedy, or any other kind of composition which requires an author to embarrass himself by unities. It is simply the histories of certain personages whose fate was closely linked together; and the picture of Monsieur de St. Medard's mind, in all its phases, forms as much one of our objects in writing as any other matter that we shall touch upon in the course of the work.

"My dear abbé," he said, "I have reached this great city without any impediment; and I write to you, not to give you any account of the rolling of my carriage along the highway, the changing of my horses, or of any other of those events which are so frequently communicated by one friend to another, either because he has no thoughts that are worth the transmission, or that he does not think his correspondent worthy to share them; but, on the contrary, to tell you how my mind has travelled, since we last met, upon a road on which you yourself directed it, and what discoveries it has made by the way.

"I perceive, then, that the first thing I have to combat is a certain peculiar habit of thought, which would fain lead me away from your course of argumentation to my own; for custom, I find, is as powerful over the actions of the mind as over the body, and, as good old Montaigne remarks, '*C'est, à la vérité, une violente et traistresse maistresse d'escole que la Coustume*,' who establishes in us, little by little, and without our knowing it, her authority; but, having by this gentle and humble commencement planted and fixed it by the aid of Time, she soon makes a furious and tyrannical use of it, against which we have not even power to raise our eyes. I have been amused at making this discovery of myself; and think I perceive in others, also, that we, who call ourselves philosophers, somewhat narrow our path by never reasoning but in one direction. I am making a vigorous struggle against custom in my own case, however; and will endeavour, as far as possible, to follow a fresh plan *in regard to the subject* of inquiry which I have promised you to investigate anew. I will attempt to clear my mind of all preconceived opinions upon the subject, to start from the point of perfect ignorance, to ask myself what is there in all I see around me, throughout the universe, that should make me believe in the existence of a God at all: then, what is there in any book to make me believe that God has thought fit to reveal his will to man, and to suppose that it is a record of truths regarding things beyond this world more than other composition of man.

"Although I have had plenty of time to reflect, as I have rolled along this dusty road towards the capital, yet at present my thoughts upon this subject are still in confusion; and I am, as it were, sweeping out the house. But I will confess to you—with a sincere wish that you would help me to get rid of it—that there is one old customary conclusion from which I cannot divest myself, and which will prevent me, as long as it remains, from ever looking upon the Bible as anything else than a collection of highly poetical works by various very clever Jews. I cannot conceive such a Being, as we are told God is, so meddling with the affairs of man at all. But I must go to the bottom of my objection, in order that, if possible, you may remove it. My mind, then, is repugnant altogether to the idea of a special Providence; even admitting your first great principle, the existence of a God! Taking it for granted that there is such a Being, and that He is, as you represent Him, with all the attributes in which Christians believe; does it not seem beneath the majesty of Jehovah to superintend the minor concerns of mortal men, and of things still less in the scale of creation? But, still more, is it not totally inconsistent with the idea of an Omniscient Being to suppose that He would interrupt the course of his general laws for any individual object? Is it not absurd to conceive that a Being, equally just, powerful, and wise, would be turned from his purpose, or assuaged in his wrath, by the prayers or repentance of man? An English poet, not long dead, has said, with more truth than poets generally display, 'God rules by general, not by partial laws;' and, indeed, the geometrical principles, which we discover in the portion of the universe within our ken, show us one universal rule, which, supposing, as we do for the moment, that there is a God, must be his law, from which there is no reason to believe He would deviate. It seems to me, in short, my dear abbé, that you Christians make your God act in a manner inconsistent with the very attributes that you assign to Him. If you can say anything to remove this difficulty, pray do.

"I write this in the trust that you are much better than when I left you, for I have just received a letter which Francis wrote on the day after I left Riom. So his friend, Jean Marais, has stood the trial, and is installed in the high post of his valet de chambre! I trust that it may turn out well, but I doubt: you know that I am a great doubter of all things unproved. But do you, my dear abbé, never doubt that I am

"Your most sincere friend,

ST. MEDARD."

On the evening when this letter arrived, the abbé was not so well as he had previously been; but the good old man read it eagerly, and declared he would write an answer without delay. Francis de Langy, who was sitting with him at

the time, tried hard to persuade him to put it off for two or three days; but the abbé had his peculiarities, as well as other people; and one of his notions was, that when a man pauses and procrastinates in doing what is right, fate generally steps in and prevents him from doing it at all. He persisted, then, in his resolution of answering the letter immediately; and, as it was evident to Francis de Langy that he could not accomplish it with his own hand, the young gentleman had no course left but to take the pen and write the reply, while the abbé lay in his bed and dictated as follows:

"My dear Friend,

"Your letter has given me great pleasure, as it shows me, beyond all doubt, that the clouds are about to be dispersed from your mind, and that the light of truth, reason, and religion will soon shine in. To all your objections touching the nature and the character of the Deity, and of how He would or could act under certain circumstances, I might reply, that neither we nor any one else know anything upon the subject, and can only judge of what we see. I might add, that in reasoning abstractedly, and independent of revelation, it is just as absurd and unfounded a conclusion to say that God acts by certain geometrical laws, because we find that these laws obtain in certain parts of the creation within our sight, as to say that He acts by irregular impulses, because we see what appears to us to be infinite irregularity in many of the phenomena of nature; and I might point out to a philosophical mind that the principles of his actions are as much beyond human comprehension as the idea of unlimited space, or any other of those extraordinary facts to which we are obliged to assent without being able to comprehend them. But I will make no other use of such a course of argument than once more to inculcate deep humility in approaching, with the very narrow faculties of humanity, a subject of infinite extent. Of that subject a very small portion is all that is necessary for us to consider, and, indeed, is all that we have even the capability of investigating. If we attempt to carry our view beyond that limited horizon, we shall find that everything becomes, in the moral as well as in the physical world, indistinct and conjectural. I may, however, deal with your difficulties in another way; not, indeed, bringing forward proofs of a system in which I myself believe, for all your assertions are but negative; and it would be endless to answer every such objection that man's vanity or ingenuity might suggest, and impossible to prove a thousand things which are neither within the scope of our faculties, nor necessary to our conviction in regard to the great truths of religion. I will only offer a few observations upon the points you have suggested, which may serve to sweep such stumbling-blocks from your way, and reserve whatever I may have to assert as positive for some future occasion; when, if God spares my life, I trust to find your mind prepared to receive the great fundamental proofs on which our faith is founded.

"Your mind, you say, is repugnant to the idea of a special Providence—perhaps, I might add, to God's moral government of the world—at all events, to the supposition that He is moved by our prayers, softened by our repentance, ready to avert from us the evil consequences of our own acts or those of others, or, in short, to care for the pitiful animal man, who is but a minute insect in the midst of creation; and you persuade yourself that these objections spring from a vast idea of the dignity and powers of God. You will be surprised when I assert that they are founded, on the contrary, upon a very limited and petty notion of the Divinity. If you can but stretch your mind to conceive that to Him all things are forever present, and every being stands at once in his sight, that time and space to Him do not exist, that to Him nothing is small, nothing is great; you will behold the same Almighty and Omniscient Being superintending every part of his creation, from what we consider the greatest, to what we term the smallest, with the same infinite care which created them at first; seeing—or foreseeing, if you will—the sin and the repentance, the necessity and the prayer, in the same ever-present instant, and providing for each and all by one act of volition, passing along the complicated, but unentangled chain of cause and effect, from immemorial ages in the past, to events and epochs in that dark night of futurity which his sight alone can penetrate, but which to Him is as much in being as anything that is or has been. Far be it from me to say that the Almighty does not rule the universe upon some vast and general scheme; but, that a special and superintending Providence is a part of that scheme, forms with me an object of humble trust and most confident belief.

"Of all the objections which have been stated, that which at first sight appears most plausible is implied by the assertion that we cannot conceive an Omniscient Being interrupting the course of his general laws for any individual purpose; but to this there are two answers. First, that, from the infinitely minute portion of the infinitely vast whole which we can see, it is impossible for any one to say whether those very facts which we assume as instances of interruption are not, indeed, harmonious parts of one great scheme; and, secondly, that the daily convulsions in the universe, moral and physical—nay, every hourly change in the arrangement and disposition of things around us, except certain motions in which we have detected a degree of regularity, are evidences of that apparent interruption of general laws which is all that is necessary to the idea of a special Providence.

"It is that our understanding is too narrow, and our utmost knowledge too limited, to grasp the idea of a scheme so vast, that the some thousands of years to which our history extends, and the millions of worlds which we faintly descry, are but the most minute parts of a grand whole. It is but this narrowness of comprehension, this *angina mentis et animæ*, which makes us doubt even for a moment that the Almighty rules individually the fate of everything created. Even in speaking of the powers of God, our incapacity evinces itself by the very language that we use; and we are obliged to apply the terms, which finite creatures have invented for the purpose of expressing finite objects, to the attributes and operations of an Infinite Being. We say 'in the beginning!' but, to God, when was the beginning? Yet, if we speak of the creation of our globe, or of the system to which it belongs, or of the constellation whereof our sun is a small star, or of the myriads of constellations which we descry, or of the countless and unnumbered multitudes from which not one small ray has ever visited this earth, the very fact of their creation was in itself an act of special Providence; and as great a deviation from any existing laws that we

know of, or can conceive, as the manna sent to the children of Israel in the wilderness, the plagues which punished the obduracy of Pharaoh and his people, or the dispensation which wrought reconciliation between God and man. If the universe was created at all, and it is demonstrable that it has been created, that fact was a special Providence, or, in other words, a distinct act of the Almighty, taking place at a fixed and appropriate time, for a certain and definite purpose; and there is as much reason to believe that the earthquake which shakes one half of the world, and the fall of a sparrow, though brought about by agents with which science or habit has rendered us familiar, are operations of the will of God, as to believe that He hung the firmament with suns, or rolled the globe through space. Those acts in which the immediate operation of Divine volition becomes more plainly visible to human eyes by a deviation from an ordinary and expected course of events, and which are displayed particularly in the history of the Jews, so far from being rendered doubtful by any just use of human reason, can only be considered as historical illustrations of that constant superintendence of the Almighty over every part of his creation which our reason shows to be an absolute consequence of the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful Being; and without presumption I may be permitted to say, that one of the most remarkable effects (if not one of the chief objects) of those evident acts of Divine agency has been to keep alive a just notion of the Divinity through ages of darkness, and, during a long period of moral infancy and error, to afford to the nations selected as the depository of revealed truth a constant and tangible proof of important facts concerning the attributes of God, and thus, through times when all people were idolatrous and ignorant, to support revelation till wisdom was mature.

"That there were other and still more glorious objects in the miracles displayed throughout the Hebrew history, I humbly hope and devoutly believe. But even putting aside those manifestations of the active superintendence of the Almighty, afforded by the history of the Israelites, which a skeptic may hesitate to believe, and the vainer part of men of science, without denying, attempt to explain away, it seems to me that, even to our simple, unassisted reason, it is impossible to conceive that a Being who created all things, from the greatest to the least, and who knows all things, from the beginning to the end, and who has power over all things to the utmost verge of creation, does not rule, and guide, and superintend throughout the whole. While reason leads us to such a conclusion, the face of nature, at every step, affords us proofs that it is so. The very fact of creation, the very fact of change in anything, the very variations of the earth, the seasons, the events, from one ordinary and constant state, or regular and fixed recurrence, show that the will of the Almighty is in active, not in passive operation; and though there are some occurrences, which, by their regular return, we have been enabled to form into a system, the great mass of events affecting ourselves is governed upon principles which we do not understand, but which clearly betoken a special Providence over all things.

"Were I to push the subject farther, it would soon lead me into the question of the origin of evil; upon which I should not like to enter at present, even as a matter of humble and speculative inquiry. Remember, my dear friend, that I am not bold and impious enough to fancy that I can explain the mysteries of God; nor, I trust, will you seek to comprehend things clearly above human comprehension. I know that, if you strive diligently, you will find such a body of facts, susceptible of distinct proof, as to establish beyond all doubt, to any unprejudiced mind, the existence of a Great Intelligence, which, having created all things, governs all things; and upon that vast foundation I do not fear to see built up the fabric of true faith in the great scheme of our salvation, the grand and crowning act of that special Providence in which it is my greatest comfort to believe.

"I will add but one word more, and that is upon the subject of the extraordinary repugnance of man to believe in an intelligence higher than his own. He sees the effects of it in every work of nature; he can trace design in the structure of every flower and every animal; he can perceive contrivances calculated with the utmost nicety to accomplish certain ends; wherever he turns his eyes, he finds these infinitely varied and infinitely extensive; and yet, as a refuge for his own vanity to escape to from the conviction that the powers of his own mind are nothing when compared with those of God, he attributes all this to an inevitable necessity in the nature of things, and strips the Creator of all those qualities of which he himself is most proud, namely, reason and volition.

"Enough for the present, my dear friend: I knew you well, and am aware that with you to search is to find, to be convinced is to believe. That you may do so from your heart, and derive all those comforts from that belief which nothing but faith can give, is the sincere prayer of your devoted brother,

"CHARLES ARNOUX."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHY should there not be railroads in everything? through time and space, as well as from London to Manchester—across the waste of history, and across the desert of Suez—along the highway of politics (with one door always locked, as on the road to Bath), and pierced through the hard depths of science (with tunnels as deep and as badly lighted as any between Devizes and Bristol, or Liege and Cologne)? Why should there not be railroads in everything? In truth, reader, are there not?

Oh yes; the moral follows the material in accelerated speed; and we drive over roads—along which we once crept, observing everything as we went—at the railway speed of fifty miles an hour; seeing nothing but the station from which we start, and the terminus at which we arrive.

Jump in, reader, and away! We are bound for Paris; the distance is only three hundred miles, and you shall be there in a minute.

Doubtless, you recollect the Marchioness de Langy? A very pretty and an amiable person she was. She was a Frenchwoman, too, altogether; but a Frenchwoman of the best kind, and, consequently, none the worse for being of that country: for when a woman, in the midst of many vices, remains pure; in the midst of much infidelity remains faithful, she surely establishes, on the score of temptations overcome and evils resisted, a sufficient balance in her

own favour, on the great account with the world, to justify a few little extravagances and frivolities. In the account with God it may be a different thing. The Marquis de Langy, too, was an amiable man in his way. They were two people well matched; and had, what was rare at that time in the world, and especially in France, a great deal of tender and kindly feeling. I say especially in France; because that tender and kindly feeling is there, not only as in other countries, ground down upon the heavy grindstone of interest and worldly pursuits, melted and dissolved away, as in other countries, by luxuries and vices, scattered and broken to pieces, as in other countries, by passions and contentions; but is also, as in no other country, blown to the four quarters of heaven by the light winds of persiflage and mockery. As the reader well knows, nothing can go down in France which has not a grand air; and at the times we speak of, to have given the heart any importance in the affairs of life, one would have had to put a sword by his side and to make him a *Marquis*.

However, the Marquis and Marchioness de Langy had both too much good feeling to be able to hide it, and too much good sense to try; but it would have been very much better for both of them if that good sense had extended so far as always to guide their good feeling in the proper direction, and to limit it to the proper extent. In most ordinary cases it did very well; they loved each other tenderly and affectionately, yet always with due decorum; but in regard to their children they carried their parental fondness to a pitch which stopped not a step short of weakness. This was especially the case with their eldest son, who, being always with them, of course engrossed the greater part of their attention; though the mind of both the marquis and marchioness often turned with the yearning of parental love towards him whom, for his own benefit, they had consigned to the care and guardianship of another. In regard to their son Victor, however, their misdirected affection went to the length of vicious indulgence; and, as may easily be supposed, such conduct towards a young man of strong passions and not very strong mind produced the natural fruits of self-will, licentiousness, and violence.

At the early age which he had reached when his brother Francis set out for Auvergne, Victor de Langy had already twice called upon his father to pay very considerable debts, and had still more frequently required his aid to extricate him from the consequences of irregular and vicious conduct. Monsieur de Langy, it is true, had never come forward to his assistance without remonstrance and reproof; but these were so gently applied as, even in the first instance, to be listened to with little attention, and, in the end, to be heard with impatience and disrespect.

It was one morning, then—while the younger son of that noble house was dreaming sweet dreams by the side of Julie d'Artonne—that Monsieur and Madame de Langy were sitting together in a chamber of their hotel in Paris. It was a large sunny room, with tall windows, which nearly reached the ceiling, but did not descend lower than three or four feet from the floor; and a great deal of ornamental furniture, a splendid bed, looking as if it were never intended to be slept in, marble tables, so covered with clocks and vases that nothing else could find a place, and chairs, stiff and stately, ranged around the wall, gave the room that appearance of cold untenantedness which was the general characteristic of all the chief apartments of the day.

It is a strange fact, but no less true than strange, that the moral characteristics of a nation, as well as of an individual, show themselves remarkably in the style of furniture that they choose; and in the ornament without comfort, the mixture of coldness and glitter which the French saloons of that period displayed, we find no bad image of the heartless vanity and splendid emptiness of the people and the times.

Monsieur and Madame de Langy were alone, talking together of the future, that grand object of the human thought on which all the mind's energies are so vainly spent—the future, on which man so idly reckons as his possessions, when it, and all that it comprises, are God's alone. Their anxieties were for their elder son, for his advancement in life, for a marriage they were planning between him and some girl of wealth and expectations; and they saw, in their baseless calculations, the injuries which their property had sustained more than repaired by her dowry, and a long race, bearing their noble name, marching on through coming times, which they fancied would be just like their own.

They were discussing the matter eagerly—perhaps a little sharply; for the marquis and marchioness differed upon one or two points, and the lady was, of course, resolved to have her own way. She was saying, "No, indeed: Victor shall carry the proposal himself, and I will school him into showing some degree of devotion and attention; I will answer for it, all will go right if you will but let me manage it."

Even as she spoke, there was a considerable noise below, and upon the stairs the unpleasant moving of many feet, and the murmur of voices in tones eager, yet subdued—the sort of sound which tells one instantly that something has happened—something that agitates and excites, yet is to be concealed from somebody. We naturally think that it is from ourselves; and Fear, the veiled but constant companion of Hope, pushes before her bright and beaming fellow, and tells her tale of sorrows, and misfortunes, and distress, often as false as those of the deceitful goddess of expectation.

Madame de Langy started, for the sounds were coming up the great staircase, and Monsieur de Langy stepped forward and opened the door. A groan mingled with the rustle of the approaching feet; and, as soon as those who were coming up beheld him, there was an exclamation of "Ah, monsieur!"

Madame de Langy darted into the corridor, and perceived her son carried in the arms of four men. His coat was thrown lightly over him, as if it were a mantle, and the sheath of his sword was empty. His hat, too, was gone; and the curls of his hair, those beautiful curls with which his mother's hand had played so fondly in his childhood, fell back from a face now covered with the ashy hue of death; while down his left arm, which hung, as if powerless, by his side, streamed the red blood, appearing here and there through the fine sleeve of his shirt, dabbling the ruffles at his wrist, and dropping from the tips of his fingers.

"Good Heaven! what is this?" cried Monsieur de Langy; while his mother, with a distracted scream, rushed to the side of the wounded man.

"Why, sir," said one of the servants, "he met

this morning with Monsieur Eugene de Launay, whose sister, you know—"

Monsieur de Langy waved his hand. "What happened? what happened?" he demanded.

"Oh! carry him in, carry him in, and stanch the blood!" exclaimed Madame de Langy. "Here! here! lay him on this bed. Send for surgeons; bring the nearest first; then run for Robert! Oh dear! oh dear! how terrible this is!"

The unhappy young man was borne into the room where his father and mother had just been sitting talking over his future prospects. He was placed upon the couch; and his head, which had drooped forward, fell back upon the bolster. The coat of morone-coloured silk, that had been thrown over him, was drawn aside, and the shirt soaked in gore exposed. It, too, was torn open by the trembling and eager hands of his parents; and there, in his right breast, was seen a small triangular wound, from which no blood was streaming, while on the left side appeared a corresponding aperture, pouring quickly forth the warm current of life. Madame de Langy strove to stop the bleeding by pressing her handkerchief tightly on the wound; and the marquis, who in his military career had seen death in many shapes, gazed hopelessly on the pale face of the stripling, merely pronouncing the word "Water!"

An ewer was immediately brought, and some drops sprinkled on his brow and lips. The application produced some effect, for he opened his eyes, and they turned with a faint and heavy gaze upon the marchioness. His lips moved, too, for nearly a minute, and he seemed to fancy he was speaking; but the only articulate sounds that he uttered were the words "My mother!" with which the effort ended, and then came a low moaning sort of sigh. His eyes closed and opened again, while a strong convulsive shudder passed over his frame. His hand, which he had raised as if to grasp at something, fell heavily by his side—and all was still!

The signs were not to be mistaken, but still a mother's hopes clung round the form of the dead. She believed she saw the bosom heave, long after the last breath was fled; she thought she saw the light of life in those fixed glassy eyes, long after the lamp was out; she fancied motion in the lips, she dreamed even the colour was returning to the cheek. Her husband stood, and gazed with tearless lids and a heavy, frowning brow; but *he* did not deceive himself; and when a surgeon entered in haste and approached the bedside, he took his wife by the hand, cast his right arm around her, and saying, "Come!" drew her away.

"Oh! let me know if there is any hope," said Madame de Langy, as he supported her towards the door.

"Hope?" said the marquis in astonishment, for he knew not how a mother's heart can deceive itself. "Hope? He is dead!" and the marchioness fell back upon his arm as unconscious of all life's woes as he whom they had just left.

Monsieur de Langy gave her over into the hands of her women, and returned immediately to the chamber of death. Still there was not a tear in his eye; but a strong and bitter curl of his lip, and heavy contraction of the brow, told plainly that anger aided him in mastering his grief.

"He is gone, sir," said the surgeon, as soon as the marquis entered; "I am sorry to say life has departed."

"I know it," replied Monsieur de Langy, abruptly; "do you think I never saw a dead man before? How did this happen?" he continued, fiercely, turning to one of the servants: "François, you knave! you have pandered to all his vices. If you have had any share in this, wo be to you!"

"Indeed, sir," answered the valet, "it was not my place to stop Monsieur Victor in what he thought right to do. If you did not disapprove, I had nothing to do with it."

"You are right, scoundrel! you are right," cried the marquis; "a weak parent is chargeable with half a child's faults. Would to God I had sent you to the Bagne when first I found out what you are! How did this happen, I ask? Let me have the truth, if there be anything like truth in you."

"Why, sir," replied the man, sturdily, "I can only tell you what I have heard. They say the count went somewhat too far with Mademoiselle de Launay last night, and offered her some violence; believing that a *petite demoiselle* like that might think herself honoured by his notice. She resented it, it seems; and, meeting her brother Eugene this morning in the garden of the Tuileries, Monsieur Victor retired with him to the open space behind the *traiteur's*. I had been watching to prevent mischief; but I came up too late, for their coats were off and their swords crossed; and, before I could get up, young De Launay lunged, and ran him through the body. But I should think the king would never suffer a pitiful lieutenant of the line to kill a man of Monsieur Victor's rank without—"

"Order out the carriage instantly!" cried Monsieur de Langy. "Stop! I will take a fiacre. Come with me, sirrah!" and away he strode, cast himself into the first vacant vehicle he could find, and drove with all speed to the palace.

He was admitted immediately to the presence of the king; and, casting himself at his feet, the marquis exclaimed, "I come to crave justice, sire! One of your officers has killed my son!"

"I know it, Monsieur de Langy," replied the monarch; "and most sincerely and deeply do I feel for you, the more especially as in this instance I cannot act as I could wish. Your son, sir, offered a gross and flagrant insult to a young lady who deserved it not; a brother drew his sword to avenge his sister; and although I greatly disapprove of any one daring to take the law into his own hands, yet my sense of the provocation is too strong to permit of my visiting the fault with all the severity that, under any other circumstances, I would have shown. De Launay and his son have been here—"

"And my cause is prejudged!" exclaimed Monsieur de Langy, rising.

"I pardon you, sir," replied the monarch; "your loss deprives you of your reason. I have banished him, sir, from Paris, and that punishment shall suffice. But I have determined to bring this system of duelling to an end altogether. The law has already put down those premeditated meetings which once disgraced our country; it is now, however, evaded upon the pretence of accidental encounters. These, too, I will stop; and therefore I give notice—mark me, gentlemen all, and make it generally known I will never pardon again any action of this kind, be the offender who he may. No pretence shall be available; and, if one French gentleman kills another in vengeance for a private injury, the matter shall be looked upon as any oth-

er murder, and treated accordingly, from this day forth."

The marquis muttered something between his teeth: for, although he was naturally of an easy and placable disposition, the fact of his child's death was fresh upon him, and that terrible thirst of vengeance, the drop of the blood of Cain which is in all our hearts, burned in his veins, and as yet had not had time to cool. He would pursue the murderer himself, he thought; he would spill his blood as he had spilled that of him so dear. But, as he drove back to his own house, anger gave place to sorrow. He wept, and the tears softened the bitterness of his heart.

Wiping the drops away, that his servants might not perceive them, with a false sense of what is manly and becoming, the bereaved father entered his dwelling amid the silence of all around. But, as he mounted the stairs to seek the chamber of his afflicted wife, Memory, obtrusive Memory, with her peculiar malice, called back a thousand images of happier days, and contrasted the hopes and the joys of the bright past with the grief and anguish of the dark present. He heard the voice of his son, as in infancy and boyhood it had prattled within those walls; he saw the sunny face of the child, and the expanding graces of the youth; he recalled a thousand traits which had touched the parental heart with emotions never to be forgotten. Everything that was bright and promising was carefully culled by the hand of Remembrance to swell his sorrow, and everything that was evil and weak was cast away.

As he approached the apartment to which Madame de Langy had been removed, he heard a voice talking to her, and concluded that a priest had been sent for; but on entering he found her leaning her head on the shoulder of Monsieur de St. Medard, and weeping calmly, though bitterly.

"Speak not, my dear Adèle," the viscount was saying as his nephew entered: "speak not as if you were utterly bereaved and childless. Remember, you have still a son, one every way deserving your tenderest affection. Ah, Victor! this is a terrible blow; but if you entertain that faith and religious feeling which you have both of you always professed to cherish, you will derive consolation from it now."

As he himself spoke, Monsieur de St. Medard's eyes fell towards the ground. The sources of consolation which he pointed out to his nephew seemed, at a moment of sorrow and anguish like that, to acquire an importance and a depth which, in the current of an even and a prosperous life, they had never seemed to possess. Thought glanced like lightning over a thousand topics which he had lately been considering; and those longings and aspirations for immortality, which, if anything be innate in the heart of man, we have every reason from their universality to suppose are so, made him ask himself if it were not a far grander, a far more magnificent and sublime conception to believe in the existence of one great and all-creating Spirit, filling the human breast with tender affections and kindly sympathies, and, after trying them in the fire of a disastrous and disappointing world, giving them full fruition in a brighter and purer state of being, than to imagine that all things here below, the material world around us, our thoughts and feelings, the pleasures of the mind, the loves of the heart, are the perishable productions of a cold inevitable law which calls them into being without volition or object, an them to annihilation without regret or c shrunk from the consequences of his o cherished doctrines, and for the first tim to believe.

For a moment or two, the words, whi sieur de Langy spoke in reply, fell upo unheard; but then, rousing himself, the applied all his energies to console his and niece under their bereavement. H some degree successful: thought, which lost in the tumultuous sensations of afflic turned after tears had had their course; night, Monsieur de Langy and his wi busied with their kind relation in mal those sad preparations which the terrib of the day had rendered necessary. On first steps was to send off a courier to A to summon Francis de Langy back to P all speed.

CHAPTER XIX.

The sad solemnities of the funeral ken place before Francis de Langy coul Paris, but still his meeting with his fat mother was a very painful one. In m spects he was unlike the dead, taller more powerful in frame, though sever younger, darker in complexion, with more marked and manly; but still the him was enough completely to overset th of equanimity which the marquis and m ness had regained, and to recall with p anguish the memory of his brother a shock of their loss. Gradually, however impression wore away, and nothing re but the consolation of his presence. seemed to cling to him even more fond they had done to their eldest son; and t rental affection, which, like a fresh-trans shrub, had appeared to languish and fad day or two, revived, and bloomed brighte ever in the new soil when once it had root. On his part, the hero of our tale that the gentle kindness of a feeling hea a delicate mind could do to soothe and c his parents under their deprivation; and, they might still experience deep regret they thought of him who was gone, they not but acknowledge that their survivi was far his superior in every quality of and understanding.

Calm tranquillity was thus soon resto the house of the Marquis and Marchion Langy; but yet in the breast of each m of the family rested a something on whic were unwilling to fix their attention—a those questions to be determined on whi much is staked, that we fear to agitate i our present peace should be lost. The and mother could not but remember that had given over their right in their son other; that Monsieur de St. Medard ha mally, and with their consent, adopted h his own. Could they, then, with honour, o propriety, take him from one who had be parent and guide of his youth; and yet they consent to part with him for such le tervals as those which had hitherto occur their communication with their son? Thi a frequent subject of thought with both

er dared to speak to the other upon it, nor ffer the viscount to see that their minds agitated by such considerations.

quently, too, did Monsieur de St. Medard ate upon the same difficult point, but an- subject mingled with the current of his tions when they turned that way. His ion for Francis de Langy was of a less kind than many even of our purest at- ents. The viscount could have made his up to resign his unquestionable claim, if doing he could really have benefited his d child; but that was what he doubted. gh he knew the good qualities of his neph- d niece, he knew their weaknesses also; e asked himself, if their foolish indulgence ompletely ruined the disposition of their son, was it not likely that their daily in- ng love towards the one who was left lead them to the same errors, and have, egree, the same effect? He was aware, l, that the mind of the youth whom he ought up was originally of a firmer and er nature than that of his brother; he be- that the education he had received was ated to strengthen and improve that mind, did not fear that Francis would ever be- like the youth whose vices had brought upon his own head and sorrow upon his s. But he had taken a pride as well as a re in forming the character of his neph- on upon principles long considered and inately chosen. He trusted that those les, if followed out, would evolve all that ood in his disposition, correct all that ad; that the flowers and the fruit of the would be nourished and protected, the removed, and the blight destroyed. It asily be supposed, then, that he did not see his plans frustrated even in a de- that he dreaded the effect of over-tender- ven upon a character prepared, as far as ne would permit, to resist it; and al- his affection towards Francis, his fond- or his society, and the interest which he n cultivating and directing his mind, not have prevented him from relinquish- right at once, yet the apprehension of g his adopted child himself made him and hesitate, and, finally, determine to no absolute abandonment of the claims he possessed. Much more important re- an he foresaw hung upon his decision; this place I must beg the English reader llect that, in France, the adoption of a vas regulated at that time by different rom those established in any other coun-

question, important as it was, and af- , as a matter of course, his whole future ough it did certainly cross the mind of s de Langy from time to time, was not hich occupied his attention the most. ader may easily divine what it was, at f he knows anything, or ever has known g of love. It was of Julie d'Artonne thought; and often and anxiously did himself how he ought to act, what he to do. Feeling how young he was to in such sensations, there was a timidity, of apprehension in his breast, which made rink from speaking of them even to Monsieur de St. Medard, with whom he was accustomed to have no concealment in regard to any of his thoughts; and yet he was afraid of trusting to the dark, capricious, uncertain future, lest some incident should supervene to destroy all his hopes forever. He knew how early many a marriage was arranged in France; he knew, too, that very often they were decided long before, as a mere matter of business between parents, without any consultation with the parties most interested, and sometimes even without informing them. He feared, therefore, that such might be the case either with Julie d'Artonne or with himself; and he was well aware that such an engagement once entered into, either by his father or hers, would be irrevocable, and place an eternal bar between them.

On these considerations he resolved to speak of his attachment to Monsieur de St. Medard. He knew that he could trust in his affection, in his kindness, in his judgment; [redacted] though there was nothing in his adopted [redacted]'s manners, demeanour, or character, no word that he had ever heard him utter, no act that he had ever seen him perform, which had in it the slightest touch of what is called romance; though he was a man of sound and practical sense, of calm, cool reasoning, displaying in all his actions thought rather than passion; still there was something, an indefinable something, which told Francis de Langy that the kind friend of his youth had at some time loved deeply, and could still feel sympathy, strong, generous, and tender, for such sensations as those in his own bosom. And yet, though he resolved to speak day after day, he shrunk from the task of telling his attachment and explaining his wishes.

As fate will often have it, whenever he had made up his mind, and went to seek the viscount, Monsieur de St. Medard had gone out to the council, was busy with papers, or had some indifferent person with him; and then, when accident threw them alone together, either he could not summon resolution to introduce the subject abruptly, or some interruption took place just as he was about to commence the tale.

Thus passed on nearly three weeks. The rest of the young man's time was generally spent with some youths of high family who were studying under an old officer of invalids some of the practical parts of the science of war. They usually met in a ground set apart for the purpose, at a distance of about four miles from Paris; and there, in forming bastions, redoubts, and field-works, and receiving instructions for their attack and defence, several hours were passed every day.

It so happened, on one of these occasions, that after the exercises of the morning were over, and the officer whose lessons they had been practising had left them, Francis de Langy, with some ten or twelve of his companions, stood together near the gate of the field, with a number of grooms and other servants holding their horses. The day was very hot and sultry, they were all fatigued and thirsty, and Francis had sent Jean Marais to a small cabaret on the other side of the little green to bring some wine and water to refresh them after their exertions.

He had scarcely left them, when an old woman in poor apparel, tall, coarse, and forbidding in appearance, and of a yellow, tanned complexion, came through the gate, and with the common whine of the race which the French call Bohemians, and which we name Gipsies, asked one of the young gentlemen to have his fortune told. The lad immediately held out his hand, and gave the woman the piece of silver she demanded; in return for which he received a very flattering account of his future performances in love and war. Several of the rest followed; and, at length, the fortune-teller turned to Francis de Langy, who had hitherto shown no disposition to consult her art.

"Come, my sweet young gentleman," she said; "cross my hand with silver, and I will tell you your luck. You will be a fortunate man, I am sure; I see it in your beautiful face. Why, you are taller than the rest by a head, and you will not refuse a poor Bohemian a little crown."

"Come, come, De Langy," cried one of his companions, seeing him shake his head. "You are not afraid of having your fortune told, are you?"

"Oh no," replied Francis de Langy. "I put too little faith in the matter to be afraid. There, my good woman, there is a crown for you, and there is my hand, if it please these good gentlemen to hear my fortune."

The woman pocketed the money, and then took his hand in hers, gazing steadily into the palm for a minute. The next moment she dropped it with a look of contempt, and, taking out the crown again, thrust it back upon him, saying, "I did not come to tell the fortune of such as you. I came to talk with young gentlemen, not with a peasant's son. Keep your money; you will want it some day."

All his companions burst into a loud laugh; and one exclaimed, "Why, you old fool! don't you know this is the Count de Langy!"

"I don't know what he is called," replied the old woman, "but, count or no count, he is the son of a peasant;" and, as she spoke, she turned away, and left the group of gentlemen, directing her steps towards the little cabaret which we have mentioned. Just at that moment, Jean Marais, followed by a boy carrying wine and glasses, was seen coming across towards them; and Francis de Langy exclaimed, laughing, "I have a great mind to bid my servant stop her, and make her tell me something more, as she is so learned; but I fear, Auxerre, you have spoiled the sport for to-day by telling her who I am."

"Bid him bring her back! bid him bring her back!" cried several of the others; but the woman seemed to divine their intention, for she turned shortly and quickly out of the way of Jean Marais, and took a path which led round a little garden at the back of the cabaret.

The incident which we have described produced, at the time, no more important effect than some laughter among the young men who were present. One of them advised Francis de Langy to inform the marquis that he was found out to be a peasant; another asked him, jestingly, to produce his letters of nobility; and the young gentleman himself seemed as much amused as any one, for he looked with too much contempt upon the woman and her tale to attach sufficient importance to the matter even for anger. When he told his father the story at dinner, however, Monsieur de Langy was highly indignant, and declared that he ought to have had the woman arrested immediately for offering such an insult to a French noble. In the capital, too, and at Versailles—there happening to be no piece of pleasant scandal, or idle gossip, or public news of great interest current at the time—the story of the Bohemian and the young Count de Langy was circulated from mouth to mouth, and supplied the place of other conversation at least a day and a half.

On the evening following this event, however, not to lose sight of any of the personages of our history, Jean Marais, whether among the servants of the house of Langy, or waiting upon his master at dinner, or assisting him to undress when he went to bed, displayed a degree of thoughtful gravity not at all usual in his case. He seemed abstracted, uneasy, restless; and twice he was heard to say to himself, "Well, it is no business of mine."

At night, Francis de Langy remarked the singular conduct of Jean Marais; and, after having had to speak to him more than once whenever he wanted anything, he asked him, in a kind manner, what was the matter, adding, "You seem very sad and thoughtful to-night, Jean. Has any misfortune happened to you?"

"Oh no, sir; not at all, not at all," replied Jean Marais. "I am as merry as a lark. Misfortune? God bless me, no! On the contrary, I fancy a cousin of mine has come into a fortune, and I was thinking of asking your permission to go into the country for two or three days to see my relations."

"By all means," said Francis de Langy. "Can I do anything else for you, Jean?"

"Well, sir," answered Jean Marais, "with an impudent man—which I hold myself to be, and thank God for it—one favour granted always begets another to be asked. May I make use of the horse that usually carries me to carry me now? It will save me a Louis in conveyance, or half a Louis in shoe-leather."

"Take him," replied Francis de Langy; "but do not override him, my good friend. Remember, though he is a strong beast, you are a heavy man."

"Ah, sir, you don't do me justice," said Jean Marais; "I have a heavy hand upon an adversary's head, but a light one upon a horse's bridle. I should certainly have liked a few words with that old woman there has been so much talk about to-day."

"Indeed!" cried his master, somewhat surprised at the abruptness with which he introduced the subject; "what can you want with her?"

"Oh! to have my fortune told, of course," replied Jean Marais, with a laugh; "I expect to turn out a very great man some of these days."

"Why, you are not foolish enough to suppose she could tell you anything about your fortune?" rejoined his master.

"I don't know, sir," answered the valet; "she said one very true thing to-day, if she said no more."

"And pray, what was that?" demanded Francis de Langy, with his surprise not diminished.

Jean Marais paused a moment ere he replied, but then answered, with a low bow, "She assured you that you were a very fortunate gentleman, I am told, the moment she looked at you; and that you will certainly admit is very true. First, you have an excellent father, who is very fond of you; so you are lucky in that. Then you are lucky in an excellent mother; and an uncle as good as either; lucky, too, in fortune, rank, figure, health, disposition; and also in having the very best valet de chambre that was ever born and educated, in the person of your most humble and obedient servant, Jean Marais."

"Well, well," said Francis de Langy, laughing; "you are right in all the first particulars you have mentioned, and I trust you will prove yourself right in the last also. So now good-night to you. Tell one of the other servants to take your place for the time being, and let him call me early to-morrow, for I wish to catch my uncle before he goes out."

Thus saying, Francis de Langy retired to repose, like all the rest of the world, in happy ignorance of the events which were coming rapidly forward out of the dark future to alter the whole complexion of his fate. Each man, when he lays down his head upon his pillow to rest, has a volcano underneath him. It may remain still and tranquil during his slumber: for hours, for days, for months, for years, it may show nothing but peace, and calm prosperity may stretch around. But it may wake him ere morning with the lava or the earthquake, and burn up the harvest of his hopes, or scatter the vineyard of his fortunes to the wind.

CHAPTER XX.

We must return, dear reader, to a spot which we have abandoned for many years, and to persons whom we have not seen for some time; but we go back with none of those feelings of affection wherewith one revisits the scenes of one's youth, with none of those warm and kindly associations which the memories of happiness enjoyed are sure to produce. In returning after long absence to the home of our early years, we may, it is true, find ourselves disappointed; a part of the brightness is almost sure to have passed away, and our eyes are changed, even if the things they looked upon have remained the same. The persons whom we loved, too, are sure to have altered, and rarely for the better; for, even if they be still upon the bright side of life, the rose-bud is generally more beautiful than the rose; and, if they be on the autumnal side of the hill, we shall have to mark many a leaf that has fallen, many a flower that has faded away.

In going back, however, to the *Ferme Godard*, neither have we ourselves any great interest in the place or the people, nor, to say the truth, had Jean Marais. Nevertheless, he judged it necessary to visit the home of his youth, dear reader; and, as we do not feel ourselves to be competent to censure his conduct or restrain his actions, we, too, must follow him thither, to see what he was about.

It was hot summer weather, as the reader well knows, and Jean Marais thought—he was a very reasonable and calculating gentleman—that it would be much cooler, both for himself and his horse, if he made his little expedition by night rather than in the daytime; and accordingly, within two hours after he left the bedroom of Francis de Langy, he was going soberly along the road in a direction varying from northwest to northwest and by west. As nothing in the world happened to him except his horse getting a stone in his shoe at the distance of about five leagues from Paris, we shall not dwell upon the events of his journey, till, at about half past eight o'clock in the morning, he rode out of the little village which was seen from the farm-house, and took his way slowly up the hill. Although the recollections of childhood in the breast of Jean Marais were not full of unmixed pleasure, and the sweeter parts were altogether connected with himself; although he had lost his parents early, and had fallen to the care of Gerard Latouches, who, to say the truth, was not the kindest of cousins; although he had been put to labour, as soon as his hands were capable of work, with a harsh and suspicious master, who gave every encouragement that distrust and severity can afford to make a servant outwit him he serves; yet, as Jean Marais rode along and looked round upon the scenes of his early years, he could not but experience some of that melting tenderness which seldom, if ever, fails to rise in the heart of man when any circumstance, either of sight or sound, recalls, in a more tangible and vivid form, a period of comparative innocence and gentleness of feeling. Memory brings its own light with it; but that light, which, like the lustre of the moon, is a reflected one, partakes the character of the period from which it flows. When we look back, in our latter day, towards the joyous activity and energy of first manhood, the evening seems to be brightened for a moment by the splendour of noon; and when, in the full summer-day of maturity, we pant under the heat of our passions and the excitement of strife and endeavour, the calm, fresh gleam of the morning appears to fall refreshing upon our hearts as soon as we turn our eyes to the softer hours of childhood.

Such feelings took possession of the hero of this chapter as he went on towards the farm, but they did not hold him long, and his mind speedily resumed its ordinary habits. Now the mind of Jean Marais, dear reader, was a very peculiar one; an active, eager, bustling intellect, which was always busy about something, inquiring, finding out, setting to rights, arranging its goods and chattels, or bartering them against those of other people with a great degree of sagacity and shrewdness. There are as great differences in the demeanour and conduct of the mind as in the character and bearing of the outward man. Indeed, the fleshly creature seems but the corporeal type of the thinner essence which is boxed up within each of us; and, just as much as there are slow and sluggish frames which move with difficulty and unwillingness, busy and bustling bodies that are always in a state of fuss and locomotion, graceful and beautiful forms, that, whether in activity or repose, present themselves in sweet and

agreeable attitudes, active and powerful shapes which require robust exertion and energy as the natural result of their structure, so have we minds possessing precisely the same qualities, and exhibiting themselves precisely under the same aspects. It does not follow, indeed, at all, that the body should represent the mind that is within it. In truth, alas! the contrary is frequently the case; and I have often been tempted to think—and might have given way to the temptation, too, had not revelation put a bar to the vagaries of fancy—that, according to some heathen superstition, the bodies and minds of men were originally made separately, like an instrument and a case, and were then laid by, to be put together as they might be needed. Going a little farther still, I could have fancied that in this sort of arrangement it was not judged of much importance which spirit was put into which case; so that a very fine instrument was not unfrequently found in a coarse, inconvenient, or damaged cover.

Such was in some degree the case with Jean Marais; that is to say, his corporeal and mental qualities were very different. Strong, powerful, and active he certainly was in frame; but no one would have imagined, from his somewhat light and careless demeanour, that his mind was so thoughtful and busy as it was, especially at those moments when his limbs and muscles were in the most quiet and tranquil state. Had the outward and inward man acted at all together, our friend Jean could not have gone up the hill at the slow and sauntering pace with which he proceeded; for his fancy was employed with a thousand different inquiries, and was flying from one point to another with a rapidity truly marvellous.

As he came nearer to the *Ferme Godard*, however, he laid by speculation, and took to observation. The first thing that struck him was a look of great improvement, and an increased neatness about the building, and all that lay around it. His cousin had evidently prospered in the world, and Jean Marais remarked it with a smile. He did not in the least wish Gerard Latouches any evil, he was not sorry to see his fortunes improve; but, if the truth must be told, he had considerable doubts as to the means by which that improvement had been effected. He had no great confidence, in short, in the peculiar honesty of his cousin; and he had some cause, to say sooth, to doubt Gerard Latouches' mode of acquisition.

Riding up to the house, he entered a farm-yard which had lately been added and enclosed with walls; and, tying his horse to a ring which was fixed in the side of the house, he opened the door quietly and went in. The first person his eyes fell upon was a maid-servant, an appendage which the farm now owned; and he was about to ask for his relations, when Marguerite Latouches herself came out of the back room, and for a moment seemed scarcely to recollect him, though, perhaps, he was less changed than she was herself. He had, indeed, become a stout, powerful man, instead of a tall, well-grown boy; but a very different sort of alteration had taken place in her appearance. In the first place, she had completely lost the smart air of the lady's-maid, and had sunk down in dress and character into the small farmer's wife. In the next place, every vestige of beauty was gone; the pretty girl had become the plain woman, brown, and somewhat shrivelled with time, exposure, labour, and care; but the saddest change of all was from health to sickness. There was still some colour in the face, it is true; but that colour centered in one small spot in either cheek, and the rest was all sallow and sickly. The lips were pale and bloodless, the features sharp and thin, and there was, moreover, a look of anxious thought, as if something were pressing continually upon her mind.

As soon as she recognised her husband's cousin, Marguerite Latouches welcomed him with a faint smile, but told him, at the same time, that Latouches was absent. "He has been away five days now," she said.

"I thought so," replied Jean Marais, much to her surprise. "Pray, where is your son?"

"He is at school," answered Marguerite Latouches; "Gerard is bringing him up for a lawyer."

"For a lawyer!" repeated Jean Marais; "that is an honest profession! But what hopes has he in making the young man a lawyer? He can but be an *avoué*, or a notary; and, without some relation in that line, a peasant's son will never get on."

"Ay, but you forget," said Margaret, "that your cousin Martin, Gerard's brother, is intendant to Monsieur de Langy, and can do a great deal for him. But come, Jean, you must break bread in the house, though you seem to have grown a very fine gentleman. What will you take?"

"Nothing but a cup of water with a dash of wine in it," replied Jean Marais; and then added, abruptly, "I should have liked to see your son."

"Thank you, thank you, Jean," answered Marguerite: "you were always kind to the boys; and I used to say you had a good heart, though a wild head."

"I should have liked to see him," repeated Jean Marais; "I want to know which of his family he is like, Marguerite."

At that moment the good woman turned away to get a glass out of the cupboard; and Jean Marais added, in the same sort of abrupt manner in which he had before spoken, "I always thought your husband had great intentions for his son."

Marguerite turned and looked at him steadily, while the bright colour came up into her sallow cheek. There seemed to be a struggle in her mind as to whether she should reply or not, and after a momentary pause she said, "Jean Marais, some day or another—"

But just at that moment a horse trotted rapidly up to the front of the farm, and with a nervous look in that direction she hastened to draw some wine from a barrel, leaving the sentence unconcluded. The next instant the door opened, and Gerard Latouches entered, looking round him for the guest whose horse he had seen standing without. Jean Marais sat still gazing at him with an unconcerned air, and an expression of countenance which might be translated "Here I am! how do you like me?" but it was evidently by a great effort of memory that Gerard recollected his cousin.

"On my life," he cried, at length, "on my life, I believe it is that worthless scapegrace, Jean Marais!"

"No other, if you will believe me," said Jean Marais, with the utmost nonchalance: "I do not wonder at your not knowing me, Gerard; I am very much changed in all things since I left you. I have got to a new school, and have turned an honest man."

"Then the philosopher's stone has been discovered," cried Gerard Latouches; "for nothing but a transmutation of metals could do that."

"Why, it is true, I am your first cousin," replied Jean Marais, "and they say what is bred in the bone will never go out of the flesh; but still I am trying to be as honest as the bad blood in my veins will let me."

"Then be so good as to pay me the ten Louis which you stole out of my table when you went away," exclaimed the farmer, "or I will have you taken up for robbery."

Jean Marais laughed. "Come, come, Gerard," he said, "thou always wert the most impudent of men; and how I come to be so modest I cannot tell, considering I was brought up by you. Answer me one question, Gerard Latouches: did you not pocket everything my father left when he died? Did you not sell the two cows, and the horse and cart, and the field, and the furniture, and the house? I only helped myself to a part of my own; and, if we come to reckon, I think you will have to put your hand in your purse."

"Who fed and clothed you, and placed you at school for three years?" cried Gerard Latouches. "You cost me much more than ever you brought, and were always in mischief from the time you were twelve years old."

"Will you go into an account before a notary?" asked Jean Marais.

"Stuff and nonsense!" answered his cousin. "Besides, if there were a few Louis more or less, you had no right to break open the drawer. You could be marked on the shoulder for that."

He spoke much more diffidently, however, than he had done at the beginning; and, in the end, he thought it better to change the conversation, saying, "Well, where did you get all your fine feathers, and your horse? Have you been plucking some young gull, or robbing on the highway?"

"Neither, my good friend," replied Jean Marais, who well knew all the little intricacies of his cousin's character, and was aware that, among other not very singular opinions, he held wealth to be virtue, and poverty to be vice; "neither: you mistake my position altogether. I hold a capital situation, which fills my purse and covers my back; and all that I have got to say is, that if you have any claim upon me whatsoever, and are ready to enter into an account with me, I will discharge my debt in a moment, be it what it may."

Thus speaking, he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a well-filled leathern purse, much to the surprise and admiration not only of Gerard, but of his wife, neither of whom could by any effort of imagination conceive how he could have possessed himself of so much wealth.

"No, no, Jean," replied Gerard, who was not at all fond of entering into the reckoning which his cousin talked of, "let the past be the past. I forgive your breaking open the drawer with all my heart; and as to the money, it is no matter. I never thought to see you again, and so I kept no account. But what is this situation you have got? I should like to hear."

A moment's consideration made Jean Marais resolve not to tell his worthy cousin what was the nature of his employment, and by whom he was employed; although he was well aware that, sooner or later, Gerard, from his connexion with the house of Langy, would find the facts out for himself.

"You will excuse me, Master Gerard," he said; "my situation is one of trust and confidence, and I think it better not to mention anything about it. Thank you, Marguerite," he continued, taking up the glass of wine and water which she had placed on the table before him; "here's to your health! Gerard, your health! I must be going."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Gerard, "you must stay and take a bit of dinner with us. My wife will put a fowl in the pot, and we will have a merry meal of it. Your horse looks tired, too; we will have him round to the stable. How far has he come this morning?"

Jean Marais would not give the slightest indication of his place of abode, and simply replied, "A good many leagues." In the matter of dinner, indeed, he suffered himself to be prevailed upon, staying an hour or two for the purpose of gaining rather than affording information. From Gerard Latouches very little was to be obtained, that worthy gentleman not having received from nature a communicative disposition. Small signs and symptoms, however, to an inquiring eye very often discover great truths; and, among other matters which Jean Marais perceived, was the fact that poor Marguerite stood in awe of her husband to a degree that could only be produced by some great severity on his side. Everything like love appeared to be out of the question between them. She had expressed no satisfaction at his return, nor he any pleasure at seeing her again; and though, like a slave, she hastened to obey his lightest word, the anxious glance of her eye showed that it was the obedience of fear, and not affection. Various other little particulars became apparent to the keen scrutiny of Jean Marais: and before he left the house he was tolerably well satisfied in regard to several questions on which he was doubtful when he entered their doors. As soon as the meal was over he took his leave, and left his relations, with some pity for the wife, but no great reverence for the husband.

Such feelings would have been not a little increased could Jean Marais have seen the events which occurred immediately after his departure. Gerard Latouches waited till the sound of his horse's feet died away; but, the moment that such was the case, the husband opened a drawer in the old walnut commode which stood near, and took out a paper covered with writing on two sides. His wife watched him with a look of fear and anxiety, and, on his turning round and approaching her, seemed ready to sink into the earth.

"You shall sign the confession, woman," said Gerard Latouches, "whether you like it or not. I don't mean that I will use it, but have it in my own hands I will."

"I told you before," answered Marguerite, in a low voice, "that I will never do it. If you kill me, I will not."

"We will see," replied Gerard Latouches, and at the same time he struck her a blow on the side of the head with his open hand, which made her reel and wellnigh fall.

"Now will you sign it?" cried her husband.

"No!" she replied, bursting into tears, and casting herself into a chair. "If you touch me again I will scream till the people hear."

"Let them," said Gerard Latouches, and once more he struck her as she sat, more severely than before.

Marguerite uttered a long and piercing shriek, and then began coughing violently. In an instant her mouth filled with blood; and, the cough continuing, every effort brought up more, apparently from the lungs. Gerard Latouches was now alarmed; and, calling to some of the labourers, he sent them instantly down to the village, in which, by this time, a surgeon had established himself to do those offices for the sick which, in former days the good priest of the place had performed with little less skill than himself. The son of Esculapius soon arrived, and heard from Marguerite herself the ill treatment Gerard had given her; for, with natural indignation, she was not at all unwilling to show that her husband had been instrumental in killing her. The surgeon, who had attended her for some time for a complaint in the chest, and who had a reverence for all the rich farmers in the neighbourhood, declared that the blows she had received in the face could not have ruptured a vessel in the lungs, and, consequently, that her own screaming must have produced that result. Nothing he could do, however, seemed to stop, or even to diminish, the pouring out of blood; and, drawing Gerard Latouches aside, he informed him that his wife would not see the next morning.

"That is unfortunate," replied Gerard Latouches, in a very indifferent tone, "for I must absolutely return to Paris to-night. If you have got anything else to do, my good friend, go and do it, and then come back and attend upon her while I am absent. But are you perfectly sure that she will die?"

The surgeon informed him that there was not the slightest hope of her surviving; and Gerard, after having seen him depart, returned to his wife's chamber, and remained with her in conversation for nearly an hour, notwithstanding an injunction to keep her as quiet as possible. The surgeon brought back with him, two or three hours after, both a sick-nurse and the priest; the latter of whom was received by the farmer with a very sad and wobegone countenance. He declared his deep regret that he was obliged to leave his poor Marguerite under such circumstances; but, on mounting his horse, and riding away from the door, the clouds passed off from his face very soon; and any one who had marked it accurately might have seen a strong inclination to laugh curling his lip.

CHAPTER XXI.

Francis de Langy was disappointed in seeing his uncle on the day after Jean Marais's departure. Monsieur de St. Medard had gone out before his nephew arrived, and during the whole day he did not visit the Hôtel de Langy, where the young gentleman had taken up his abode on reaching Paris. The next morning, however, as his adopted son was sitting in his own room about an hour before breakfast, calculating whether it would not be better to speak to the marquis at once on the subject of his wishes, rather than wait in order to trust the communication to his uncle, Monsieur de St. Medard himself opened the door and came in.

"I am glad to find you alone, Francis," he said, taking a chair which his nephew placed for him: "there are two matters on which I wish to speak to you; and on one of which, my dear boy, I think you have wished to speak with me, yet seem to have hesitated to do so. In the first place, then, let me advise you, Francis, with those whom you love and respect, never let timidity prevent you from going straightforward to the point regarding anything that you desire. Mental courage is as necessary to a man as corporeal courage: they are the two great guardians of truth; and when you have well considered a matter, and have made up your mind that it is right to do it or to say it, have no hesitation in putting your resolution into execution, nor attempt to prepare the way by any preliminaries, except such explanations as are absolutely necessary."

"I was doubtful, my dear uncle," replied Francis, with the colour somewhat high in his cheek, "I was doubtful whether it was really right and necessary to do that which I wished to do."

"I am not blaming you, my dear boy," said his uncle, "but giving you advice for the future—two very different things. But to the point. You are now an only son; and my belief is that, although you are too young at present, according to the customs of the world, to marry, your father will wish to form an alliance for you as soon as possible. My wishes in that matter will go with his, for various reasons. In the first place, one cannot altogether free one's mind from prejudices which have been instilled into us early, and every man in our station of life desires to see the house to which he belongs carried on by direct heirs. It is a foolish inclination, perhaps, and has no very reasonable foundation; but still I must feel with the world in this respect, and should be sorry to see the honours and estates of the house pass away to remote kinsmen of whom we know little or nothing. In the next place, I am a great advocate for early marriages where both parties have been educated in the principles of virtue and honour. I look upon a man's attachment to a woman who deserves it as the greatest possible safeguard to him in his dealings with the world; it keeps him from all those small vices which unfettered youth thinks little of, but which certainly, though slowly, undermine the foundations of better things, till in the end the whole fabric of right and wrong gives way under the assault of temptation. I myself owe more in life than you can imagine to an early and honourable, though unrequited affection. Now, from your conduct and demeanour towards Mademoiselle d'Artonne, I am inclined

to believe that a union with her would not be disagreeable to you."

"I love her more than any being upon earth," replied Francis de Langy.

"I am glad of it," said his uncle, "for I think she is worthy of your love; and I am not the least offended, my dear boy, at your not making any exception in my favour in regard to the exclusive attachment you profess for her, for Nature never intended that man should love any other human being with the same devotion which he must feel towards her who is to be the companion of his whole existence. I am glad of it in another respect, too; because I think that, merely in a worldly point of view, the alliance is one which your father would himself desire, and because I also know that there will be no obstacle on the part of Monsieur d'Artonne. That fact I had already ascertained before your brother's death; and, if he did not object when your position was much less favourable, he certainly will throw no impediment in the way under existing circumstances."

It may easily be conceived that such intelligence gave extraordinary joy to a bosom full of the warm enthusiasms and eager affections of early youth. A thousand dark apprehensions and misgivings had hung between the eyes of Francis de Langy and the future, making him fearful to look upon it. He had fancied that his father might object, or even Monsieur de St. Medard himself; that Monsieur d'Artonne might oppose; that the hand of Julie might even be promised to another; or, at the best, that all parties might treat his attachment coldly on account of his youth, and interpose long delays to chill the eager hopes of love. Such apprehensions, however, were now all swept away in an instant. It was as if a dark and sombre curtain had been suddenly removed, and one scene of unclouded brightness and splendour opened before him as his future prospect. The presence of age almost always chills more or less the fire of youth. Had Francis de Langy been alone, he might have given way to almost any sort of joyous extravagance to vent the exuberance of his satisfaction. A young man is not worth much who could not jump over a chair or a table when he is very happy, just to expend a part of the superfluous excitement. But Monsieur de St. Medard being present, Francis de Langy restrained himself, and only kissed his uncle's hand warmly to show his gratitude and his joy.

"Well, well, my dear boy," said the viscount, "I see you are satisfied with the arrangement I propose, and therefore, without a word more, I will go down and speak to your father about it. Stay here, and I will let you know the result."

There is in the human mind a want of faith in happiness, which, I believe, is inherent, not acquired. What we long for we tremble for; and even the child snatching at the fruit or flower has fear in his eagerness, as well as desire. We know, without being taught, that everything on this earth is mortal; and that, of all mortal things, joy is the most frail. The moment his uncle was gone, the feeling of apprehension again took possession of the heart of Francis de Langy. He knew of no cause for dread, and yet he dreaded that some unforeseen obstacle might still intervene. He was not long kept in suspense, however, for the viscount was not gone five minutes, and his air and manner on his return at once showed that all was as he could have wished it.

"Your father is delighted, Francis," said Monsieur de St. Medard, "and your mother not less so. Go to them, my dear boy, and then make preparations for a journey. It is determined you shall be your own ambassador; and as you have selected your future bride yourself, contrary to all our absurd precedents in this country, you must even ask her hand of her father also."

At an early hour on the following morning Francis de Langy was concluding his preparations for his new expedition to Auvergne, aided by the servant who had supplied Jean Marais's place during his leave of absence, when suddenly the worthy valet himself entered the room, exclaiming, in grief and astonishment,

"Going to Auvergne, sir, and I not going with you!"

"Why, my good Jean," replied Francis de Langy, "I have business of importance to transact, and could not wait for you."

"Wait!" cried Jean Marais; "I am ready this moment, sir. You can never go to Auvergne without me. Is not a real, genuine, unadulterated valet de chambre as much a part of his master's person and identity as his right leg, without which he cannot walk, but only hobble? I will answer for it, sir, that if you were to set out for Auvergne without me, you would get into some scrape in two minutes, from which no one could extricate you but myself; and in taking me with you, as I fully intend you shall, you will find cause every hour of the day to thank the lucky stars that furnished you with Jean Marais. What is a gentleman without a valet de chambre, indeed!"

Francis de Langy laughed gayly, with a heart so full of its own gladness that everything else seemed of minor importance; and, leaving the other man and Jean Marais to settle the matter between them as to which should accompany him, he saw it speedily arranged to the satisfaction of both parties, the lackey being quite as much pleased to remain in Paris as Jean was to journey into Auvergne.

Ere half an hour was over, Francis de Langy's postchaise rolled out of the *porte cochère* of his father's house, and was soon on the road to Clermont. If thou shouldst ever be in Paris, reader, and be either enchanted by its gayeties, fascinated by its pleasures, deluded by its apparent wit, philosophy, and energy, or attached to it too strongly by any of the bonds of the heart or the head, and, on leaving it, shouldst desire a brush wherewith to sweep away every feeling of regret from thy mind, go out slowly by the Faubourg St. Marceau: let the sight of its filth and squalor, its crowded abominations and uncheerful horrors, be thy last remembrance of Paris, and, if ever thou dost wish to see it again, thou must have a strong stomach or a bad memory. Nowadays, one can avoid that faubourg, on whatever road one travels, but, at the time I speak of, there was no possibility of getting to Moulins without passing through it; and, as the postillion jogged on slowly over

its rough and jolting pavement, Francis de Langy thought he would never get to the end of sights displeasing to the eye, and smells offensive to the nose. But when they issued forth under Menil Montant, and passed through Villejuif, where there was no post at that time, the postillion did not seem to go any faster, or the road to be less tedious. Alas, that the wings of the little blind god, though he uses them sometimes swiftly enough to fly away with himself, should never be of any service to his votaries, even when most eager to proceed upon their way! On went the postchaise at its own pace, notwithstanding all the wishes of Francis de Langy; Fromenteau, Essonne, Ponthierry, Chailly, Fontainebleau, one by one, were reached; and such was the rate of progression on that day, that by the time the carriage rolled into Nemours it was quite dark. Onward, however, the young gentleman travelled till he arrived at Montargis, by which time he had received conclusive proof that the attempt to make much way during the night was of very little use, and tended much more to wear out his patience than to accelerate his journey. At each of the two posthouses between Nemours and the last-mentioned place, he was kept waiting an hour before the people of the place were roused and the horses put to; and as he came into Montargis itself, the town-clock was striking two in the morning, though he was yet less than eighty miles from Paris.

The next day the same took place, and the next again; and the feelings of Francis de Langy were only changed, inasmuch as, when at the end of the third he stopped at Moulins, he was within twenty-one leagues of the dwelling of her he loved. Those twenty-one leagues, however, though in general not what can be called mountainous, were difficult to travel; the road not the best in the world, the horses by no means superexcellent, and the people somewhat slow. As Francis de Langy knew this by experience, he was in his carriage at sunrise, and, perhaps, might have reached the Chateau d'Artonne by daylight, had not the postillion taken it into his head to drive furiously across a gutter in the little town of Gannet; which proceeding dexterously broke the axle of the carriage at the very precise spot most convenient for mending it, opposite to a blacksmith's shop, who, it was remarked by the people of the town, had always strongly opposed any alteration of the gutter which ran across the highway.

About fifty yards farther on there was a little auberge, or cabaret, kept by a cousin of the postillion; and thither Francis de Langy naturally bent his steps, and spent an hour in taking his dinner while the axle of the carriage was being mended. That operation took up at least an hour and a half, and thus the sun had just set when he reached Riom.

Do you remember, reader, having walked with us up a hill not far beyond that city, and through a path in the wood which led to a fountain! If you do, you will also call to mind that Francis de Langy there beheld, for the first time, the beautiful being whom he was now going to seek as his bride. Just as he reached the bottom of the ascent on the present occasion, the moon, which had been somewhat hidden either by the clouds or the hills—I know not well which—shone out bright and clear; and at the same moment the postillion pulled up his horses and asked if monsieur liked to walk up the hill. Francis agreed to do so very willingly; and at the mouth of the little path which he had formerly pursued, with his heart full of the memories of that meeting, he turned away to the left, enjoying at every step the thrilling pleasures of association. He smiled as he recollected how free and easy was his breast when first he trod that little meandering footway, how little he had expected that any incident would occur to beget such a complete change of feeling in his heart; and then he thought of her he loved, and of how beautiful she had looked as she lay senseless upon the path before him; and he called up the glance which she had given around as recollection returned, and the first meeting of his eyes with hers.

Memory might pause for a moment, too, upon all that was strange and unexplained in the events of that day; but his heart was too full of love to permit thoughts of any other kind to hold it long, and he walked on, dreaming of Julie d'Artonne. As he went, the moonlight seemed still to keep him company; for though the path, as we have shown, took many bends round the sweeps of the hill, yet the bright planet was so high that she either shone out full upon his way, or poured her rays in wavering spots of light through the brown leaves and branches overhead.

As the young gentleman was approaching the little fountain, however, he heard a sound as if some one had thrown down a quantity of tools or implements of husbandry, followed by voices speaking in a low, grave tone. He suddenly stopped, for the usual hour of work was past, the labourer retired from the field, the woodman gone home to his cottage, and Francis then perceived, for the first time, that Jean Marais was close behind him.

"What is going on, Jean?" he said in a whisper.

"Perhaps some poachers," answered the man; "and, if it be, we had better go on and take no heed."

"Perhaps we had," replied Francis de Langy; and he accordingly walked slowly and quietly forward, for ten or a dozen steps, to a place where the path became more open, crossing a space of about twenty yards in breadth and forty in length, where some trees had been cut down on the hillside, leaving behind them a patch of underwood here and there, while the rest of the ground was covered with long forest-grass. On the left hand the hill declined somewhat abruptly; and beyond the opening the trees rose tall and thin, with a few shrubs and plants beneath them, not thick enough to deserve the name of underwood.

Here, again, Francis de Langy suddenly stopped, for there was another light besides that of the moon; and the persons from whom the voices proceeded were partly visible at no great distance. They were gathered together just below the path, and were some twelve or fourteen in number. As they stood at different distances down the descent, the heads and shoulders of some, the heads of others, and nearly the

whole form of one or two, were visible. The latter was the case with a tall man, dressed in the garb of the maréchaussée, who held a torch in his hand, with the flaming end somewhat bent down. There seemed to be another flambeau, if not more, below, by the red light and smoke which came up, drowning in a gloomy and portentous glare the pure cold beams of the moon.

After gazing for a moment, Francis de Langy fancied that he recognised more than one of the persons before him; and, at all events, his curiosity was too highly excited to permit of his proceeding without ascertaining what they were about. Without any attempt at concealment, then, but with a quiet step, he advanced through the grass to the spot where the group was assembled, followed, as he did so, by Jean Marais. Their approach caused little observation; one of the men turning round his head, looking at them slightly, and then resuming the steadfast gaze with which he had been previously contemplating the proceedings of another personage, who, with mattock and pickaxe, was beginning to dig by the light of the torches held above his head.

What they were seeking the two new-comers could not divine; but it was now clear, not only that the business was of importance, but that Francis de Langy was right in supposing several of those there assembled to be well known to him. Close to the person who was digging stood the intendant, with his arms crossed upon his chest, and a red roquelaure cast over his shoulders to keep him from the night air. He was looking on with his usual calm, cold, impenetrable expression of countenance, steadily, but not anxiously, as one might be supposed to witness a proceeding which excited nothing but mere curiosity. A little nearer to Francis de Langy, but with his back turned towards him, stood the Count d'Artonne. It was evident, from the attitude which he had assumed, that he was gazing at the proceedings with strong interest, though his face could not be seen. One or two of his servants were there also, as well as the préfet of the neighbouring town, who had been pointed out to Francis de Langy during his former visit to Auvergne. The rest of the party comprised two or three labourers, and some servants and officers of the intendant, with several agents of the police, and no less than four servants in the livery of Madame de Bausse. In the front was the large dog which we have mentioned as accompanying that lady on her visit to the house of the intendant, which now stood with drooping ears and tail, the mouth partly open, and the tongue hanging out, watching the process of digging, and every now and then running forward, and attempting to aid the men who were employed, by scratching eagerly with his feet.

The scene altogether was a curious and a solemn one. All were now silent; and the only sounds which broke the stillness were the strokes of the mattock and an occasional low whine from the dog. The sensations of Francis de Langy were by no means pleasant; a cold chill seemed cast over his bright expectations; vague and uncomfortable images rose up before his fancy, and connected the present with many events of the past. He remembered that it was close to that very spot where he had found Julie d'Artonne in a state of insensibility; he recollected the sudden and unexplained disappearance of Monsieur de Bausse; and, he knew not why, his mind would join those events with that which was at present going on, and that, too, in a painful manner. He, too, stood and watched the labourers with a feeling of awe and apprehension, as one gazes at a dark thunder-cloud which is ready every moment to burst upon us. In the mean while the men worked on, removing shovelful after shovelful of earth, till at length the mattock struck the rock, without their discovering anything.

"Work on in this direction," said the intendant; "you have begun too much towards the hill. Let the dog be your guide."

"We shall come upon the water, monseigneur," replied one of the men; "the stream from the fountain comes down there."

"Do as you are ordered," replied the intendant; and the workmen proceeded [illegible] from the spot in which they had been [illegible] or three feet to the right.

The first shovelfuls which they threw up in this place were of a dark soft earth mixed with some volcanic stones, loose and easily moved. They then came to some leaves thickly packed together, and moist with the water of the stream, which, oozing through them, passed under the surface of the ground from the basin of the fountain above, to join the stream down below. Two spadefuls were cast out, and then the intendant suddenly exclaimed,

"Stop! what did you touch there?"

"Nothing, I think, but the packed leaves, monseigneur," replied the man.

Monsieur d'Artonne stepped a little forward, and said—it seemed to Francis de Langy, not without a considerable effort—"Better scrape the leaves away gently: they must have been placed there, as the earth is above them."

His voice was low and hollow [illegible] he spoke, the dog, whom one of the servants had taken by the collar, broke away, and scratched up the leaves with his feet.

The next instant some cloth, apparently the sleeve of a man's coat, was discovered; and the intendant exclaimed, "Hold the torch! hold the torch! Here is the body! Take away the dog, remove the earth and leaves gently, let us see exactly how he lies."

Quickly and in silence the men proceeded with their work, casting off the earth and the wet leaves on either side, and in less than a minute they came to a hilt of a sword; upon which one of them was stooping down to pull it out from the mass that covered the blade, but the intendant stopped him, exclaiming suddenly, "Do not touch it! Remove the rubbish from it with the spade; it is necessary to see whether it be drawn or not."

Very little labour was necessary to prove the fact: the sword was unsheathed, and quite rusty, seeming to have been thrown in after the body had been deposited in its unconsecrated grave. When it was all clear, the intendant took it from the hands of the workmen, and examined it by the torchlight; while every one gazed on him and it, in deep silence and with a contracted brow.

"Go on," said the intendant, and the work was resumed.

In about three minutes more the whole of a human body was exposed to view; but the little stream, trickling on through the leaves, formed with the disturbed earth a muddy pool around the corpse, which prevented anything from being seen, except that it was lying on the side, with the face towards the hill.

The body was easily raised, however; and, being placed upon the open ground, a torch was held close to the face. To the surprise of all, not the slightest appearance of corruption was visible. It would seem that the stream of water, either from some peculiar quality in itself, or from the extreme coldness of its temperature, had entirely preserved the corpse from decay, so that the features were as perfect as at the moment when Death set his seal upon them. They were those of a young and somewhat handsome man, well formed, though not particularly prepossessing. The countenance seemed [illegible] certain degree of expression, wh[illegible]bly more the accidental one wh[illegible] the moment of death, than that which was habitual to it. The brow was contracted, the teeth set hard, and the corners of the mouth drawn down. The right hand had a glove upon it, the left hand none, but one was found under the body. The clothes were rich and expensive; there were rings upon the fingers, and a chain of a watch apparent, with several large seals. No hat was found; and the sheath of the sword was doubled up underneath him, and somewhat broken.

"Do any of you recognise this man?" demanded the intendant.

"I do," replied the Count d'Artonne at once: "it is the late Marquis de Bausse."

"I do, I do," cried several of the persons present.

"Now, then let us see how he came by his death," the intendant continued; "there is no appearance of blood that I can see."

"It must have been washed away by the water," observed some one.

"Open his coat," said the intendant; and, on so doing, right in the midst of the breast was discovered a small round wound, scarcely large enough to admit the point of a man's finger; but, spreading from it on every side like a halo, was a deep blue and yellow bruise.

"Well," said the intendant, after they had all gazed for a moment or two in silence, "two facts are evident. This is the corpse of Monsieur de Bausse, which we have at length found; and he has met with a violent death. Monsieur d'Artonne, I must trust to you to convey this intelligence as delicately as you can to Madame de Bausse, for I intend myself to proceed immediately to Riom, carrying the body with me. I hope too, my dear friend, that to-morrow you will give me your assistance in the investigations which it will be necessary for me to institute in order to discover the perpetrator of this deed."

"Undoubtedly," replied Monsieur d'Artonne. "At what time shall I be with you to-morrow?"

"At ten," said the intendant, "if you can make it convenient;" and some more conversation of no importance took place regarding the arrangements for the next day, and the method of bearing the corpse to Riom.

Francis de Langy, however, waited not to hear it. He felt sick and gloomy: a deeper impression was made upon him—he knew not why—than the mere sight of the dead body could have occasioned; and, turning away, he resumed the path towards the high road without speaking a word to any one. Absorbed in what was going on, no one noticed his departure any more than his arrival; and, when he cast himself into the chaise, he covered his eyes with his hands; but it was long before he could turn his thoughts away from the painful channel into which they had been directed.

CHAPTER XXII.

In this chapter, reader, we will endeavour to fly with the wings of the wind; though, perhaps, we had better say with the wings of the butterfly. But this is a chapter of young joy, which is always eager and rapid, passing like a flash; and the butterfly is the image of calm happiness, sporting in its garden of flowers, and fluttering, half sated in the wantonness of fruition, from sweet to sweet, ere each be fully tasted.

The meeting of Francis de Langy, on the night of which we have already spoken, with Julie d'Artonne, with her father and with her mother, was somewhat checkered with gloom. The scene he had witnessed had cast a shadow over his own mind; it had done so still more over that of Monsieur d'Artonne; and, judging that the count might wish to communicate with his family in private, Francis soon after his arrival proceeded to the chamber of the Abbé Arnoux, whom he found very slowly advancing towards recovery. The good old man was quite contented with his progress, however; he had been up for an hour during each of the two days preceding, and he thanked God for the relief afforded him with the humble gratitude of an earnest and pious heart.

The next morning beamed more brightly; the impressions of the night before had been softened in the mind of the young lover; and, on going down, he found Monsieur d'Artonne also with a more cheerful face. While speaking with him at the foot of the stairs, a servant brought in a letter from the intendant; and, in reading it, a well-pleased smile came upon the count's lip. Francis de Langy thought the moment favourable for his own suit; and at once presented a note, which had been given to him by his father, formally asking the hand of the young heiress of Artonne for the heir of the house of Langy. The count read it with a grave air, and then merely replied, "If you will go into the saloon I will join you in a minute."

A momentary shade of apprehension came over the heart of Francis de Langy. It was in vain that he recalled the words of Monsieur de St. Medard, and the assurances which those words implied; he loved too much to be confident, and remained in doubt and fear till there were steps without, and the count himself came in leading Julie by the hand. Her face was like a rose in the morning, all blushes and tears; but the tears were happy ones, like the dew of the summer dawn; and, when Francis sprang forward to meet her, she gave him both her hands, and he held her to his bosom as a bride.

They were joined the moment after by Madame d'Artonne; who, with a warmth and eagerness very different from the cold and formal manners of the day, expressed the delight she felt at the idea of her daughter being united to the adopted child of one who had been the earliest and dearest friend of her husband and herself. A few minutes of confused joy succeeded, during which neither Francis nor Julie well knew what they themselves or any other person said; and then came calmer considerations as to when this union was to take place. A smile, thoughtful and grave, but yet full of calm and happy expectation, came upon the countenances of Monsieur and Madame d'Artonne when they called to mind how young, how very young, were those two lovers. The only difficulty, indeed, that either of them felt was to make Francis de Langy understand that a considerable lapse of time must pass ere he could receive Julie's hand. That matter, however, was more easily settled than Monsieur d'Artonne expected, for Francis already had come to the same conclusion; so that he offered not a word of opposition, and the matter was left vague and uncertain.

"I must go to Riom immediately after breakfast," said Monsieur d'Artonne, as they were sitting down to the morning meal; "but I will not take you with me, Francis, upon a dull and somewhat sad errand. I have another affair for Julie and you to transact, better suited to your time of life and to your feelings. Do you remember the man who was in prison for poaching—Antoine Bure? He was set at liberty; but it appears that there were other charges of the same kind against him, which have kept him from his home wandering among the mountains for the last fortnight. Now, with some difficulty, I have obtained an order to *surseoir*, which is tantamount, you know, to pardon; and you two, if you like, may carry up the notice thereof to his father's house. Do you know where it is, Julie?"

"Oh yes!" replied Julie, "I can find it; it is to the left, above Bourasole, among the hills. I never was there; but I heard something about the Huguenots, and that you were angry with the people because they were unkind to them."

The matter was soon and easily settled. Francis undertook that they would easily discover the house, for he would not have given up the promised expedition for a mine in Peru. To be with Julie alone; to talk of love with her who was the object of it; to borrow from the sky, and the air, and the clouds, and the sunshine, and the mountains of laughing Limagne, figures to image forth all the sweet sensations of his heart; to breathe the expansive happiness of his bosom under the free canopy of heaven, was a joy such as man has power only to taste in those few early years of life—so sweet, so fugitive—when all the flowers of the heart are in blossom, before they have been trampled down, or plucked, or have cast their leaves in the summer. Oh, how they pass away, those early years! and, if joy itself be but a point in the vast space of time, how small is the point when joy is pure and unsullied, without the alloy of one regret!

Monsieur d'Artonne set off soon after for Riom, and Francis de Langy and his sweet companion were not long in taking their way up into the hills. There was a little abatement, indeed, of their anticipated pleasure from Madame d'Artonne insisting upon sending horses to meet them as they returned, lest Julie should be tired. Julie felt that, under such circumstances, she could have walked untired double the distance; but something prevented her from saying so, and Francis de Langy would not oppose anything which was supposed to be for her comfort.

They took their way forth, then, alone, about ten o'clock in the morning; and passing through the park that surrounded the chateau, they issued out on the other side into a small bridle-road shaded by walnut-trees, which led in those days from Riom to Portefaix. Here they met a number of countrywomen going on to buy or sell in Riom, and as they wanted no society but their own, they struck off into a footpath which led round the base of one of the mountains between Riom and Clermont, called Chanturgue. They were now lonely enough: the vines were soon left behind them; some orchards full of rich fruits were likewise passed; and then came extensive meadows, stretching out from the mountain foot to the bank of a small rivulet, which wandered on and joined the Ambene above Riom. As they went on the scene grew wilder still: large masses of volcanic stone stood up out of the green turf; few houses were seen, and those far apart; villages and hamlets were at an end; the cottage of the shepherd, the solitary farmhouse, were the only traces of man's habitation, except where a cross upon the summit of a crag, or upon the soft side of the mountain, either showed where some accident had happened, or called the wanderer passing that way to offer up his praises to the God of all, or spoke hope and comfort in the storm and tempest to those who, perhaps, were wellnigh abandoning themselves to despair.

Julie and Francis de Langy made no great haste along the road. One might almost have applied to them the lines of the poet:

> "Slow through the meadows roved they many a mile;
> Toyed by each bank, and trifled at each stile."

It was not, indeed, exactly so; for, of course, refinement in education and in character produced a refinement in their affection which was not to be found in Phœbe Dawson and her lover. They were full of deep thoughts and strong attachment, but pure and high; and Love, too, was in his young timidity with both. But still they prolonged their walk as much as possible, paused and rested, and talked of future happiness till the shadows, beginning to fall the other way, warned them how long they had lingered, and urged them more quickly on.

At length, amid the wildest part of the scenery, appeared a few patches of corn nicely cultivated, a number of young trees planted in sheltered situations, and a low cottage with some small outbuildings seated close upon the verge of a little lake, if it deserved that name, from which issued forth the rivulet that flowed through the valley they had followed. The expanse of water was probably not more than four or five acres at the most, but it was clear, and bright, and perfectly calm, at the moment that

Francis and Julie approached it, so that the hills around, the heavens and floating clouds above, and the little cottage by the side were all reflected brightly from the surface. As they paused upon the edge to look down into the depth of the liquid mirror, in which the hills seemed to contemplate their own beauty and grandeur, they beheld the figure of a woman, apparently well advanced in life, come out of the cottage and gaze earnestly towards them.

Francis de Langy saw, but took no particular notice, and would fain have lingered there for a moment longer, dreaming fond dreams by Julie's side. Love is always more selfish in a man's bosom than in a woman's; and, though she was well pleased to stay there beside him, Julie, as soon as she remarked the old woman watching them, pressed Francis's arm gently with her hand, saying, "I am sure that is his mother, anxious about her son. Come, Francis, do not let us delay giving them any comfort that we can."

They went on immediately, and, following the little path round the tarn, soon reached the door of the cottage, where the old woman stood, clean and neat, with a withered but gentle countenance, which expressed some degree of wonder to see two young people, evidently of high rank, wandering up to the threshold of a remote and lowly habitation. She spoke first, addressing them in a courteous and quiet tone, without any of the *patois* of Auvergne, though with a touch of the Languedocean accent.

"Will you come in and rest, mademoiselle," she said, "and take a draught of milk!"

"We have come to see you, my good mother," answered Julie; "and so I will go in and sit down for a minute. Is your husband at home!"

"He is just at the back of the cottage, staking in a new cow-shed," replied the old woman. "I will call him in a minute. Father! father! Antoine Bure! Here are a young lady and gentleman want to see you!" and while Julie entered with Francis, and seated herself upon a low settle by the clean white table, an elderly man, the exact counterpart of the good dame herself, came in, putting on his rough short-tailed coat, over a shirt as white as snow. His features were somewhat harsher, and the expression, upon the whole, more stern than that of his wife; but still it was a pleasant and benignant countenance, grave and firm, but kindly withal. In Julie's eyes from the first it was very prepossessing, though she little knew the joy which the sight of that face was destined at one time to give her.

"I am the daughter of the Count d'Artonne," she said, as the old man bowed, and seemed to wait for her to speak, "I am the daughter of the Count d'Artonne, and have come to you by his desire."

"Oh! I know you well, mademoiselle," replied the farmer; "and as for the good count, he has done as much for us as he can in withdrawing his own charge against our poor wild boy. He can't make the other people do the same, I know; though I think the other little lords, such as Monsieur d'Argental and Montvert, might do so too when a nobleman like him sets them the example."

"Oh yes," replied Julie, "my father has done more for your son; he has got an order from Paris to *surseoir*: so that he is in no more danger, and can come back to you when he pleases. Here is the notice of it from the Greffe."

The old man caught the young lady's hand with a sudden start of joy and satisfaction, and kissed it warmly. Then, taking the paper, he ran his eye over it, and handed it to his wife. But she could scarcely read it for tears. It rarely occurs in England that a man of the lower, or even the middle classes, can express easily any sudden emotion of pleasure or gratitude: it is seldom in France that he has not something well-turned and graceful to say upon the occasion.

"The count is very kind, mademoiselle," cried the old man; "the count is very kind indeed in sending us this notice, and has doubled his kindness by the hand that brought it. I am very grateful, mademoiselle; and, though I am but a poor peasant, it is not impossible, nay, I think it very possible, that at some time I may have an opportunity of serving the count in return."

"Oh! he wants no return," replied Julie; "he is always glad to do any good that he can without wishing for any recompense."

"Ah, mademoiselle," answered the good farmer, in a thoughtful tone, "when I was young, my mother used to tell me a story of a lion that got into a net, and a mouse that let him out. I dare say you know it, for most mothers tell it to their children—"

Julie smiled, and nodded her fair head to indicate that she was aware of what he alluded to.

"Well," continued the Huguenot peasant, "I may be the mouse some day, mademoiselle. God knows, but I trust I may. And who is this young gentleman! The count has no son, I think."

"No," replied Francis de Langy; "I am but a friend, yet one who loves him nearly as well as if he were his son."

"Ah, and will be his son, too, some of these days," cried the old woman, laughing; "I can see how it is very well. Nay, do not let me make you blush, mademoiselle! Happy are those who get the man they love. If it be a blessing in bright days, what is it not when the sky is cloudy or the storm comes down! But, God protect you both, I say!"

"Ah, God protect you both!" cried the old man; "and He will protect you too, for I have always seen a blessing follow such things as you have done to-day."

Some farther conversation of the same kind took place, and, after remaining in the cottage about a quarter of an hour, Francis de Langy and his beautiful companion turned their steps homeward with an additional gleam of satisfaction on their way; for the heart of man, with all its corruption, does find delight in witnessing and promoting the happiness of others; at least before all the efforts of the great tempter, who is constantly about our path in the world, have had their effect in changing those emotions, which God planted in our breast for our own good, to his evil purposes. They returned joyful, then; with peace in all their own feelings, and gladness, moreover, in that which they had communicated to others. The horses

met them not far from the little lake, and, entering the chateau, they found that the count had already come back from Riom. He was calm, and even cheerful. Madame d'Artonne seemed to enjoy the sight of their mutual love; and the day, which had risen in brightness, went down without a cloud.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As usual, in the course of all true tales, from the time of Tom Jones down to the present day, the reader is obliged to go backward and forward in this book, from scene to scene, and from place to place, in order that he may lose nothing of that which was taking place, and affecting the history of those in whom he feels an interest. The cause of it is, dear reader, that Fate is ubiquitous, and man the reverse. Fate operating everywhere, each individual is the centre of the circumstances which are attacking him on every side: so that, when we want to see the causes which affect any particular personage, we have to wander far and wide, and then do not discover even one half.

About three o'clock of the very day on which Francis de Langy set out for Auvergne, the marquis, his father, was sitting in a small room fitted up with books and somewhat encumbered by papers. In this he usually transacted business with his intendant or steward, and that worthy functionary had not long left him at the moment we speak of. The marquis, accustomed for many years to find in his son one great object of thought and emotion, now felt himself somewhat lonely in the absence of him who had supplied the place which the death of Victor de Langy had left vacant in his sensations; and, sending for the marchioness, he proposed to occupy the unfilled moments by conversing with her on the various arrangements which they had to make for the future.

She was followed into the room by a servant, who stood silent for a moment while the marchioness spoke to her husband; but her first words were an inquiry to which the man alone could give an answer.

"Who is that handsome, good-looking youth," she asked, "who seems waiting for you without?"

"It is a young gentleman, madam," said the lackey, "who has brought a letter for monsieur, which he will deliver to no one but himself; nor will he give his name, making a curious sort of answer when I asked it, and saying, 'You would know it well, and yet not know it at all.'"

"Let him come in," rejoined the marquis, with a smile; "he must explain his riddle himself."

The servant retired, and the next moment ushered in a very handsome and graceful youth, about the height of Francis de Langy, but not so powerful in frame. His complexion was considerably fairer, his eyes closer together, and the expression of his countenance intelligent and keen, but not very frank and open. He was dressed well, but not expensively; and his coat had somewhat the form used by the student of divinity who had not yet taken even the first step in his profession. He gazed for a moment in the countenance of the marquis with a strange and peculiar expression. It seemed that of wonder and affection; and then again he turned his eyes upon the marchioness with the same marked look.

"Well, sir," said Monsieur de Langy, somewhat surprised, "may I ask what is your business? Pray be seated."

But the young man did not take the chair which the servant had placed for him, advancing towards the marquis, and placing in his hand a letter folded and sealed.

Monsieur de Langy looked calmly at the address; then broke the seal, and proceeded to read the contents. In a moment, however, the look of quiet curiosity forsook his countenance. He turned pale, his eyes strained upon the paper; he cast a hurried glance at the youth before him, then gazed at the letter again, and then anxiously looked at the marchioness. In the mean while, the young man himself was manifestly agitated, the colour had fled from his face, he trembled violently; and the marchioness, surprised at the emotion of her husband and his visiter, advanced to the former, exclaiming, "What is the matter, Victor? Do not conceal anything from me."

"Read, read!" cried the marquis, putting the letter into her hands; and Madame de Langy took the paper and read as follows:

"Ferme Godard, September 17—.

"Sir,

"It is with shame and grief I address you, and only hope for pardon by making a full confession of the wrong in which I have taken part; though it was not originally designed or executed by myself. From the time that Madame la Marquise de Langy confided to the care of Marguerite Latouches her youngest son, my unhappy wife conceived the horrible and criminal design of placing her own child in his room, and obtaining for our boy the advantages of his rank and education. I acknowledge that I suffered myself to be persuaded to take part in this wicked act; but I have never ceased to regret it ever since, and have of late been, every day, more and more confirmed in my determination of restoring your son to his parents. With this view, I have gone to the very extent of my means, and even beyond, in order to give him such an education as will not disgrace his family; and, although I admit that I deserve punishment, and submit myself totally to your will, yet I trust that this conduct may procure my pardon. As long as my wife lived, I was withheld, out of tenderness for her, from blighting the unjust prospects which she had obtained for our child; but her death, this night, sets me free from such considerations, and a conversation with my brother, your intendant, confirms me in my good resolutions. I send you, therefore, your son, who is the bearer of this letter; and only farther beseech you to grant me your forgiveness, and to afford some small means of subsistence to the unhappy youth who has so long occupied a place in your family. I have wrung from my wife, on her deathbed, an acknowledgment of her crime, which you will find written below.

"Your humble and repentant servant,

"Gerard Latouches."

"I do confess and acknowledge that the child taken by me to Madame la Marquise de Langy was my child, and not hers; and that the one brought up by me as my own son is the child of the Marquis and Marquise de Langy.

"Marguerite Latouches."

As soon as the marchioness had read the paper she let it drop from her hands, and gazed for a moment at the young man, who stood with his fine head bent, his hands clasped together, and a look of timid hope upon his countenance. With woman's unquestioning confidence she held out her arms towards him, exclaiming, "Oh, my poor boy! and have you been kept in poverty and misery all this time?"

The youth sprang forward, and knelt at her feet; and, throwing her arms round him, she wept upon his neck with tenderness and joy.

The marquis, however, was not so fully satisfied, nor did he give way to such emotions. He remembered the noble bearing of him whom he had so long considered as his son, his high and generous spirit, his deep affection, his fine intellect; he compared his figure and face with those of the youth before him; and, however prepossessing the latter might be, he felt that there was an inferiority—doubtless the result of education—and, on questioning his own heart, he could not but acknowledge that he would rather have had him, whom he had so long called Francis de Langy, for his son.

"Sit down," he said, giving the young man his hand; "sit down. Let me consider this matter. It takes me by surprise, and overwhelms me;" and raising the paper from the ground, to which it had fallen, he read the contents over again.

And as he did so, his countenance assumed a stern expression; and, turning to the young man, he asked, with a frowning brow, "Who wrote this letter? This is not the style of Gerard Latouches, the farmer?"

"It is not, sir," replied the young man, promptly; "he wrote it, indeed, with his hand, but his relation, Martin Latouches, your intendant, dictated what he was to say. He is an excellent man that Martin Latouches, and persuaded my foster-father earnestly to tell the truth."

"Where is Gerard Latouches now?" demanded the marquis; "is he without?"

"No, sir," answered the youth; "he feared to present himself before you, and remained at the house of your intendant at Langy."

"Well, well," said the marquis, thoughtfully, "do not be alarmed, my poor boy. This shall all be inquired into accurately. At first sight, it seems true; and if so, all that a father's tenderness can do shall be done to make up to you for what you have undergone. In the mean time—"

As he spoke a servant entered to tell him that Monsieur de St. Medard was in the saloon; and the marquis, on the first impulse, ordered him to be shown in, saying, "This will affect him as much, perhaps, or more than ourselves." But the next instant he rose, adding, "No! stay, I will speak with him without;" and, taking the letter in his hand, he quitted the room.

"Why, Victor, what is the matter?" exclaimed the viscount; "you look anxious and alarmed."

"And not without reason, my dear uncle," answered the marquis; "look at that paper, and say how I may best discover whether it be true, or whether it be false. Remember, too," he added, "that extraordinary tale of the Bohemian, and what she said to our poor boy."

Monsieur de St. Medard took the paper without reply, read it from beginning to end in silence, returned it to the marquis, cast himself into a chair, and, covering his eyes with his hands, thought deeply for several minutes.

"I am afraid," he said, at length, "I am afraid, Victor, that this is true. I recollect, when I returned from India, some fourteen or fifteen years ago, having ridden to the house of this woman to see your son. When I asked which of the two boys he was, there was a certain degree of hesitation and embarrassment about her which puzzled me, nay, excited some vague sort of suspicion, which passed away after a time; but I remember it well now. This is a severe blow upon you, and a sad embarrassment to us all. Had it taken place but yesterday, much pain, and disappointment, and anguish would have been spared; for I fear that the friends of Julie d'Artonne will never consent to her marriage with a *roturier*, and the poor boy will have been raised to the very height of happiness to be dashed down into the depths of misery. It is very unfortunate, indeed! Yet I fear that the tale may prove too true."

"Then nothing remains for me but to acknowledge the youth?" said the marquis.

"Nay, nay, nay!" cried Monsieur de St. Medard, "there is a good deal more to be done than that. Our convictions in this matter are nothing in the eye of the law. This dear boy has been for fifteen years recognised as your son, and it will require very strong evidence to shake him out of his possession of that station. Worthy of it he is in every respect—high, noble, generous; and it is scarcely possible to suppose that the blood of a mean rascal, such as this Gerard Latouches always was, can flow in his veins. I always thought that education did a great deal; I shall now think that it does everything."

"But what do you intend to do?" demanded the marquis; "and what would you have me do? Give me your advice, I beseech you, my dear uncle, for I am bewildered and astounded."

"What I intend to do is very clear," replied Monsieur de St. Medard. "To me Francis is a son, he always has been such, and ever shall be. I may regret that he is not yours also, if it should prove so; but it is for his inherent good qualities that I love him now, whatever might be the motives on which I first adopted him. There is a weakness in one's nature, certainly, for one's own kindred blood; but that weakness shall never, with me, stand in the way of justice and right, of love and esteem, of honour and propriety. I made no condition with him, when I took him, that he should be of the house of Langy. I have promised him, a thousand times, to be a father to him; and so I would be, if he were the son of my worst enemy. So much for my conduct, Victor; now for yours. Although you may believe, as I do, that this tale is true, and that the youth here spoken of is really your son, still, before you disown the one and receive the other, let the judges of the land inquire and decide; and do nothing to bias their opinion either way. In the mean while, do not send the youth back; let him be comfortably provided for, and proceed with his education. The man says he has had some instruction: to what point has it been carried? Have you seen him? What like is he?"

"All one could desire or wish, apparently," replied the marquis: "graceful in manners and in person; and, though placed in so strange and painful a situation, conducting himself with propriety and modesty."

"Poor Francis!" said the viscount, his mind reverting to him who had been so long the object of all his thoughts and affections: "his is a sad case, indeed. I wish to Heaven that I could go down to Auvergne myself, to break this news

im, and to aid him with counsel and consolation; but I have promised the king to stay, and must keep my word. However, my dear Victor, we must make no delay in recalling the poor boy, and in making the Count d'Artonne acquainted with the fact of a new claimant having appeared to the inheritance of De Langy. We must be as open as day, and not let it be said that, in such delicate circumstances, we kept the count in ignorance even for a day. I will write to Francis; you communicate with the count; and to-night we will send off a messenger to Riom."

Such was the course agreed upon; but, in the first instance, the viscount followed his nephew into the little room of business before mentioned, in order to be introduced to the youth whose arrival had caused so great a change in the arrangements of the Marquis de Langy. Monsieur de St. Medard entered the room with a grave and thoughtful air, and, as he looked at the young man in silence from head to foot, his brow became contracted and his lips compressed.

There was something in the lad's appearance that did not satisfy him. It might be that he was unwilling to be pleased; that his love for another threw a mist before his eyes, which would not suffer him to perceive all those graces and high qualities which had struck the marquis and the marchioness; for, though of a strong and generally unprejudiced mind, Monsieur de St. Medard had his weaknesses, like other men. But, notwithstanding that the youth's countenance was unpleasant to him, still memory recalled the scene in the *Ferme Godard* sufficiently to show him that the features and complexion, though somewhat altered by time, were those of the boy whom he had seen with Marguerite Latouches, and whom he had first fixed upon as his nephew's son.

He put a few questions to him, and received answers distinct and clear. There was nothing that he could find fault with, there was nothing to create a doubt; and, as he left the room to write to Francis de Langy, he murmured to himself, "It is a great pity, a very great pity, that he has been brought up by this pitiful pair. We shall find his mind full of meannesses, and, perhaps, small vices. One can see it in his graceful bends and inclinations, pretty though they be; there is a want of moral dignity in his aspect which will be hard to get over."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Francis de Langy had not risen so early as usual, for he had remained during the greater part of the night keeping watch with Love. He found it impossible to sleep during many hours after he had retired, for every feeling was wide awake within, as on some joyous festival, when the whole night passes in revel, and dance, and merriment, and no eyelid feels the heavy weight of slumber, though half the space of watching would, at any other time, have weighed them down. But early youth is fond of such sweet wakefulness; and, far from striving to sleep, he rose again from his bed towards two in the morning, and, opening his window, looked out upon the starlit skies, while between him and them floated by the pageant-like figures of imagination, grand, and bright, and beautiful, at the command of the enchanter Hope. At length, almost when daylight was about to appear, his eyes felt somewhat heavy, and he cast himself down again, thinking to sleep for a few short hours, and then

"Wake for joy, like nightingales in May."

He was just dressed, and Jean Marais was adding the last touch to what he conceived his master's perfect *toilette*, when one of the servants of the Count d'Artonne brought up a letter, saying that it had just arrived by an express courier from Paris. The fact of having been followed so soon by a messenger gave Francis de Langy some alarm; but his fears pointed in a very different direction from the just one. He thought that his father or his mother must be ill; and, taking the letter from the man's hand, he looked first at the address to see by whom it was written. He instantly recognised the hand of the viscount, and saw, written in the corner, the words, "To be read alone."

"Leave me, Jean," he said, "leave me;" and, sitting down, he opened the packet.

His eye ran hastily over the contents; his cheek became pale; his lips quivered; he shook violently. It was all in vain that Monsieur de St. Medard had striven to tell the truth in language as gentle and as kind as possible. It was all in vain that he assured his adopted child that he should ever be to him a son, let the result of the pending inquiry be what it might; that his fortune, his name, his rank, were all secured to him in so formal and legal a manner that he could never be deprived of them. It was all in vain that he tried to cheer and console him with hope upon the very subject of all others which affected him the most. Still, it was a severe and a terrible blow, crushing, overwhelming, confounding him altogether. It seemed impossible for him to collect his thoughts, so great, so sudden, so bewildering was the effect of the intelligence he had received; but when, at length, a full perception of his situation broke through the mist, and showed him the real state of his prospects and his probable fate, how dreadful was the sensation with which the mind's eye rested on the hopeless blank before him!

There is a story of a traveller proceeding to the city of Augusta at the time of an earthquake, and arriving towards evening upon the summit of the hills from which the towers and spires of the town used to be visible. A light mist hung over the plain, but he rode on joyfully towards the place of repose, till suddenly the mist cleared away, and he found himself standing on the edge of a wide lake, with nothing but an idiot boy beside him, who could give no account of how or when the city had disappeared.

Something like the feelings of that traveller were those of Francis de Langy. At the very moment when his heart was approaching to its place of rest; when, full of joy, and hope, and satisfaction, it seemed as if every wish of his heart were on the eve of being accomplished; in an instant the mist, which hid the future from his sight, was dissipated, and nothing was before him but a yawning gulf, in which all his brightest expectations had disappeared. Alas, alas, for the hopes of man! He builds up; and cities arise, and crumble away: he plants the seed; the tree rises, flourishes, withers, descends into the dust. He forms, he shapes with the chisel, he portrays with the brush, and Time comes, with his heavy foot, and crushes it all to ashes.

He breathes forth his mind, he writes his ideas and his fancies on the paper, the parchment, or the stone; "he returns into the dust, and all his thoughts perish." But, of all the weak and fragile things that he produces or possesses, the most frail and evanescent are his hopes. Alas for the hopes of man, for they are very vain indeed! And still that which is most cherished, that which is most fondly loved, that which is pre-eminently dear—still, I say, it is the thing the soonest taken from us. A voice, the solemn and awful voice of Fate, is still crying out to us, "Set not your heart on earth, or any of earth's things, for, lo! they are passing away, even while you look upon them."

So was it with him: his rank, and station, and noble blood, were but as gaudy ornaments, of which he could have stripped himself without much regret. Wealth, too! what cared he for wealth in those early years, when the heart is free and all the energies strong? when comforts and luxuries—the sweetmeats of second childhood—are little valued by hardy manhood? Competence was all he cared for; and that, he thought, he could always win with his own right hand. But, Julie d'Artonne! could he lose her he loved? Could he see her snatched from him, without learning the terrible lesson of what it is to despair? There all the bright hopes and wishes of his young ardent spirit had centred; there all the fond, eager, strong affections of a heart unsullied and unworn. And could he see her taken from him at the very moment that she was promised? Could he see a bar, irrevocable as it appeared to him, placed between them forever, without feeling that life had nothing left to strive for, that hope itself was dead, that the world was all one vacant blank? Oh! bitterly, most bitterly, did he feel it; and for near an hour he gave way to sensations too painful to describe. At the end of that time, however, the firm principles and steadfast notions of right and wrong, in which he had been educated, began to assert their sway over him; and he asked himself how he was to act under the circumstances in which he was placed.

"I must communicate this," he said, "I must communicate this immediately to Monsieur d'Artonne. He must judge and act. Oh! how will he act? how will he judge? Alas, alas! it is but too clear!" and Francis de Langy hid his eyes, as if to shut out the future from his sight. A moment after, however, he rose suddenly; and, quitting his room, proceeded to that of the Abbé Arnoux, where he remained in conversation with his kind and good preceptor for some time.

In the mean while, events scarcely less painful had taken place in another part of the Château d'Artonne. The count had risen some hours, when the courier from Paris reached the place, and he, too, experienced some surprise on receiving a second letter in the hand of the Marquis de Langy so soon after the arrival of Francis.

"Here has some accident happened," he thought; "some new loss in the family. Poor Francis! I am sorry for him. I wonder whether this curious invention of letters has given more pleasure or pain, more consolation or anguish, in this world? I fear the latter."

As these ideas passed through his mind, he broke the seal; and then, turning to the contents, read the intelligence with which the reader is already acquainted. Monsieur d'Artonne was really distressed: kindness, good feeling, affection for his daughter, high esteem for Francis de Langy, made a strong effort in his bosom to overcome the prejudices of education, and the common habits of feeling in his class and country; but it was in vain. That men should say he, the Count d'Artonne, whose blood had come down pure since the foundation of the monarchy, whose family was allied to some of the first in the land, who had always stood among the high nobility of France; that he had given his daughter to a *roturier*, to the son of a peasant! It was quite impossible; it could not be done. He might deeply regret it, he might feel for the young man most sincerely, he might do any thing he could to serve him; but still he could not enter into an alliance such as that; still he could not look upon himself as bound by a promise made under such a mistake. Francis could not expect it himself, he thought; Julie, too, would surely shrink from such a union. The Count d'Artonne had either forgotten the feelings of his youth, or knew not how firmly the first affection of her heart had taken possession of Julie d'Artonne.

Hastening to the chamber of his wife, the count communicated to her the news he had received. Madame d'Artonne was more moved than he had been: she acknowledged that it was impossible, that it could not be thought of, to unite their daughter to the son of a peasant of Picardy; but yet she wept at the thought of the anguish it would occasion to all, and judged better than her husband what would be the feelings of her child. After a brief conversation with the countess, Monsieur d'Artonne proceeded to his daughter's chamber. She was not there; and, going down to the saloon, he entered somewhat suddenly. Julie was standing near the window alone; and the moment she heard the door open she started and looked round, while the warm blood of happy expectation rose up and coloured her fair cheek. Who was it that she expected to see? certainly not her father, or her heart would have beat more quietly. Advancing towards him, however, she gave him the morning salutation, with her whole face beaming from the sunshine in her heart. Oh, how soon that sunshine was clouded, when she heard the tidings of the change in her lover's fortunes! The bright tears rose in her beautiful eyes; but she dashed them instantly away, exclaiming, with a faint smile, "Poor Francis! how sorry I am for him! but we must do all we can to comfort and console him. Oh, what a pleasure it will be to try to make up to him for all that he has lost!"

Monsieur d'Artonne stood reproved before his child: he could not but own that hers were the high and noble thoughts, his the low and worldly ones; and yet he could not vanquish the habitual feelings in which they were founded. During a moment or two he was silent, for he knew not well what to reply. There is many a weak and wicked parent who, under such circumstances, would have had recourse to anger and to harshness—the ordinary resource of feeble minds when embarrassed by their own follies or prejudices; but Monsieur d'Artonne, notwithstanding some points of weakness, was too wise and too good a man so to shelter himself at the expense of his child. He wrongly believed that, in giving way to the customs of his class and his country, he was consulting her interests, when in fact he was consulting his own pride;

ad, as his wish was to make her happy, he would not on any account have added, by even a stern word, to the temporary sorrow which he considered it necessary to inflict upon her for her future benefit.

After pausing, then, for a time, he took her hand and led her to a seat, saying, "You must listen to me, my dear Julie, for I am afraid this matter is even more painful than you imagine; and do not think your father harsh or unkind in placing the facts of the case plainly and at once before you. Our young friend, whom I shall ever consider with the highest regard, whatever the result may be, seems likely to be deprived not only of the whole inheritance, which, since the death of Victor de Langy, he had every reason to expect—not only of the future rank and station of Marquis de Langy—but of all claim to noble blood—"

"Ah, it is very terrible indeed!" cried Julie; "do let me go and try to soothe him, my dear father."

"Nay, nay, Julie," said the count, more embarrassed by her utter unconsciousness of any obstacle being interposed by the existing circumstances to her marriage with Francis de Langy than if she had foreseen them all, and expressed a determination to disregard them—"nay, nay, you must hear me out," he said; "you do not seem to comprehend," and he lowered his voice as he spoke, "that the rank and station of your family, and the customs of the country, will prevent me from giving my daughter to any other than a man of noble blood."

Julie started back, and gazed in the count's face with her bright eyes full of terror and surprise.

"Oh, my father!" she exclaimed; "oh, my father, is that the law?"

"Not exactly the law, Julie," replied her father; "but custom, which is nearly as strong as law, renders it quite out of the question that I should ever bestow the hand of my child on the son of a peasant."

"And will you, my father," cried Julie, with a look of astonishment and consternation increased rather than diminished, "will you take from him the only consolation he has left, when you tell me that accident, and not his own fault, has stripped him already of everything else that he had a right to expect? Oh, my dear father, you will not, you surely will not be so cruel—you who have taught me always that honour is the highest nobility, virtue and good conduct the richest of all treasures! Oh, no, no, no! I cannot believe it!" and poor Julie burst into a bitter flood of tears.

The count was moved, and, rising in silence, he walked musing to the window. His heart yearned to yield; but he thought of the peasant relations and friends of his future son-in-law; he fancied he heard the low-born farmer calling Julie his daughter; and, hardening himself in his resolution, he returned to her side, saying, "Julie, this is a matter which will not admit of argument; the time will come, and you will see that I am right."

Julie made no answer, but kept her overflowing eyes bent upon the ground.

"I am deeply pained to grieve you," he continued, "but it is absolutely necessary you should understand that, if the claims of this young man who has started up be just, I can never bestow your hand upon him to whom it was promised under a mistake. You must not think of it."

Julie raised her head and wiped away the tears from her eyes. "I have always obeyed you, my dear father," she replied; "I have always tried to think you right in all you did. You forbid me to marry him; and even if the law allowed me, which I suppose it does not, your command would be my law; but, in return, I have one request to make to you. As soon as this question is decided and it is determined that he loses his rank and inheritance, and also by your command his promised bride—whenever hope is over for us both, in short—you must let me go into a convent, for I have nothing more to do with the world."

"Nay, nay, my dear Julie," answered her father, tenderly. "You will think better upon that subject; you are too young to have felt such deep emotions as to render that step even reasonable. You may be grieved at present, Julie; but such feelings will pass away with time, and I may yet see you the happy wife of some man of your own rank."

"Never!" said Julie, in a firm but calm tone; "never, my dear father! Yesterday, with your permission and consent, I plighted myself to him whom I shall always love, by every vow that he could ask me to make. I know that you will say that we were all under an error; it is very true; and therefore I am sure Francis himself would free me from such vows, and will consent to my obeying you so far as in never thinking of a union that you disapprove of. But my own conscience will never set me free to wed another, and I call God to witness that I will never do it. If I do, may I never know a moment's peace here or hereafter!"

"Julie! Julie!" cried the count, trying to stop her; but the words were pronounced, and there was something, both in the manner with which she uttered them, and in his previous knowledge of his daughter's character from her childhood upward, which taught the Count d'Artonne that those words were irrevocable.

"What have you said?" he exclaimed; but, before she could answer, the door of the saloon opened, and a lieutenant of the maréchaussée entered, and advanced with his hat in his hand.

"Monsieur le Comte d'Artonne," he said, "I am grieved at the task I have to perform; but by order of the intendant of police, I arrest you on the charge of murdering the late Marquis de Bausse."

The count turned deadly pale; and Julie, whose cup of anguish wanted but one drop more to make it overflow, sank fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER XXV.

It may seem strange that such an event as we have related in the end of the last chapter should have occurred at this early hour in the morning, when it is known that the Count d'Artonne had, on the preceding day, parted from the intendant with the greatest kindness and apparent confidence existing between them. The intendant had accompanied him, when he took leave, to the very bottom of the steps, pressed his hand, and bade him adieu with every token of regard and respect. It may be asked if, between that afternoon and the following day, that powerful officer had not received some intelligence which had induced him to suspect the count of the crime for which he was now arrested? But no-

thing of the kind had taken place. He had, indeed, been visited very early on the preceding morning, and several hours before he saw the count, by Peter Neri, the valet of Monsieur d'Artonne; who had taken the first opportunity of quarrelling again with Jean Marais on the very night of his arrival, and who had been heard to swear that he would have revenge. But, as we have said, whatever was the character of the communication made by the valet to the intendant, it occurred long before the interview between the latter and the count; and, to say the truth, Peter Neri had returned not very well satisfied with his reception, having been treated with some contempt, and given to understand that he was looked upon in the light of a rogue.

All the great machines of the world, however, roll upon small wheels. In the evening of the day during which Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne had taken the long and happy walk we described some pages back, no less a personage than Jean Marais, having strolled forth to the good town of Riom, was wandering along, through some of the old and not very much frequented streets, when he suddenly encountered the intendant of justice, police, and finance, walking along with a servant following him, carrying a cloak and sword. Jean at once recollected the great functionary, and, remembering that it was by his order he had been released from prison, very reverently took off his hat and made him a low bow. The intendant noticed him with a slight inclination, and was passing on; but suddenly he seemed to recollect him, paused, and beckoned him to come near.

"Ah," he said, "are you not the man who was first accused by the Marchioness de Bausse of the murder of her son?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Jean Marais, with a low inclination, "I had that misfortune."

"Has she taken you into her family again?" demanded the intendant.

"Oh dear, no," answered Jean Marais; "I believe, monseigneur, that she accuses me of the murder to this day, and says that you were very wrong to let me out of prison, for which I owe you my most humble thanks."

"She may find that I was right, not wrong," replied the intendant. "Have you yourself any cause to suspect any one of committing the murder?" demanded the intendant; "you may speak to me in confidence."

"Oh dear, no, sir," exclaimed Jean Marais, whose opinion of informers in general was not very favourable; "I never suspect any one."

"Indeed!" said the intendant; "you are very innocent."

This was intended as a sneer; but Jean Marais felt it to be an insult, for he did not like the reputation of innocence at all. He only bowed his head, however, for the intendant was not a man to bandy words with; and the other proceeded to inquire whether, to his knowledge, the late marquis had incurred the hatred or enmity of any one.

"Why, sir, he was pretty fortunate in that respect," replied Jean Marais, with a peculiar smile.

"How do you mean?" said the intendant. "I had heard that he did not live upon very good terms with many people in the neighbourhood."

"That is just what I intended to imply," answered the valet of Francis de Langy.

"Then why did you say he was fortunate in that respect?" inquired the great officer.

"Because he tried hard to make everybody hate him," replied Jean Marais, "and he succeeded to a miracle."

"Let me have no riddles, sir," said the intendant, dryly, "for I am accustomed to trust the town jailer with a solution thereof. Did you ever hear of any quarrel or disagreement between the marquis and the Count d'Artonne?"

"Never," answered Jean Marais, "but about Mademoiselle Julie, and that was but a few words."

"Indeed!" rejoined the intendant, with an indifferent air; "and, pray, what was that about?"

"Why, Monsieur de Bausse, with his usual modesty," replied Jean Marais, "wished the count to promise him the hand of Mademoiselle d'Artonne, and, when the count refused, he was very angry; upon which, Monsieur d'Artonne remarked, that the hand of his daughter should never be given to any licentious debauchee in the land. That he would not refuse her, if her own inclination led her that way, to any honourable and respectable gentleman; but the man who sought her must show that he was fitted to make a reasonable woman happy before he should have his consent."

As far as it was possible for him to smile, the intendant did so on the present occasion (not unmarked by Jean Marais), and replied, "A very wise and sensible answer of the count. Pray, in whose service are you now, my good friend?"

"In that of the young Count de Langy," said Jean Marais.

"And is he down here now?" asked the intendant, with a look which did not express the greatest satisfaction.

Now, Jean Marais was one of those men—there are not a few of them in the world—who, by the help of very slight indications—a word, a tone, a look—read, with tolerable accuracy, what is passing in the hearts even of the cold and cautious; and he had not failed, on the present occasion, to discover a certain portion of the secret thoughts and purposes of the intendant. It must be remarked, too, that the dry and austere tone of that personage, and the rebuke he had given him for his quaint method of expressing himself, had not particularly conciliated the valet's regard; so that he was very well inclined to say or do anything that might give the royal officer a certain degree of pain or annoyance, when it could be effected without the slightest possibility of offence. As soon, then, as he discovered, first, that the intendant had some views upon the hand of Julie d'Artonne, and, next, that he was a little jealous of Francis de Langy, he determined to have the satisfaction of communicating to him the news, which had speedily become current in the Chateau d'Artonne, that the young lady was engaged to his master; and he replied, accordingly, to the intendant's question, "Oh dear, yes, sir; he came down yesterday. He is to marry Mademoiselle d'Artonne, you know."

So far the news was true; and, as no one had ever told him to keep it a secret, our friend Jean was very well justified in retailing it; but, not contented with the simple truth, Jean Marais resolved to have a lash at the wound he had made, and he added, "They are to be married immediately, I believe."

Alas! Jean Marais knew not the full extent

of the mischief that he did, as, indeed, is very generally the case with those who inflict pain upon others. Those few words, which he then uttered, caused the arrest of the Count d'Artonne, and, as a consequence, all that long train of sorrows and misfortunes which the rest of this book is destined to record. He had not even the satisfaction himself of seeing how far he had mortified and pained the intendant, for that officer was always upon his guard against great emotions; so that the words of Jean Marais produced not the slightest change upon his countenance, though, for the last three weeks, he had been nourishing in his heart the scheme of uniting himself to Mademoiselle d'Artonne, and had buoyed himself up with very confident hopes. He was silent, indeed, for the space of half a minute; but he then replied quite calmly, as if the matter had been one of the most perfect indifference, "Indeed! Are they not very young?"

"Oh yes, monseigneur," replied Jean Marais; "but the count and countess approve of early marriages, I believe."

"They are quite right," replied the intendant; "I shall go over and offer my congratulations to-morrow."

He meant more than he said; and, dismissing Jean Marais with an inclination of the head, he returned to the house which he occupied for the time, and gave orders that the Count d'Artonne should be arrested early on the ensuing morning, preparing to follow the officer to whom he intrusted this unpleasant commission, for the purpose of taking advantage of anything that might occur in favour of his own views.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Count d'Artonne folded his arms upon his chest and gazed for several moments down upon the ground. He took no notice of his daughter, thinking, perhaps, that it was as well she should be unconscious of all the painful things that must take place around her; or perhaps it might be that his mind was so overwhelmed in the depth of his own anguish that he regarded not for the time the grief of others.

"Good Heaven! what is the matter?" exclaimed Madame d'Artonne, entering the saloon; "the chateau is full of soldiers and archers!" But, even as she spoke, her eye fell upon the officer of maréchaussée, and then turned to her husband and her child; the first still standing, gazing on the ground, as if he did not mark her entrance; the latter lying senseless on the floor where she had fallen. Madame d'Artonne paused in terror and surprise: "What is the matter?" she cried; "gracious Heaven! what is the matter?"

"It is my painful duty, madam," replied the officer, "to arrest the Count d'Artonne on the charge of having murdered the Marquis de Bausse."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the countess, the warm blood rising angrily into her still beautiful cheek: "what! the Count d'Artonne commit a murder? A man looked up to through the whole country, not only for his virtues, but his benevolence! Nonsense, I say, or rather calumny! This is the work of some enemy! Can Henriette de Bausse have done this?"

"I really know nothing upon the subject, madam," replied the officer; "I only know the orders I have received, but not the motives of them."

"Speak! speak, D'Artonne!" cried the countess, "and tell them how false this is."

The count waved his hand sadly, but made no reply; and the officer added in a firm though respectful tone, "I cannot suffer the count, madam, to converse with you farther. My orders are to confine him to one chamber till the intendant can arrive, and to allow him to hold no communication with any one whatsoever."

The Countess d'Artonne cast herself into her husband's arms, crying, "They cannot, they will not be so cruel."

"Hush, my love! hush!" replied the count; "we must obey the law, though it may, not unfrequently, be unjust. Look to poor Julie; she will need consolation in all ways. Be content. To whose malice I owe this charge, of course I cannot tell; but they cannot keep me separate long from you, my beloved wife. Nay, I must do as I am commanded. If I am permitted, sir, to choose the room where I am to be confined, it will be my own dressing-room; I have books there, which may amuse my mind."

"Assuredly, sir," answered the officer of the maréchaussée; "I do not wish to be in the least harsh, and doubt not you will soon prove your innocence."

They were words, of course, which had been spoken a thousand times before to every gentleman of a certain degree of wealth or station who had fallen into the hands of the honourable thief-taker; but, nevertheless, they were comfortable to the ears of the Count d'Artonne, and, gently withdrawing himself from his wife's arms, he proceeded to the chamber where he was to remain a close prisoner till the arrival of the intendant.

The personage who had arrested him took especial care to examine the height of the window from the ground, and to see that a second door, which conducted into another room, was locked; a third also caught his attention, but it opened merely into a closet from which there was no exit; and, having satisfied himself on all these points, the officer retired, placing two of his men in the corridor to keep guard.

Some four hours elapsed before the intendant made his appearance; but, when he did so, he found Madame d'Artonne at the door, called forth by the sound of his carriage-wheels, and eager to learn something more of the charge against her husband. She had now recovered her composure in a degree; but still the tears rose in her eyes, as, after the first ceremonious greeting, she inquired eagerly who had accused Monsieur d'Artonne of such a crime, and what were the circumstances which could afford even a pretence for his arrest. "You know, Monsieur l'Intendant," she cried, "you know it must be false. You, a friend of the family, are well acquainted with my husband's character, disposition, virtues, and high principles. You cannot yourself suspect him for a moment!"

The intendant listened to her with his usual imperturbable air, calm, cold, but attentive, without the slightest appearance of sympathy, but yet also without the slightest appearance of sternness. "My dear madam," he said, "I am

bound, in this instance, to act as if I knew nothing of Monsieur d'Artonne at all. I have only to look upon him as an individual against whom a serious charge is brought, and to take the best means in my power of ascertaining whether that charge be true or false. You must excuse me for not entering upon any of the questions connected with this case until such time as all the preliminary evidence is collected. Thus much I must say as a magistrate. But, as a friend of your family, allow me to assure you that I am most deeply grieved to have caused so much pain and anxiety to persons I love and esteem, as the arrest of Monsieur d'Artonne must have produced; more especially," he added, "to have been obliged to do so, at a time when you were all probably in the midst of rejoicing over the approaching union of your daughter to young Monsieur de Langy."

There was the slightest possible touch of sarcastic bitterness in his tone; but Madame d'Artonne did not remark it, and replied, with a sad shake of the head, "You are mistaken, sir, you are mistaken altogether. Instead of coming to disturb joy and satisfaction, this event was destined to add sorrow to sorrow. Not an hour before, we had received the sad intelligence that the poor youth, for whom we all entertain so deep a regard, was likely to lose his rank and station altogether."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the intendant, hurried into a stronger expression of surprise than he usually permitted to visit his countenance; "how is that possible, madam? Is he an impostor?"

"No! oh no!" replied the countess. "It is a long story I cannot tell now, Monsieur l'Intendant. He is the son of the nurse, it seems, substituted for the real child during their infancy. But tell me, sir, what do you propose to do? Surely, surely, you will not commit the Count d'Artonne to a prison?"

The intendant paused for a moment ere he replied. "That, madam," he answered at length, "must depend upon circumstances. It would be with the greatest regret that I did so; and you may be sure that I will take the most favourable view of the case that it is possible to receive. My deep regard for the Count d'Artonne would make any step against him as painful to myself as to any of his own family; so you have the greatest assurance of no unnecessary severity occurring: but I must do the duties of my office, though with mildness; and in the first place I shall have to examine accurately every fact connected with this business."

"Surely, Monsieur l'Intendant," pursued the countess, thinking she perceived a softening of his tone, "surely, Monsieur l'Intendant, the count's general reputation and high character must go for something in his favour?"

"Undoubtedly, madam, undoubtedly," replied the intendant, somewhat in contradiction to his former assertion; "*primâ facie*, it is evidence that he could not commit such a crime. But I beg that you will retire for a little, leaving me to pursue the necessary course of proceeding, and making your mind as easy as possible, knowing that the person who conducts the inquiry is as well disposed to yourself and family as any man in all France. I will, in the first place, hold some conversation with the count himself. Monsieur Aubry, where is the Count d'Artonne?"

"This way, sir," said the officer of maréchaussée, who had come out with the countess; and, while the countess retired to wait with fear and apprehension for the result of the pending investigation, the intendant mounted the stairs and entered the dressing-room of the count. He remained alone with him for more than an hour and a half, and at the end of that time he called in the officer of maréchaussée, and gave into his possession a number of letters and memoranda which he had found in the count's dressing-room, bidding him take an exact list of them, and bring them to Riom that night. He then spoke with Madame d'Artonne for a moment, and afterward made a general visit to every room in the house, opening the drawers and instituting a cursory examination of any papers that he found. The chamber of the Abbé Arnoux was not exempt; but there he discovered nothing. The good old man himself was seated in a large arm-chair, having one hand supported by a sling, his head covered with bandages, and his brow somewhat disfigured by wounds not yet entirely healed. He was conversing with Francis de Langy, and some writing materials lay before them, but nothing was written on the paper. The intendant bowed ceremoniously, and the abbé tried to rise from his chair to acknowledge the salutation, which Francis only returned by a very slight inclination of the head, and a look as stern and grave as that of the functionary himself.

"I am under the necessity of searching for papers, sir," said the intendant. "Perhaps you will allow this gentleman," pointing to a man in a robe who followed him, "to examine any drawers or bureaux belonging to the Count d'Artonne."

"They all belong to the count, sir," replied the abbé; "but they contain nothing but my property, which is so little in volume that the gentleman will not have much trouble in his perquisitions. Pray, let him proceed."

"May I inquire, sir," said Francis de Langy, "if I can be permitted to see Monsieur d'Artonne? It will be a great satisfaction to me," he continued, judging from the cold and unmoved countenance of the intendant that his request was about to be refused. "I am about to return to Paris under very peculiar circumstances, and may probably never have an opportunity of seeing the count again. I wish, therefore, to bid him adieu, and to thank him for much kindness, as well as for intentions which he once entertained towards me, which other events have frustrated."

The shadow of a smile came over the intendant's countenance; and he answered at once, "From the want of confirmatory proofs against the count, sir, I have determined to leave him in his own house, under *surveillance*, until I have examined farther. He will remain confined to his own room properly guarded. But I have already informed the Countess d'Artonne that his valet and the members of his family will be permitted to visit him separately for half an hour at a time. I will give orders that you shall be treated as one of the family in this respect till your departure. Good-morning, sir! Good-morning, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

Francis de Langy bowed his head, and the intendant retired, leaving the greffier who had accompanied him to conclude his examination of the Abbé Arnoux's room, which was soon accomplished. The young gentleman then betook himself to the window, and looked out with a haggard eye, and teeth set fast, in the effort to keep down emotions which were struggling for some vent. The abbé gazed at him from time to time, but said nothing; and then, drawing the paper towards him, began to write with a feeble hand. In about ten minutes the intendant's carriage rolled away from the terrace before the chateau. The lieutenant of the maréchaussée, with a number of his troopers, followed shortly after; and Francis de Langy then turned suddenly from the window, saying to the abbé, "I must go and speak once more with the Countess d'Artonne. I will be back again, my dear friend, very shortly. Do not fear for me; I will not give way. Now that I know my fate, I am prepared to meet it;" and he left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

At the bottom of the stairs Francis de Langy met the countess's pretty maid, apparently coming from the saloon. The girl's eyes were red, as if she had been weeping; but the moment she saw the young gentleman, she stopped, saying, "Oh! sir, I was coming to seek you."

"Where is Madame d'Artonne?" demanded Francis, eagerly.

"She is with the count, sir," answered the girl; "but Mademoiselle Julie is in the saloon, and sent me to ask you to come to her. She wishes to see you directly."

The young gentleman passed on without reply, turned up the narrow passage to the left, and opened the door of the room in which he had been told he would find Julie. She was seated at a table, with her head leaning on her hand, her face very pale, and her eyes anxious, but no trace of recent tears upon her countenance. The moment she beheld Francis de Langy, she started up, ran to meet him, and cast herself into his arms.

"Oh! Francis," she exclaimed, while he held her tenderly to his heart and kissed her cheek, "you must go to my poor father, hear what he has to say, and try to save him. I know you will forgive his unkindness of this morning, even if he did speak harshly, now that he is in anguish and distress."

"He did not speak harshly, dear Julie, for I did not see him," replied Francis; "it was your mother informed me that he had come to the decision I expected, and she was telling me as gently as such painful intelligence could be communicated, when the sight of the archers and their prévôt alarmed her. But, dear Julie, there can be surely no real cause for fear in your father's case. You frighten yourself needlessly, I am sure."

Julie hid her eyes upon his shoulder, and he could feel that she trembled violently.

"Alas!" she said, "alas! there is always cause for fear, even with the innocent, where there are enemies. But, Francis," she continued, looking in his face, "I must not, I cannot talk to you upon this subject; you must see my father, you must speak to him. Oh! I hope he will confide in you. Go to him as soon as my mother leaves him—but stay with me till then. Do not leave me by myself, Francis. I never was afraid of being alone before; but now I feel as if my heart would break, when I am left in solitude to think over all the sorrow that has fallen upon us this day."

"Leave you, dearest Julie!" cried Francis de Langy; "I will stay with you forever if I may. But, alas! that cannot be; and I must soon quit you, never to see you again, and only to hear of you, perhaps, as the bride of another."

"No!" replied Julie, looking him firmly in the face, "no, Francis; that will never be!"

"You cannot tell, Julie, you cannot tell," replied Francis de Langy; "your father's commands, your mother's wishes, will have weight with you; and think not that I will blame you, Julie. You have duties to perform to them, which must supersede all thoughts of me."

"No, Francis, no!" replied Julie again; "I have duties certainly, but none that will make me give my hand to another. That is out of the question. I have told my father that it cannot be. I have sworn it in a way that can never be broken; I have called down the wrath of God upon my head if I do. But let us talk of him, Francis. I can but think of him now, of the danger that he is in, of the grief that he must be suffering. Is there no possibility, Francis," she added, in a low voice, "is there no possibility of effecting his escape?"

"Good Heaven, Julie!" cried Francis, starting, "can such a proceeding be necessary? He surely can be in no peril!"

"I know not, I know not," replied Julie d'Artonne; "he is betrayed and accused, I find, by those he trusted, Francis. My mother's maid, Marie, has just told me that she is sure Pierre Neri, his valet, has something to do with this matter, in consequence of a quarrel with your servant, Jean Marais. He was heard then to threaten that he would make his master repent the words he used, and yesterday he was absent at Riom during all the evening. I think she said he was seen going into the house of the intendant."

In broken conversation like the above passed some twenty minutes more: painful it certainly was to both of them, and yet it was a consolation to be together. From the count to themselves, and from themselves back again to the count, their words and thoughts wandered, in no very regular form, till at length the countess returned with her eyes swollen with weeping. Sinking into a seat, Madame d'Artonne covered her face with her hands, exclaiming, "Go to him, Julie! go to him! He asks for you;" and Julie sped away without reply.

Francis de Langy remained with the countess, leaving her for some minutes to give free course to the grief with which she was oppressed, and then offering her such consolations—such poor consolations—as words can afford. Alas! they are poor indeed, for

> "I never yet did hear
> That the bruised heart was peaced through the ear."

In moments of distress and anguish, at the time of deprivation and loss, in the bursting of the strongest and the dearest ties, in the hour

of dismay and horror, there is but one comfort, one strength, one support, which the heart of man can receive; and against that, too often, his iron heart shuts the door, and stations the fiend Pride to guard the entrance against the friend who would console him. Who is that friend? Faith! the angel messenger of that God who may see fit to chastise, but of whose bounty, of whose mercy, tenderness, and love, man—rebellious worm as he is—has no reason to entertain one doubt.

Such feelings of faith, however, but too seldom are admitted into the human heart in the first moment of affliction; nor was it at all likely, in that day and in that country, that they should find ready access. Nevertheless, Madame d'Artonne did strive to recollect, that whatever befell her was by the will of One all-wise and all-good, as well as all-powerful, and to derive from that conviction the high consolation which it is calculated to afford.

"I know it is God's will, Francis," she said; "but yet this is terrible to bear. Still, I could endure it, if he himself did not seem so painfully depressed, so utterly crushed by this horrible and unjust charge. He, who was always famous for his courage and his fortitude seems now totally overwhelmed. You must not leave us, Francis, in this state. Indeed, you must stay to give us comfort and support. Do you think they will let you see the count? That dark, deceitful man said, 'his own family—only his own family.'"

"The intendant promised I should see him," replied Francis de Langy, "and has, I believe, given orders for that purpose. But why do you call him deceitful man, dear lady? He seems to me an unpleasant one, cold, supercilious, heartless; but—"

"Oh! he is playing some deep game," cried the countess; "I know not well what. If we did know, we might frustrate it. But, trust a woman's eyes to discover when a man is insincere! She can always do it, Francis, when her own heart is not concerned. No, no; there is something beneath, I am sure there is something beneath; and, sooner or later, we shall discover what, to our cost."

"How many of the maréchaussée are in the house?" demanded Francis de Langy, somewhat suddenly.

"I know not," replied Madame d'Artonne; "two, I believe. There is one at the door."

"I will inquire," said Francis de Langy, and left the room.

He found that three of the soldiers of the maréchaussée had remained to keep guard alternately; and, in the short space of time which he was absent from the countess, reflection showed him that a plan which had struck his mind, for seizing upon the archers and setting the count at liberty, was vain. It would have been necessary, in order to execute it, to engage every servant in the house to aid; and it was not to be hoped that they would all consent to encounter the certain punishment that must fall upon them. He therefore abandoned the idea almost as soon as it presented itself; and, returning to the countess, he endeavoured to learn from her any additional facts in regard to the death of the Marquis de Bausse. Madame d'Artonne, however, appeared to be perfectly ignorant of everything, except that the marquis had been killed by a gun-shot wound, and that her husband was charged with the deed.

But, as they conversed on the subject, many circumstances in the past came back to the mind of Francis de Langy, raising up vague doubts and apprehensions which had before presented themselves to his thoughts, only to be banished as soon as received. They now, however, assumed a more tangible form, and he felt himself compelled to look upon them carefully and firmly. First, he recollected that it was on the very day of his arrival in Auvergne that the unhappy Marquis du Bausse had been missed. Next, he remembered that Julie d'Artonne had been found fainting within a very few yards of the spot where the body had been afterward discovered. Then he called to mind many things that had surprised him in her demeanour, much that had seemed strange in that of the count. To believe Monsieur d'Artonne guilty of so great a crime as the deliberate murder of his young relation was quite out of the question; but yet it was evident there was something strange and unaccounted for in the whole business; and the young man fell into more than one fit of musing while conversing with the countess and waiting for the return of Julie. At length the latter appeared; and still, though she was sad and grave, her face showed no signs of tears. There seemed a deeper gloom on it than if her eyes had been streaming—a look of dark, painful anxiety, more terrible than any sorrow.

"My father has much to speak to you about," she said; "go to him, dear Francis, go to him. I will stay with my mother till you come back. They will only let you remain half an hour, for the guard called me at the end of that time, and would not let me linger any longer."

Francis de Langy hurried away and mounted the staircase, at the top of which a passage led to the right and to the left, each again turning so as to form two parallel corridors, the one on the one side, the other on the other side of the house. Just at the top of the stairs was the chamber of the Abbé Arnoux; and, after passing that, on the right-hand side, the first door round the angle of the corridor opened into the dressing-room of the Count d'Artonne. Francis de Langy had never been in it; but he knew the direction in which it lay, and the guard at the door was a sufficient indication. The man suffered him to enter, merely saying, "You can stay for half an hour, sir, and no longer," and locking the door upon him as soon as he had passed.

The Count d'Artonne rose, and came forward to meet him as soon as he appeared. His countenance had regained all its calmness, though it was grave and sad.

"Welcome, Francis!" he exclaimed, "welcome! Come and sit down at this side of the room, where they cannot hear us through the door. I have much to say, and but little time to say it."

Francis de Langy followed him to the extreme end of the dressing-room, and sat down with him on a small sofa near the window which looked into the court.

"Now, Francis, listen to me," continued the count. "I hope and trust that you will show yourself more generous to me than I have shown

myself to you. This morning, in the pride of my heart, in the vanity of an unstained name and a long line of noble ancestors, I was prepared to retract my plighted word, and to refuse my daughter's hand even to the man I thought most fitted to make her happy, because it had been accidentally discovered that his birth was not as high as my own. I overlooked every noble and every fine quality, and for a name sacrificed what was just and right. Now, Francis, my pride is humbled. Charged with a dark crime, lying under strong suspicion, uncertain—nay, very doubtful—that I shall be able to prove my innocence, I come humbly to you, and ask if you will take my child, if you will protect, support, love, and console her, whatever may happen to me."

Francis de Langy grasped his hand, with joy sparkling in his eyes which no words could express.

"To my life's end," he replied, "to my life's end."

The count looked down, saying, "Perhaps the one act of mine is as ungenerous as the other; but still I must do it, Francis. Yet recollect what it is you undertake. Recollect that I tell you I am doubtful—most doubtful—of being able to prove my innocence, that my days may end upon a scaffold, that shame and disgrace may fall upon my family, that my child may lose, by the cruel law, fortune, rank, everything but her pure, high heart and noble spirit!"

"Be that her dower!" replied Francis de Langy; "I ask no more of God or man."

"Then she is yours," said the count, "and I am at peace on that score. Thank you, thank you!" and he wiped away the tears from his eyes.

"As far as I can make her happy," answered Francis de Langy, "nothing shall be wanting; and though, Monsieur le Comte, I may not possess the high fortune that I once expected, yet, as the adopted son of Monsieur de St. Medard, I shall always have enough to maintain my beloved wife in a station not inferior to her birth. But tell me, Monsieur d'Artonne, what can be done for yourself?"

"Nothing," replied the count; "I am in the net of the fowler, and it is in vain to struggle and flap my wings."

"But cannot we break the net?" asked Francis de Langy.

"I fear not," answered the count; "I see not how it can be done. Would to God that it could!"

"Then would you fly if it were possible?" inquired his companion.

"Would I!" exclaimed the count, starting up; and then, immediately sitting down again, he added, "ah! young man, you little know."

Francis de Langy paused for a moment in silence, and then, in a low, quiet voice, inquired, "Then am I to believe, Monsieur d'Artonne, that this charge against you is true?"

"No, no, no!" cried the count vehemently; "I am charged with murder. I am not guilty of murder! But many things can be proved against me," he continued, after a moment's thought, "which will make it seem as if I were. I have not time to tell you the tale now; but these facts, Francis de Langy, can be proved—that Martin de Bausse and I had quarrelled, that he wrote me word he was coming hither on the day on which he died, that I went into the wood in which he was found at the very time that he must have been in it, that my gun had been discharged on my return, that my coat was stained with blood, and that I brought home no game with me."

His voice sunk almost to a whisper as he spoke, and, after a moment's pause, he added, "All this can be proved against me; and, moreover, that by his death I succeed to the estates of De Baussee. I have naught to say in reply! It is all true; and it is more than probable that, in a trial such as that which must take place, some small circumstance, some minute fact upon which I do not calculate, will be found to confirm this testimony, and, if there were a doubt before, to turn the scale against me. Julie has talked of escape, but that is impossible."

"If you could escape," asked Francis de Langy, "would not the very fact of doing so banish you forever from your native land?"

"No," replied the count, "no. The king's pardon might be obtained."

"Pardon!" said Francis de Langy; "then are you really guilty?"

"Not guilty, young man," answered the count, somewhat sternly; "no, not guilty. It was in my own defence."

A pause of several moments took place when the terrible truth was once told. Francis de Langy gazed sadly upon the ground without reply: not that he doubted the count's word; not that it was possible for him to suspect a man whom he so much loved and esteemed, of anything like deliberate murder; but he saw at once how terribly the fact would aggravate the dangers and evils of his friend's situation. Monsieur d'Artonne, however, attributed his silence to a suspicion, and added, after gazing at him full in the face, "On my honour! on my soul! on my eternal salvation! Francis, I slew him accidentally in my own defence. Do you doubt me?"

"No, oh no," replied Francis de Langy, taking the count's hand; "but I am sad, because his death by your hand at all renders this business more perilous."

"It is as perilous as it can be," answered the count.

"Well, then," said Francis, "there is nothing for it but to labour for your escape. I will do the best I can; but I must have some one to help me, some one to consult with. Your valet, I fear, is not to be trusted."

"The villain?" exclaimed the count; "it was he who betrayed me. Do not let him come near me, Francis, or I shall dash his brains out. No, no: but your own servant—the man who saved you and Julie—he first was suspected of the deed; he is clever, keen; he himself escaped from a prison, to avoid the wearing anxiety of moments such as these."

"I will speak with him, I will speak with him," answered Francis de Langy; "he will help me, I am sure. But I foresee an additional difficulty; we shall have to blind this villanous valet, and, doubtless, his eyes are keen."

The count shook his head: "Too much so," he said, "too much so. He is one of those cold, watchful, observing fiends, who mark eve-

ry action of others, to use them for their own purposes. But surely he can be lured away!"

"I will try," rejoined Francis de Langy, "I will try. Be you ready at a moment's notice, and believe me that I will do everything that man can do to set you free, be the risk what it may."

"And, whatever is the result," said the count, "you are Julie's husband! Is it not so, Francis?"

"On my honour!" replied Francis de Langy. "Oh! if you knew how I love her, you would not doubt it."

"And no word of reproach," continued Monsieur d'Artonne, "no cold look at the daughter of the criminal will ever darken the sunshine of her home! Do you promise me, Francis?"

"On my life," replied the young man, warmly; "I will love her and cherish her to the very last hour of my existence."

As he spoke, the door was unlocked, and the guard put his head in, saying, "The time is up, sir; you must come away."

"Already!" exclaimed Francis de Langy; but, knowing that it was vain to resist, he bade the count adieu, and retired.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The thoughts of Francis de Langy, when he quitted the chamber of the count, were all in a state of wild confusion. To set him free, if possible, he had determined, and to make every effort for that object at all risks, and whether successful or not; but what plan to pursue, or how to begin, puzzled him; and, ere he had descended the stairs, innumerable schemes had passed through his mind, cast aside as soon as they presented themselves. Should he try to corrupt the guard, was the first question he asked himself; and, as he passed the man who was keeping watch at the door, he scanned his countenance anxiously, to see if he could derive any encouragement from its expression. It was cold, stern, and somewhat contemptuous: the look of one long habituated to deal with scenes of crime and sorrow, hardened and acuminated by the anguish and vice which he was accustomed to contemplate. There was no hope there; and Francis de Langy recollected that, even if one of these archers could be gained over, it would be necessary to bribe the rest also, for it was too well known that they were universally spies upon each other.

He then asked himself whether the count's escape could not be effected by the windows of his room. He had remarked that there were no bars upon it, nor did any other obstacle exist which could prevent his egress; and, after turning several more plans in his thoughts, this was the one on which his mind at length rested. In the mean while, however, he hurried towards the saloon in the hopes of finding Julie and Madame d'Artonne there; but it was vacant, and, on inquiring, he learned that the grief and anxiety of the countess had at length overpowered her, and that she had been carried insensible to her room.

His next care was to seek Jean Marais; and, having found him, though not without some difficulty—for the whole house was in a state of confusion impossible to describe—he called him to his own chamber, and set him to perform some trifling service, while he turned in his mind the best manner of opening the subject of the count's escape to the valet. Jean Marais, however—who, as the reader is already aware, had all his senses in a state of constant activity—saved his master a great deal of trouble by the rapidity and accuracy of his combinations. He spread out some of his clothes as he had been directed; he rubbed the buttons with a piece of leather; he wiped the hilt of his sword, which lay upon the table; and still, as he did so, he looked at Francis de Langy with an inquiring expression of countenance, seeming to calculate what was passing in his thoughts, and arriving, step by step, at his own conclusions thereupon.

Now, had Jean Marais been influenced by the usual policy of persons of his class, and actuated by the desire of making the most of his services, he would, in all probability, have left his master to find some way of breaking the matter to him as best he could. He would have held back at every step, enlarged upon the difficulties, and enhanced the value of his assistance by the trouble of obtaining it. But Jean Marais was a good-natured soul, with what one may term a necessity of exertion upon him, which never suffered his energies to slumber; and happy it was when the object presented to them was praiseworthy, for they were certain of being employed somehow. He had a spice of vanity, too, in regard to his *savoir faire*, which rendered him always anxious to show his dexterity in everything; and, in the present instance, several motives made him desirous of doing something for the service of the Count d'Artonne. Gratitude was not among the least: for, notwithstanding a good many faults and a good many follies, the heart of Jean Marais was more sound than his principles, and the experience of much harshness and hard treatment through life had rendered him but the more sensible of kindness. After having worked away in his vocation, then, for several minutes, he could resist his inclination to speak no longer, and, looking up in his master's face, he said, "This is an awkward business, sir."

"Very painful indeed, Jean Marais," replied Francis de Langy. "I wish to Heaven something could be done to serve the count."

"So do I, sir," rejoined Jean Marais; "and I wish I could do it; for I have a great notion that I have had a hand in putting him in his present situation."

Francis de Langy started, and gazed at him with surprise. "How so?" he exclaimed, with some degree of sternness. "You surely never dared to charge him with this—" he was about to have added the word "crime," but he hesitated, and then substituted "deed" in its place.

"Oh dear, no, sir," answered Jean Marais "I met the intendant in Riom yesterday, and he asked me a great many questions about this business, to all of which I gave him answers out of which he could as much draw information as you can suck honey out of a straw; but, before I left him, I thought I would give him something to go to sleep upon; and so I told him you were going to be married to Mademoiselle d'Artonne."

"Well!" said Francis de Langy; "but what has that to do with this affair?"

"Why, bless my soul, sir!" cried Jean Marais, "don't you see that he wishes to marry her himself? Why, it is as plain as the Grand Puy! Have you not remarked how sweetly he used to talk to the count, how soft he looked whenever he mentioned her name? He smiled, sir—he actually smiled twice while he was talking to Madame d'Artonne; a thing that never happened to him in his life before. Oh! sir, that is the cause of all the mischief."

A new light broke on Francis de Langy. "The villain!" he muttered. "If such be his motives, he is worse than a murderer himself! And now, Jean, what can be done to remedy this misfortune? I see you are willing to do your best. What can be done, I say?"

"Right willing I am, sir," replied Jean Marais, "to do anything in the world; but first I must know what is wanted of me. You see, sir, the Count d'Artonne's feelings may be very different from mine. I don't enjoy a long imprisonment; I would rather have two rooms to walk in than one; I don't like an archer at the door; I am fond of stretching my legs on the side of the mountain, and have no objection to ramble by a clear stream. Monsieur d'Artonne may like to remain where he is, or may have a fancy for the prison of Clermont; but, if I were in his situation, I should wish the archers good-morning, and be out of the Chateau d'Artonne before one o'clock to-morrow, at which time I heard the intendant say he would come back again."

"And so would the Count d'Artonne, if it were possible!" said Francis de Langy, with emphasis. "Now then, Jean Marais, how is it to be effected? The count is as anxious to escape from imprisonment as you could be. He can return to stand his trial, or pursue what course he likes afterward; but—"

"Oh! I have nothing to do with that," cried Jean Marais; "that is his affair: and, as to getting out, we'll manage it some way."

"I have been thinking," rejoined Francis de Langy, "that we might get him out of the window during the night."

"Lord bless your soul, sir!" exclaimed Jean Marais; "you forget the window is on the steep side of the chateau. It is fifty feet from the ground at least, and there is not a ladder fit for anything but getting down apples and walnuts in the whole place. The highest of them is twenty feet; and, as to making one, that's out of the question. No, sir, no; that wont do."

"Is there any possibility of bribing the guard?" asked Francis de Langy.

"They would take the money, and send off messengers to the intendant," answered Jean Marais. "One might make them drunk, or stupify them, perhaps, if one had anything to put into their drink. No: leave it to me, sir, leave it to me," he added, confidently; "I'll undertake to get him out. Let me see! How does the abbé's room lie with his? Stop a minute here, and I'll be back directly."

"Stay, stay," cried Francis de Langy. "Not a word to the abbé, mind! His religious scruples might make all knowledge of the matter painful to him."

"I learned long ago, sir," replied Jean Marais, with a laugh, "never to confess any but the sins that I have committed, not those that I am going to commit;" and away he went, closing the door after him, and carrying with him Francis de Langy's sword, a roquelaure, and two or three other articles of apparel.

"A thousand pardons, Monsieur l'Abbé," he said, as he entered the good ecclesiastic's room; "but, if you are not using the large closet here, I wish you would let me put these things in it."

"Certainly, Jean, certainly," replied the abbé, raising his eyes from a book he was reading, and dropping them again immediately. "Put them anywhere you like."

Jean entered the closet, and remained there for two or three minutes; during which time Monsieur Arnoux heard sundry nocks and thumps, which somewhat disturbed him in his studies.

"I wish you would make less noise, my friend Jean," he said, in a mild tone. "My head is still very sensible of any harsh sounds."

"Ay, sir," answered Jean Marais, coming out of the closet and regarding him with a look of interest, "it is all for want of fresh air. I heard you say yesterday you were longing to get out; and, if you could but take a turn or two, you can't imagine how refreshed and strengthened you would feel. I was just knocking, to see if I could drive a nail in, to hang up the cloaks and things."

"I should like to get out very much," said the Abbé Arnoux, his mind naturally dwelling upon his own sensations; "but I could not walk above a few hundred yards."

"Oh! for that matter, there is the rolling-chair," replied Jean Marais, "which was made to draw the countess about when she was ill some years ago. Such a fine day as this you might well get out."

"Do you think so, Jean?" asked the abbé, with the timidity of an invalid.

"I do, indeed," answered Jean Marais. "I will go and speak to Monsieur de Langy about it;" and thus saying, he quitted the room.

But, ere he returned to that of Francis de Langy, he bent his steps to the corner of the corridor, where the guard was pacing up and down, and amusing himself by alternately shouldering and grounding his musket.

"Come, come," cried Jean Marais, in a rough tone; "I wish, Master Archer, you would make less noise. You were not put here to disturb the whole house; and you forget the Abbé Arnoux, who is in that next chamber, is just recovering from a severe illness. He can't bear your stamping and thumping."

"Then he may change his room," said the soldier, insolently. "I shall keep guard in the usual manner, whether he likes it or not."

Jean Marais turned away, muttering "*Coquin!*" loud enough to meet the man's ears; and the archer, of course, stamped ten times louder than before.

"It will do, it will do," cried Jean Marais, after he had entered the room of Francis de Langy and shut the door, "it will do; and I will take him out before all their faces in the broad daylight!"

"Come, speak reasonably," said Francis de Langy. "What will do?"

"The closet in the abbé's room," replied Jean Marais. "It has been, as I thought, nothing but

a passage from one room to the other—from the abbé's room into the count's dressing-room; and it is only blocked up with wainscot. One panel taken out, and—"

"He is safe!" cried Francis de Langy.

"Not quite," answered Jean Marais. "We have many another thing to do before he can be called safe. We must make Monsieur l'Abbé a tool without his knowing it; we must blind this Peter Neri; we must find means to cut out the panel without noise; but the less you have to do with it, Monsieur le Comte, the better. Just you condescend to act under my directions; and then you can conscientiously say, if you are asked, that you had no hand in it. Leave it to me, leave it to me, Monsieur; and, if I fail, call me a fool."

"Well," replied Francis de Langy, "I am very willing; for I am sure, Jean Marais, I can trust both to your zeal and ingenuity. What is the first thing I have to do?"

"Go and coax the good Abbé Arnoux to go out and take the air for a quarter of an hour in Madame d'Artonne's rolling-chair," answered Jean. "Old Joseph—good old Joseph—will draw it with all his heart; for he offered when he showed me the chair."

"But is the abbé able?" said Francis.

"By the great St. Come, you must make him able!" replied Jean Marais, and then added, "Oh yes, sir, he's quite able. It will do him a great deal of good. You walk quietly by his side, and talk to him. He'll be so much better, you can't think. Be quick about it, for I have a great deal of work to do before night."

"You will get the count out in the darkness, of course!" said Francis de Langy.

"*Pardie*, no!" cried Jean Marais. "See what these young hands are! You would ruin all in half an hour. No, no, no, master of mine; in the broad daylight, under their noses, to-morrow morning about eleven o'clock. But you go and get the abbé out; we have no time to lose."

Francis de Langy did as he was required; and he found the abbé not only willing, but eager, to taste the fresh air; for, since Jean Marais had hinted the possibility of his so doing, which he had never dreamed of before, that longing thirst for the free breath of heaven came upon him, which every one must have experienced who has endured a tedious fit of sickness. Everything was speedily prepared; the chair brought to the door; and the abbé, in his black *soutane*, with a large cloak thrown over his shoulders to guard against cold, his head still retaining some bandages and plaisters, and surmounted by an immense three-cornered hat, descended the stairs, leaning on the arm of Francis de Langy, and passed one of the *maréchaussée* in the hall.

"Who is that?" said the archer to a servant near.

"Oh! that is the Abbé Arnoux," answered Peter Neri, who stood behind, evidently marking everything that took place; and Francis and his companion proceeded unquestioned.

The abbé was comfortably seated in the chair; and old Joseph the servant was beginning to draw it on, when Julie d'Artonne, with her bright glossy hair flowing over her face and neck, ran out, and laid her hand upon her lover's arm, saying, "Oh! Francis, I was looking for you. My mother is somewhat better, and would wish to see you in her room, now you have spoken with my father."

"I will come to her as soon as ever I return, dear Julie," replied Francis de Langy aloud; and then dropping his voice, he added, in a whisper, "I am executing, my beloved, part of a plan for your father's escape. I shall not be long gone."

Julie fixed her eyes with an inquiring look upon the chair, which the old servant was now drawing on, and in which sat the abbé, so much muffled up that Julie could scarcely see his face.

"Oh! Francis," she asked in a low tone, "is that he?"

"No, no," replied Francis de Langy, "that is the abbé. We are only taking our precautions beforehand. Go in, dearest girl, and I will be back as soon as possible."

The Abbé Arnoux enjoyed his airing very much; but in about half an hour he felt fatigued, and they returned to the house. In the hall they found the countess's pretty maid, who made a low and reverend courtsey to the abbé, saying, "Madame thinks, monsieur, that you would be more comfortable, and have better air, if you were in a larger room; so she ordered me, while you were gone, to remove your things to the chamber Monsieur de St. Medard used to have."

"The countess is most kind and considerate," replied the abbé; "and, though the room was a very comfortable one, I dare say the change will be beneficial to me. Which is the way, my child?"

"This way, sir, this way," said the maid; and good Monsieur Arnoux was soon led to his new chamber.

Weary with the exertion of the day, the abbé retired almost immediately to bed; and he remarked that during the evening his coffee was brought to him, and the arrangements of his room made, either by the countess's own *soubrette*, or the faithful old servant of the family, Joseph.

In the mean time, Jean Marais had not been inactive. No sooner had the abbé quitted his chamber than he had entered it with some more clothes upon his arm; a precaution which, perhaps, he need not have taken, as he met no one by the way, and was screened from the bow of the archer by the angle of the corridor. Jean Marais, however, knew that the slightest neglect is sufficient to ruin a goodly enterprise; and the eyes, ears, and understandings of the police in all countries, except England, being more active than those of other people, he certainly had cause to apprehend that, if it were possible, his proceedings would be marked and discovered.

The archer at the door of the Count d'Artonne was by no means the most obtuse of his class; and between him and Jean Marais there was likely to be a keen encounter of their wits before the one could deceive the other. He had not seen the valet enter the abbé's room; but, before the latter had been there five minutes, the worthy guard's ears caught a sound that he did not approve of, and he instantly opened the door of the count's chamber and looked in suspiciously. Monsieur d'Artonne was seated at a table writing; and, raising his head sternly, he asked, "What do you want?"

"I thought you called, sir," said the man.

"No, I did not," answered the count, and the archer withdrew.

But he was not satisfied; and, walking round the angle to the door of the abbé's room, he knocked with his knuckles for admission. There was no answer, and he thrust his head in. The room was quite vacant, the window open, and everything bearing so still and empty an aspect, that the man was deceived, and returned to his post.

No part of his proceedings, however, had been unmarked by Jean Marais: he had heard through the panel the brief conversation between the archer and the count; he had heard the abbé's door open, and judged with the utmost nicety what was passing in the soldier's mind. The moment the man was gone, he issued forth from the closet in which he had ensconced himself, and with a noiseless step quitted the room, crept along the passage, and held a brief conversation with the countess's pretty maid, whom he found in her mistress's antechamber; for, full of the importance of his task, there was no place into which Jean Marais would not have entered in pursuit of his object. The maid and he by this time seemed to understand each other perfectly: their conversation was carried on in whispers, and she appeared to agree most readily to all he said, ending with the assurance that she would do anything he liked to tell her.

"Well, then, my dear Marie," he added, "the first thing to be done is to get the coffee-grinder: go under the window of the corridor, opposite to the count's door, and grind away with all your might, and as much noise as ever you can make, for the next half hour."

"The coffee-roaster will be better," replied the girl, who seemed to have an intuitive perception of what Jean Marais wished to effect; "for then he'll smell it, as well as hear it. Besides, it squeaks, and the other does not."

"Please yourself about that matter, Marie," answered Jean Marais: "only make haste, and be ready to meet the abbé as he comes back."

In a few minutes after, the archer heard sounds somewhat similar to those which had called his attention before. At first they seemed to proceed from the same quarter; but the next minute his notice was attracted by some fragrant odours coming through the window of the corridor near which he sat, and, looking out, he perceived a maid very busy roasting coffee.

"Ah! that was what I heard," he said to himself; and, discovering that the maid was young and pretty, he opened a conversation with her in a low voice.

Marie showed herself noway coy, but went on grinding and coquetting in a spirit that would do honour to any of her race; so that, if Adam forgot his duty for a woman and an apple, the exempt seemed on the high road to do the same for a woman with some coffee-berries. In the meanwhile, Jean Marais continued in the closet, to which he had gone back; and when some time after he met his master, seeking the chamber of the Countess d'Artonne on his return from walking by the side of the abbé's chair, Jean whispered, with a grin, "It is done!"

"What?" said Francis de Langy.

"Cutting the panel," replied Jean Marais, holding up a small steel saw, and concealing it again immediately: "it is all sawn round but the eighth of an inch at each corner, and wants only the touch of a thumb to drive it into the count's room."

"But will it not fall with a terrible noise?" asked Francis de Langy.

"Ay, sir, it might," answered Jean Marais, "if I had not as much foresight as Marshal Turenne. I screwed a brass peg into it before I began; so that I can hold it up with one hand, while I push it in with the other. Everything being thus prepared, we must wait for the execution till to-morrow morning; and, in the mean time, I must incapacitate Master Peter for acting the spy any more. Pray, sir, where was it you walked to yesterday morning?"

"To the cottage of your friend's father, Antoine Bure," replied Francis de Langy, somewhat surprised at his abrupt question.

"I wish you would ride there to-morrow morning," said Jean Marais, "and wait till you have a messenger from me. Take the count's best and strongest horse. Do you understand, sir?"

"I think I do," answered Francis de Langy. "But I will speak more with you afterward, Jean; I am now going to the countess."

"Say not a word, sir," whispered Jean Marais, eagerly; "never tell a man's wife how he's going to make his escape."

"Why not?" asked his master.

"Why, you have a thousand chances to one against you," said Jean Marais: "she may love him too much, she may love him too little, and, at all events, she is sure to wish to take leave of him; and then you have fainting-fits, and hysterics, and all that sort of thing; then he stays to see her recover, and she clings round his neck, and sobs very loud; and then the guard pokes in his head, the plot's discovered, the prisoner guarded ten times more strictly than ever, and those who were helping him to escape are locked up and punished. No: you may tell Mademoiselle Julie to-morrow morning, if you like; and perhaps it would be as well if she were to ride with you."

"But why, if I inform her, may I not inform the countess?" said Francis de Langy.

"For half a dozen good reasons," answered Jean Marais: "first, Mademoiselle Julie is in love, and that always makes a woman a heroine, as long as it lasts; then, in the next place, I am sure you would tell her whether I consented or not, and so there is no use of refusing. Besides, I think, if she goes with you, it will cover your going, especially if you can get her to be very gay and cheerful this afternoon. But I will come to you in your own room about nine, sir, and we will talk about all the rest. I must beat Peter Neri to a jelly to-night; so I have some work before me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"What is this Julie tells me?" asked the Countess d'Artonne, raising her head as Francis entered the room. "Oh! Francis, will you ever be able to effect it?"

"Hush! my dear madam," replied Francis de Langy; "we must not speak one syllable upon this subject. Remember that the least

word overheard, the least agitation shown, would ruin everything. Suffice it that I have seen Monsieur d'Artonne, that I know his views and wishes, and that with the most devoted zeal and eagerness I am endeavouring to execute them."

"But cannot I see him before he goes!" inquired Madame d'Artonne.

"Indeed," answered Francis de Langy, "I should think it better not. Could you, my dear madam, so command yourself as in no degree to give way to your feelings? Remember upon how small a point his safety may depend, and then judge whether any gratification of your affection for your husband ought to be put in competition with his safety."

"I can command my feelings, and I will," replied Madame d'Artonne: "I should like much to see him, Francis; but, if it be indeed necessary, I will forego that satisfaction. I will do anything, everything, for his sake."

"Well, then, my dear madam," replied the young gentleman, "you must, in the present instance, trust entirely to me: if there be a possibility of your seeing Monsieur d'Artonne, you shall do it; but if not, you must take my word for it that his safety would be compromised by the attempt. In short," he added, with a smile, "you must spoil me for the next four-and-twenty hours, and so must Julie, too; for the first thing I have to ask is, that she would take a long ride with me to-morrow morning."

"Indeed!" said Madame d'Artonne, with some surprise. "But ought she to be absent long, Francis, with her father in such a situation?"

"She must be absent, I am afraid, several hours," replied Francis de Langy; "for, though I shall accompany her out on horseback, I shall have, I think, to return on foot."

"Oh! I comprehend, I comprehend," exclaimed Madame d'Artonne, while a glad smile brightened Julie's face. "Yes, Francis, yes; we will trust to you for the time in everything."

"Ay," cried Julie; "and not only now, but always. It was my father's last commands to me to-day to look to him for protection and support, both for you and for myself, my dear mother; and where else, indeed, could I look?"

"D'Artonne mentioned something of the same kind to me also," replied the countess; "but I was agitated, and scarcely marked it; it was so contradictory, too, to what he said in the morning."

"Yes, my dear mother," answered Julie; "but do we not see here, in Auvergne, one single hour cover the brightest sunshine and the richest harvest, with clouds and storms, ruin and desolation? Such has been my father's fate, dear mother."

"And he is glad to take shelter, madam," said Francis de Langy, "even in an humble cottage. What I mean is, he is willing now to receive assistance which this morning he might have despised."

"Oh no, no, Francis!" cried Julie, "couple not such a word with your own name: never did he despise you in any way; he always loved and esteemed you, or he never would have promised you his daughter. It was but prejudice that interfered, and it has been scattered by the first touch of misfortune. But tell us, Francis, what is to be done next? What means have been taken for my father's escape?"

"I could explain them but imperfectly," replied Francis de Langy; "and I believe it will be better not to attempt to do so at all. They are in the hands of one to whose skill and to whose zeal I can fully trust. I suspect that all is prepared, and that at an early hour to-morrow the count will be free. In the mean time, I think it would be wise for us to affect a cheerful air, to assume that the charge is vain and ridiculous, and to make everything, as far as possible, resume its ordinary course."

"I cannot, I cannot!" said the countess: "with my mind so full of deep anxiety, trembling every instant for what the next instant may bring forth; I cannot cover over the emotions of my heart by any veil thick enough to hide them. I fear, too, my bodily frame would give way. You, Julie, go with Francis, and do your best to make light of the matter. Your hearts are young and buoyant. I will remain here, and seek consolation and hope in prayer."

"It is but, my dear madam," said Francis de Langy, "that by our conduct to-night we may excite no suspicion on account of our conduct to-morrow. If we seem overwhelmed with sadness now, these archers—who, depend upon it, are watching us keenly—may think it extraordinary that Julie and I should ride out so soon."

The Countess d'Artonne fully agreed to her young friend's views, and urged him to do everything to blind the eyes that were spying upon their proceedings. She even suggested that it would be better for Julie and her lover to walk out in the park that evening; and it was ultimately agreed that they should do so, though not immediately. After a protracted conversation, Francis descended with Julie to the dining-room, where they sat down together to the afternoon meal, and endeavoured, even in the presence of the servants of the chateau, to appear as cheerful and unconcerned as possible.

They both remarked that the men who waited upon them bore a different demeanour from that which they usually displayed. It was not that they were inattentive, but the usual service of the table did not go so smoothly as was customary in the well-ordered household of the Count d'Artonne. Julie attributed it, in her own mind, to the anxiety of attached domestics for a kind and amiable master; but Francis de Langy, who knew that the schemes of Jean Marais were likely to extend themselves to the lower branches of the establishment, could not help being apprehensive lest something should have gone wrong. At length, when the dessert was set upon the table, and with it some fine wine from an estate of the count's in the neighbouring province, the young gentleman directed old Joseph, who acted as *sommelier*, to ask the archer in the vestibule if he would not take a glass of the Burgundy.

"That he will, sir, I dare say," replied Joseph, "for he did not seem much to relish the small wine at supper."

The archer verified the servant's anticipations; and, as soon as he had received the invitation, entered the dining-room, with a low inclination to Julie, and a somewhat familiar nod to Francis de Langy.

"Here," said Francis, filling his glass, "here is something to drink to the speedy liberation of the count, my friend."

"With all my heart, sir!" replied the man; "though, if I had such Burgundy as this every day," he added, as he tasted it, "I should wish him to be long under *surveillance*."

"I suppose that will not be the case!" rejoined Francis de Langy, in an inquiring tone; "what do you think, my good friend?"

The man grinned, as an intimation that he understood the young gentleman's intention of drawing his opinion from him unawares; but he replied, good-humouredly, "I trust not, sir; I trust not: I dare say he has done nothing to deserve it, and, if so, he'll soon be free."

"Well, then, Julie," said Francis, turning to his fair companion, "there can be no impropriety, I am sure, in your taking a walk out in the park, or a ride either."

"Oh, *pardie*, no!" cried the archer, who was quite ready to take his part in the conversation: "no impropriety at all; no doubt, mademoiselle, it will all go quite well with the count, and perhaps to-morrow the intendant will let him go free."

"I trust so," replied Julie, "I trust so. Well, I will walk, Francis, if you like: I will not ride to-night; to-morrow, perhaps, if you are inclined."

Francis de Langy expressed, very naturally, his willingness to do anything that she pleased; and the archer, having accepted another glass of the Burgundy, retired, suspecting nothing, notwithstanding his habits of suspicion, but quite prepared to see the two lovers go forth, on foot or horseback, at any time they thought fit. Julie went for a few minutes to visit her mother, and then returned, ready for the walk. They wandered out together into the park, going not very far, and keeping within sight of the house. There were feelings of grief and anxiety in the bosom of each, powerful and oppressive. Since the preceding day—when standing at the outset of a journey which they were to run hand in hand, all had seemed clear, and bright, and distinct, as they gazed forward from the beginning of life through its long course—since then, a dark, heavy cloud had fallen over the scene, hiding futurity altogether from their view, and giving nothing but the menace of sorrow and anxiety; and yet, reader, their conversation that night, their lonely walk in the calm evening, was perhaps sweeter to both than such a moment had ever been before. Deeper, stronger love, seemed to take possession of their heart in the hour of affliction and apprehension; new bonds seemed to bind them to each other; higher emotions to spring up for their consolation and support. Have you ever, reader, seen two children, wandering forth upon a summer's day, caught by a thunder-storm in the midst of their light ramble? When the sun was bright and the sky clear, did they not go hand in hand, plucking sweet flowers, or separating to chase the butterfly? But when the cloud burst, and the thunder roared, and the rain poured down amain, they clung to each other in their infant terror, and their little arms clasped the one to the other's breast: was it not so? It is so with those who truly love, in the storms and tempests of adversity.

CHAPTER XXX.

While Francis de Langy proceeded, as we have seen, to visit the Countess d'Artonne, Jean Marais went into his own room, and quietly and deliberately changed his garments. In so doing, however, it was to be remarked that he put on everything of the lightest quality that he possessed, and which might give him the freest use of his strong and active limbs.

"This is not the pleasantest part of the whole affair," he muttered to himself; "but if I leave him an inch that's not black and blue, my name's not Jean Marais."

When this was accomplished, he descended once more from his garret to the servants' dining-hall of the Chateau d'Artonne, knowing that the hour of their afternoon meal was approaching, and being well aware that, whatever confusion might reign in the house in consequence of the arrest of the count, the cook would take very good care to provide for the wants of himself and his fellow-servants. In the hall he found nobody but one of the archers and Mademoiselle Marie, the *soubrette* of the countess; and shortly after his appearance the worthy member of the maréchaussée took his departure, saying that he must go to relieve his companion up stairs.

"Now, Marie," cried Jean, "remember what I told you; if ever there be a spice of coquetry in woman's nature, put it forth, till you have set Master Neri and the archer by the ears."

"But I may chance to make you jealous, too," answered Marie, laughing.

"Not a bit, not a bit," replied Jean Marais; "there is not a grain of the yellow earth of jealousy in all the clay of which I am made. If love won't bind a woman to a man, nothing else will, Marie; and so, no philosopher was ever jealous in this world."

"You a philosopher!" cried Marie. "Why, who ever heard of a valet de chambre being a philosopher!"

"On my life, I believe they are the only true ones!" said Jean Marais. "First, they see; secondly, they avoid; and, thirdly, they take advantage of all the follies and vices of human nature. Oh! we are great men, we valets de chambre; the politician, in his portfolio, carries not one half the secrets that we carry in our pomatum-pots."

"And, perhaps, betrays them as easily," replied Marie; "for I am sure we have an example in Peter Neri of what a rascal a valet can be."

"He is an exception to our general virtues," said Jean Marais. "But here comes somebody; so mind your part, Marie."

It proved to be one of the other female servants, however; and a few minutes passed ere the other archer—who had already obtained the advantage of a flirtation with the pretty *soubrette* out of the window—appeared, to carry it on in the hall. Marie followed her instructions with marvellous tact and discretion. She brought the man to her side in a moment, and kept up such a fire of

"Becks, and nods, and wreathed smiles"

upon him, that, before Peter Neri joined the rest of the party, the unconscious archer was

fully convinced he had made a decided conquest, and was curling up his mustaches with an air of the most determined self-complacency. The valet's countenance instantly became clouded; but he sat himself down to the table with a strong resolution to keep his temper, which is generally a sign that it is likely to depart, and such was certainly the case in the present instance. Good resolutions are very dangerous things, especially in particular circumstances; and, as usual with Peter Neri, they were soon ground to atoms under the irritation which he suffered. Four or five times he launched off some bitter sarcasm at the archer on the opposite side of the table, which caused the gallant gentleman to puff out his cheeks and blow with indignation; and at length, when he beheld Marie, in order to hear some sweet words which the other whispered, approach her soft cheek so near his lips as actually to brush his mustache, he could bear it no longer, and exclaimed aloud, "*Cognins!*"

"What sayest thou there, my friend?" cried the archer, starting up. "Do you dare to apply such a term to any lady in my presence?"

"Ay, that I do," replied Peter Neri, "and to yourself too."

"*Ventre bleu!*" exclaimed the archer, hurling a horn cup that stood at his side in the face of Peter Neri, and cutting him under the eye.

The valet was instantly springing across the table to take summary vengeance; but at that moment Jean Marais caught him round the waist, exclaiming, in a good-humoured tone, "You shall not disturb our tranquillity in this way, you fool! You are always quarrelling with somebody. It was with me the other day; and now it is this good archer. I will put you out of the hall if you are not quiet."

The tone of superiority in which he spoke but heaped coals upon the fire which was already blazing somewhat fiercely in Peter Neri's heart; and, as is usual in such circumstances, he instantly turned upon the person who attempted to interfere, exclaiming, "Fool! do you call me fool? Put me out! It's more than two such as you could do."

"I will soon show you that," replied Jean Marais. "You are fool and villain too!" and he pulled him backward from the table.

Peter Neri instantly struck a violent blow at him, which Jean Marais parried with the greatest difficulty; but, in return, he knocked his adversary down with a fall that made the hall ring. Up he started, however, and the former combat, which had been stopped by the arrival of the Count d'Artenne, was now renewed with greater fury than ever. But if Jean Marais had been more than a match for his adversary before, when they were both somewhat angry, he was vastly superior to him now, when he came prepared coolly and deliberately to provoke the affray in which he was engaged, and take advantage of every fault or folly his opponent might commit. The battle was not conducted in the way it would have been in this peculiarly pugilistic country; and many things were done on both sides which we—being a people famous for legislating, even in our most trifling transactions, and having established a regular code for the peculiar regulation of blows and fisticuffs—might term unfair, according to our preconceived notions. The maids screamed and agitated themselves, as usual; the men-servants and the third archer, who hurried down from the vestibule above, in which he was keeping a kind of secondary watch, would have interfered to part the combatants; but the one who had first given occasion for the fray called out loudly to let them alone, and explained to his companion that Peter Neri was an insolent scoundrel, very well deserving the drubbing that he was evidently receiving. The worthy archer, indeed, was not at all sorry that, on the present occasion, Jean Marais thought fit to act the part of a cudgel in chastising the man who had insulted him, and he was determined that no injudicious mediation should put a stop to the discipline. In the mean time, the two combatants closed together, swayed hither and thither, drove the crowd of domestics from side to side and corner to corner, knocked over the stools and benches, broke platters and dishes, fell, rolled over, and rose again; but still, it was evident to all—and, to the credit of the servants be it said, to the satisfaction of all—that Peter Neri was getting one of the most severe thrashings that ever was received by any but an English prizefighter.

Though smarting himself from many a sharp blow, it was no light satisfaction to Jean Marais to feel, by the staggering weakness of his opponent, that he himself was arriving at the consummation which he aimed at, namely, that of giving him so terrible a beating as to incapacitate him for playing the spy during many a long day to come. The combat, however, was destined to end in a manner as satisfactory, though very different from that which he anticipated. Discovering that he was overmatched, and that the struggle must soon end in his total discomfiture, if he trusted alone to his skill and his physical force, and blinded with rage and disappointment, Peter Neri drew back for a moment and gazed round with his face covered with blood, and his eyes dazzled and hazy with the blows he had received. Every one who saw him imagined that, feeling himself vanquished, he was going to retreat from the strife; and a mocking laugh ran round the hall, while Jean Marais, who was not yet half satisfied, rushed forward to finish what he had so well begun. But the savage, stretching forth his hand to the supper-table which stood near, snatched up a large, sharp-pointed knife, and darted upon Jean Marais with the spring of a tiger.

The two archers, however, who had all their wits about them, threw themselves upon him at the same moment, and prevented him from committing the act which he intended. One of them, indeed, suffered for his interposition; for, finding himself caught and frustrated, the valet turned with the madness of rage upon those who held him, and, before he could be stopped, had inflicted a severe wound with the knife in the shoulder of the man who had first provoked his wrath. He was overpowered and thrown upon the ground the next instant, the knife was wrenched from his grasp, his arms tied behind him with a coarse napkin; and, while Jean Marais assisted the archer who had been hurt, and loaded him with extraordinary attentions and kindness, the other ran away to the vestibule, where he had left part of his paraphernа-

lis, and returned with a pair of handcuffs, which were speedily adjusted to the wrists of Peter Neri. In this guise he was marched off by the unwounded archer to one of the garrets, and there locked in to meditate upon the result of his own conduct.

When this was accomplished, the soldier returned, and found all the servants congregated round his companion, whose coat had been stripped off, and the hurt carefully examined by Jean Marais. It was an unpleasant-looking cut, partly with the side, and partly with the point of the knife, and was bleeding a good deal; but Jean, with all the skill and gravity of a surgeon, probed the wound with Marie's silver bodkin, and declared it would have no evil result, as the weapon had been stopped by the blade-bone. Some plasters were procured from the stores of the chateau; the blood was stanched, though not without difficulty; and the injured part was dressed in a very scientific manner. The unwounded archer then proposed to his companion to send off to Riom for another to relieve him; but to this the man strongly objected, saying it was a mere trifle—a nothing—that he could do his work as well as ever, and adding, with a grin, "You know, François, I should lose my extra pay, and all the little perquisites that are likely to fall in. No, no; let that fellow be kept locked up till the intendant comes to-morrow. If he gets out he will murder some of us."

"That he will," cried Marie, "for he is as revengeful as he is passionate. Go and wash your face and hands, Jean Marais, for you are all over blood; and I am sure I can never eat my supper, if you sit opposite me such a figure. Dear me! this has frightened me out of my wits, and given me the vapours."

Jean Marais did as he was told; and when he returned, though still bearing some marks of his combat about him, he was received by all with hearty congratulations; the archer, whose battle he had fought, shaking him heartily by the hand, and declaring he was a fine, brave fellow, well worthy of belonging to the maréchaussée. He offered even to procure him a situation in that honourable corps. But Jean Marais, whose inclinations had a very opposite tendency, declined the distinction, saying that he could not think of leaving his young master. The supper went by in great good-humour, though it may be remarked that Marie was a little more coy towards her friend the archer than she had been before the fracas which had taken place. Both she and Jean Marais took great care, indeed, to prevent its being apparent that there was any particular communication between them; and the evening passed over, as far as the servants and the maréchaussée were concerned, as if no plans, plots, or contrivances were going on in the Chateau d'Artonne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"In the name of fortune! Jean Marais," cried Francis de Langy, "how have you got your face so disfigured?"

"Chances of war! chances of war, sir!" replied Jean Marais, who had hurried to his master's dressing-room as soon as he saw him return from his walk with Julie. "When a man makes up his mind to thrash another, he must always make up his mind to be a little thrashed himself; but everything went better than I expected. In the midst of the skirmish, that vagabond Italian cut-throat gave one of the archers a slash in the shoulder, which, by the time to-morrow comes, will give him something to think of; and in the mean time, Master Peter is accommodated in a lodging with locked doors, and handcuffs on his hands, though I had put tolerable handcuffs on him too before they clasped his wrists in cold iron; and, if I do not much mistake, he will find some difficulty in getting out of his bed when he is called to-morrow. I declare, sir, every blow I planted was adapted to its particular purpose with the most considerate forethought; not a movement did I make without reflection. As he might be inclined to use his eyes, I gave him a knock on each, which will somewhat trouble his vision; and then, as for his tongue, which he might be disposed to use for evil purposes, not being able exactly to get at it, I determined to shatter the box in which he kept it. Three of his teeth are now upon the hall floor. But I never saw a jaw so hard to break in my life; it must be of the same stuff as that with which Sampson killed the Philistines, for it cut my knuckles to the bone, and they are not covered with paduasoy, either. But to speak of more important affairs, sir: I am very glad you took Mademoiselle Julie out for a walk; it was the very thing we could desire; and now they will have no suspicion when you go out to ride to-morrow."

"I did it on purpose," replied Francis de Langy;" and we had one of the archers into the *salle-à-manger*, too, that he might see we took the count's imprisonment lightly."

"Capital! capital!" cried Jean Marais: "why, on my life, sir, you are improving; you will soon be quite *affranchi*, as our good friends the jailbirds call it in their *argot*; I mean, up to every *ruse*. But I guess, from what you say, you have told Mademoiselle Julie."

"I did so," replied Francis de Langy, "when I was going out with the abbé; and what, perhaps, you may not like so well, before I came back she had told the countess."

"That's a pity, that's a pity," said Jean Marais: "however, what is done can't be undone, and we must make the best of it. Do you think she will be able to command herself?"

"I trust she will," replied the young gentleman; "but she is most anxious to see her husband before he goes. Can it be permitted, Jean?"

"Oh! it can be done, sir; but—" replied Jean Marais, with a very doubtful shake of the head. "Yet, after all," he continued, "it will be better to let her do it; if we don't, she'll fret, and very likely do more harm in her vexation than if we consented. The archers will let her in for half-an hour to-morrow morning, according to their orders, and we must make her prepare Monsieur d'Artonne to take immediate advantage of the opportunity for escape. I will have everything ready to disguise him as the abbé; he must have a complete dress underneath, with sword, pistols, and what not: you must load yourself with all the money you can find, and have it prepared to give him at

the Huguenot's cottage: then, mounted on a strong horse, burdened with nothing but himself and Louisd'ors, if he do not speedily find his way out of this Generality, it must be his own or fortune's fault."

"Dressed as the abbé," said Francis de Langy, thoughtfully: "a fear has two or three times come across my mind, Jean Marais, that your scheme will fail there. Do you not think it would be better to dress him as one of the servants?"

"Bah! master mine," answered Jean Marais; "you are little aware what stuff archers are made of. There is not a servant in the house, or in the stables, whose face, figure, and look they don't know as well as their own child's. The abbé is the only one in the place that they are not thoroughly acquainted with: him they have seen once; and then they could make nothing of him, but that it was an old man in a black gown, with bandages on his head and face. They don't even know that he has changed his room; nor do any of the servants but Marie and old Joseph; for we have kept him boxed up there with none but those two to wait upon him."

"But have you let them into your confidence, then?" asked Francis de Langy.

"Not altogether," answered Jean Marais: "they know something is going on; they are quite willing to do what I tell them, to the letter—and nothing more, which is better still: so you, sir, go and make your arrangements with Madame d'Artonne; get all the money that you can together, and leave the rest to me."

"I have got two hundred Louis here," said Francis de Langy; "I shall not need more than fifty till I get back to Paris; and the count can have the rest."

"That is right, sir, that is right," cried Jean Marais; "a free heart becomes the young: so says the proverb; and, I would add—the old too. Doubtless, your assistance may not come amiss, for I should not suppose the count kept much money here in the chateau; and to send to Clermont or Riom is out of the question. I have but two difficulties," continued Jean Marais, after a moment's thought, "and I do not like to leave them to chance, for a neat artificer is not pleased to see any part of his work incomplete. First, how are we to account for the chair coming home empty after the abbé's airing to-morrow, or else how are we to get a new abbé to fill it? and, secondly, how are we to account for your returning home on foot, when you go away on horseback? for you see, monsieur, we mustn't be content alone with getting the count off, but, if possible, we must prevent these gentry from knowing how he made his escape."

"Oh! I fear not for my part," said Francis de Langy; "they could but imprison me for a short period."

"No very pleasant thing either," rejoined the valet; "but that is not the only evil. For the count's own sake we must conceal the means of his escape, for, if they find out the way he went, they will not be long in finding out the way to follow. Pray, make the countess and Mademoiselle Julie think of that; and remember, it is as necessary to be secret afterward as before. In the mean time, I will devise some means of stopping these two gaps, and let you know to-morrow when I have slept over it."

Thus ended their conference for the time; and Francis de Langy proceeded to the apartment of the Countess d'Artonne, whom he found alone; but Julie soon joined them, and a long conversation took place, deeply interesting to all. The probability of her husband's escape, and the prospect of seeing him before he set out, seemed to give new life and energy to the countess. She assured Francis de Langy that she would use the firmest and most resolute control over her feelings, and guard every word and look, to prevent any part of her demeanour from betraying the important secret intrusted to her keeping.

"I am not so weak, Francis," she said, "but that I can take my share in aiding my husband's deliverance, and bend every other thought to that great object. But now let us see what money we can gather together. D'Artonne luckily gave me this morning the key of his secretoire: I know the private drawer where he puts the gold; and I am sure that, while searching for papers, they did not find it out."

The amount of nearly four hundred Louis remained in the usual place. Madame d'Artonne and Julie contributed all they had; Francis de Langy added his share, which was as frankly received as it was offered; and after passing two or three hours together, in one of those eager conferences upon points of deep and heartfelt interest to all, which draw those who take part therein far closer to each other than any of the ordinary relations of life, the little party separated and retired, though we cannot say it was to rest. Certainty slumbers, be it certainty of happiness or of wo: it is Doubt that wakes and watches; and that sad guard sat at the pillow of each.

Early on the ensuing morning the whole household of the Chateau d'Artonne was once more on foot, and Jean Marais was soon by his master's side.

"We must none of us hold long conferences together, sir," he said: "so, listen while I dress you. We have each our part to play. Let Madame d'Artonne see the count for the half hour allowed her, as soon as she has taken her chocolate. Let her tell him what we have arranged, and ask him to get himself completely ready, when the clock of the chateau strikes eleven, to cast on the *soutane*, hat, and bandages of the abbé; for at that hour precisely I will remove the panel, having found out when the archer will be changed, so that there will be none of them coming along the passage; and I have made arrangements for amusing the gentlemen who will be there. He must have everything, then, that he wants to take with him ready about him. Madame d'Artonne must wish him good-by, neither too gayly nor too sadly. When she is gone mademoiselle had better go to him; for, though she will meet him again afterward, it will not look natural to go out without seeing her father. After that, you can visit him, if they will let you; and surely the parts that you have all to play are not very difficult. You have only to act just as if no escape had been thought of; I will do all the rest. You and mademoiselle then set off upon your ride, wait at the Huguenot's cottage till he comes to

you, and, if you can hire or borrow a horse at any of the villages, do it by all means. If not, let Mademoiselle d'Artonne come across the park by herself, and you creep round so as not to be remarked."

"Had I not better give the money to Monsieur d'Artonne when I see him in his room?" asked Francis de Langy.

"No, no, no, sir," replied Jean Marais, somewhat impatiently; "he has got many a mile to go on foot, and it would but embarrass him till he gets his horse. You must, sir, do exactly as I tell you, or you will spoil all."

Francis de Langy promised to be tractable; and, indeed, the judgment which Jean Marais displayed in constructing all his plans, and adapting one part to another, convinced him that it would be better to leave the whole to his direction, without attempting to improve upon schemes already well considered. Various other minor points were settled in a few minutes; and the proposed arrangements having been communicated to Madame d'Artonne and Julie, were shortly after put in execution. Towards nine o'clock, the countess proceeded to the door of her husband's room, and asked admission of the archer.

"I don't know," said the man; "it was my comrade who had the orders, and I thought it was only yesterday you were to be admitted."

Madame d'Artonne remonstrated in a tone of distress and mortification, which touched even the heart of an archer, supposed in general to be somewhat harder than the nether millstone.

"Well, well," he replied, "you can call him up to answer for himself; he is but in the vestibule."

Madame d'Artonne did as he suggested: the answer of the other archer was favourable, and the door was opened to give her admittance to her husband. The limited half hour soon passed; and, when the guard summoned her forth, she came readily, saying, "Adieu, then, for the present; I will tell him what you say."

She had evidently been weeping; but the guard thought that so natural, that it excited less attention than if she had come away without any signs of emotion. Julie next applied for admission, and no difficulty was made, either in regard to her or Francis de Langy. When she took leave of her father, the count said, aloud, "Oh! go by all means, Julie, if you like; there cannot be the slightest objection: the intendant will most likely stay some time when he comes, and you will be back before anything is decided."

Francis de Langy did not remain the full half hour; and, as he opened the door to depart, the archer heard the count call after him, "Give my best regards to the abbé, and tell him that I rejoice to hear he is so much better, but he must not fatigue himself too much at first."

We need not tell the reader that the count was acting a part, that the words he uttered—as so frequently happens even in the ordinary communication of man with man—were speeches uttered for effect. Were we to sift the conversation that we daily hear, how much truth, I wonder, should we find! How much would be positively false, how much indirectly so, how much would be a lie told, how much a lie implied, how much a lie acted! for, in this abode of deceit, our looks, our tones, our gestures are as often principals as accessories in the crime.

The archer had no key to the cipher, and therefore, although his trade was suspicion, he paid no great attention to the natural words which he heard; and, in a few minutes after, the sound of horses' feet caught his ear. Putting his head out of the window, he gazed forth upon the terrace, and saw Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne riding slowly away. Then, resuming his seat, he amused himself with rubbing some spots off his musket, till the time came for him to be relieved, when he went down into the vestibule, while the man who had been wounded by Peter Neri took his place above. The latter had not been long at the count's door before the sound of the coffee-roaster was again heard, and the fragrant smell rose up to the window.

"Ha, ha!" said the amorous archer; "I wonder if they roast coffee in this house every day? or whether *la belle Marie* wants another quiet chat with me from the window?" and, leaning out, he gave the pretty *soubrette* a *bon jour*, the answer to which was accompanied by a gay and pleasant glance of a pretty black eye.

Oh! if people would but be warned by the example of Samson, young men and old, strong men and weak, would not so often hear the cry of "The Philistines are upon thee!" and, in the present instance, by attending to it, the archer might have escaped dismissal from the force of the maréchaussée. While he pursued his flirtation, the guard below sought entertainment the best way he could. He threw out a handful of peas—of which he found a flower-pot full in the vestibule—to some pigeons, which came strutting about upon the terrace, and seemed looking for some accustomed hand to feed them. He then admired their glossy changing-coloured necks, their pink feet, and carnation eye; he thought them very pretty birds indeed; and, if ever idyls had proceeded from the maréchaussée, the archer might have become poetical upon pigeons, or written as good pastorals as anybody.

In two or three minutes, however, the pigeons and his poetry were put to flight by old Joseph wheeling up the countess's rolling-chair, in which the abbé had gone out the day before. The good servant did not seem to have a very well contented countenance; and, passing the archer in the vestibule, he hallooed down one of the passages, "Jean, Jean—Jean Marais! I wish you would draw Monsieur l'Abbé. I am an old man, and you are a young one; and it makes my arms ache."

"Oh! I will draw him," exclaimed the voice of Jean Marais from the end of the passage. "Is the chair there?"

Joseph replied that it was; and, saying that he would call the abbé, the valet crossed the vestibule and mounted the stairs, while his companion retreated on the other side. When about two minutes had elapsed, a slow and heavy foot was heard coming down; and, leaning feebly upon the arm of Jean Marais, appeared the form of an old and somewhat decrepit man, with plasters upon his face and bandages round his head, making themselves very evident from under a black silk nightcap, which was surmounted by a large three-cornered hat. The archer

rose, and bowed to the abbé; but the good old man was seized with a fit of coughing, and only acknowledged his civility by a sign of salutation, putting his hand into his pocket at the same time, and drawing forth a handkerchief, with which he wiped his mouth. Tottering feebly on to the door, he approached the side of the chair; and the good-natured archer, seeing him so weak, stepped forward, to the consternation of Jean Marais, in order to give him support by taking his left arm.

"Have a care! have a care!" cried the valet in a voice of great apprehension: "that's the side where his arm was broken:" and, interposing suddenly between the abbé and the archer, he set his heel upon the toe of the latter with a vigour that nearly crushed it off. The guard danced, and swore most profanely; and Jean Marais, appearing horrified at what he had done, caught him by the two elbows with an air of vast concern, exclaiming, "*Ah, mon cher!* I beg you ten thousand pardons; how could I be so clumsy? I hope I have not hurt you much."

The archer set his teeth hard together to master the pain, leaned upon the friendly valet for a moment, and then hobbled back into the house; seeing, in the mean time, that the abbé had comfortably seated himself in the chair, and replying "It's nothing, its nothing; it will soon be off. *Sacra die!*"

Jean Marais looked after him with a glance inexpressibly comic; and then, taking the long handle of the chair, he began to draw the abbé slowly along.

As they passed the spot where Marie was roasting the coffee, the girl got up and made a low courtsey to the abbé, looking as demure as if he had been her father confessor; while he inclined his head, saying, "*Bon jour, ma fille!*" and was pulled on by the stout arms of Francis de Langy's valet.

When they had proceeded a little farther, Jean quickened his pace; and, as soon as the trees covered them from the chateau, he broke into a trot, till they reached a spot at the very farther extremity of the park, where a gate led out upon the mountain. At that door appeared, somewhat panting and out of breath, no other than old Joseph himself, with a friar's gray gown over his arm; and forth from the chair sprang the pretended Abbé Arnoux, beginning, with the rapidity of lightning, to divest himself of the garments in which he was disguised. As fast as he pulled them off old Joseph put them on, and the whole process was completed without the exchange of a word. Joseph made a better representative of the Abbé Arnoux than the count had done; and Monsieur d'Artonne, when the cowl was drawn over his head—for doing which there was a good excuse in the heat of a summer's day—passed very well as a stout friar.

Master and servant stood and gazed at each other for a single moment in silence; and then the count stretched forth his hand, grasping that of old Joseph with kindly warmth. "Joseph," he said, "I need not tell you to stay by your mistress, whatever happens. She may be the object of persecution, as I should have been if I had remained, because—"

"Because you choose to give your daughter to an honest man, and not to a scoundrel," added Jean Marais.

The count started. "How do you know that?" he exclaimed.

"Oh! sir, half the wisdom in the world is guesswork," answered Jean Marais; "and one could see the intendant's manœuvres, notwithstanding all his quiet looks. But we must not talk, Monsieur le Comte; the sooner you are through that door the better."

"Well, well," said the count: "only remember, I charge both my wife and daughter never to yield to the schemes of that man, let them produce what they will. Adieu, Jean Marais; perhaps the day may come for me to thank and reward you properly. In the mean time—"

"Bah! Monsieur le Comte," cried Jean Marais. "You set me free; I set you free; the account is squared. When next we meet, we will begin a new one. But, pray, go!" and, pushing open the door, he saw Monsieur d'Artonne pass through, and closed it upon him.

The count walked forward two or three hundred yards; then climbed a little rocky bank, and looked back. He could see the chimneys and the tall roofs of the Chateau d'Artonne, the multitude of weathercocks flickering in the wind, and part of the window which lighted the chamber of his boyhood. There are moments and circumstances in which the whole events of our past life, the emotions, the thoughts, the hopes, the fears, rise up like spectres from the tomb of the past, and stand before us, pale and thin, but distinct and tangible—a crowd of things long forgotten, but soon reawakened at the call of memory, and each having a voice full of melancholy tenderness. It was one of those moments with the Count d'Artonne: forty years passed before him as he stood there and gazed, with their joys and their sorrows, their animosities and affections, the games of childhood, the sports of youth, the love of manhood, and the parent's thrilling hopes, with words, and looks, and tokens that were gone, he thought, forever. A tear rose in his eye; and, dashing it away, he cast memory behind him with a sigh, and strode on upon the forward path.

In the mean while, the old servant took his place in the chair, and Jean Marais drew it back again down the hill. They stopped before the chateau; and both looked round, with a somewhat eager and anxious glance, to see if any signs of bustle and confusion were there, to indicate that the count's escape had been discovered. All was quiet and calm: the archer was still sitting in the vestibule, pitching peas, one at a time, out of a side window to a pigeon, which seemed to enter into the spirit of the joke, and stood upon tiptoes, with outstretched neck, looking for another. The pretended abbé passed across the hall with steps really feeble and shaking; while Jean Marais aided him to the top of the stairs, with a firm hand, and a sort of triumphant scorn at the archers he had outwitted. To put the finishing touch to the picture, however, he descended again to the vestibule, and called out along the lower passage. "Joseph, Joseph! Where is the old fellow? I have dragged that thing for him long enough; I am not going to pull it round to the stables. Joseph, Joseph!"

"Coming, coming!" cried the voice of Joseph, from the back stairs, and hurrying along the passage. "You should not make such a noise,

Jean Marais, when my mistress is so anxious."

They had both nearly laughed at the farce they were playing; but, repressing the smile, Joseph took the chair and drew it away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Julie d'Artonne and Francis de Langy rode on, at first quick and impetuously, but then slow and calmly, as they came within a mile or two of the Huguenot's cottage, and knew they would have to wait some time ere they could even guess whether the count's escape had been effected or not. Their conversation was like the pace at which they went, first eager and hurried, then tranquil and slow; but, reader, it was not sad: it would have required more years, and more experience, and anguish, to make them sad; not the sudden disappointment of some expected joys, but the slow, wearing disappointment of all the fond anticipations of the heart—of the confidence of youth—of the trust in friendship, in zeal, in honour—of the warm affections—of the bright hopes of mortal life's enjoyments—of tranquillity—of peace—of all—all those dreams, in short, which man, fondly, foolishly, sets his heart upon on this side of the grave.

As it was, there was a storm around them; but to the bold heart of undaunted youth the lightnings are but the fireworks of the sky, the thunder but the deep bass notes of nature's mighty music; and there is a joy—a wild, eager, enthusiastic joy—in facing the tempest and sporting amid the crash of elements. Though we may prefer the sunshine, yet we can find pleasures in the storm; for youth—happy youth—is the true bee which can extract sweets from all things.

"Alas! Francis," said Julie d'Artonne, as they checked their horses into a slower pace, "what changes have happened since first we met! Before that afternoon my life had seemed to pass away like a summer morning; I can hardly recollect ever having shed a tear or felt an apprehension. We were all so happy and so calm; day after day went by without a difference, and I thought that the whole of existence was to be the same. But, from that time to this, there has been scarcely an hour which has not brought forth something new; some great delight, such as I never knew before, some terror, or some sorrow."

"And would you go back again, Julie?" asked Francis de Langy; "would you wish that the last three months could be done away, and that you were the calm, happy girl you were before I came hither?"

"Oh no," cried Julie, "I cannot wish it; though perhaps I ought, for the sake of others, rather than myself; but yet I could never do away all the feelings that I have now; and, if I could restore all else to the same state, I am sure my own mind would have a want, a longing for thoughts and sensations which did not exist in those times. I do not know how it is, Francis, but I regard most things now very differently; everything that I see, everything that I hear, seems to appear in another light, just as the mountains, and the rocks, and trees, look quite different in the morning, at midday, and in the evening."

"I feel it too, dear Julie," replied Francis, stretching out his hand to her: "I feel it too, and the new light is love; but I would not part with that light, Julie, either for the calm sunshine of former days, or for the brightest lustre that fortune can give."

Julie looked down for a moment, with the colour somewhat heightened in her cheek. "Nor I," she murmured, in a low tone, "nor I; and yet, Francis," she added, "many terrible changes have happened, too! I wonder what will come next?"

"I care not, Julie," replied Francis de Langy; "so that you are mine, and I am always with you, to protect, to cherish, to support you, I cannot think that there can be any situation in life which would not have its happiness for us. Indeed, Julie, indeed, there seems a strange sort of satisfaction, which I cannot account for, in having the opportunity of loving so dearly as I love you amid dangers, and difficulties, and anxieties. When I thought I should lose you, then all was dark and terrible indeed; but now that you are mine—certainly mine—that blessing seems to be doubly sweet, from its contrast with all that is taking place around us. Come what may, our mutual affection shall guard us against sorrows such as others feel, and out of the difficulties and dangers that surround us we shall gather materials for happiness; as I have heard my uncle say, that the inhabitants of the frozen zone render their warm cabins impervious to the cold wintry blast by covering them thickly with the snow itself."

So reasons youth; ay, reader, and it reasons justly, too; for those who have known what it is to have loved truly and well, will recollect that, under the touch of sorrow—which every one, more or less, is destined to feel—the tender and the true affection has burned out with brighter lustre from the dark things that surround it. All ordinary stones we back with tinsel; we set the diamond upon black: the lighter affections may gleam with borrowed rays from the glittering things of prosperity; true love, the beacon of life, shines most brilliantly in the darkest night. Julie, too, felt that it was so; and, with such words and anticipations of the future, gathering firmness from each other, they rode on, till at length they reached the place of their rendezvous, and there dismounted to wait the coming of the count. They were somewhat embarrassed, indeed, as to whether they should approach the cottage or not; for Francis de Langy feared to risk the secret of the count's escape, and the direction which he took, with any one; and he felt inclined to wait at the end of the little lake, where the count might mount his horse without being absolutely recognised. The warning of Jean Marais, however, not to deviate in any respect from the plan arranged, came back to his mind; and he was still hesitating how to act, when the matter was in some degree decided for him by the old peasant, Antoine Bure, coming out of his cottage and walking round to meet them.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the farmer in a grave tone; "good-morning, mademoiselle! had you not better put the horses up in my cowshed?"

Julie looked at Francis de Langy; and after a moment's hesitation he replied, "I think we will; but we will not unsaddle them, nor take the bits out of their mouths, for we shall soon be going."

"I had better give them a little corn," rejoined the old man, in a peculiar tone, "or some black bread; they will be all the fresher for it by-and-by."

"Oh! they will not need it, I dare say," replied Francis de Langy, with a careless air; "their day's work will not be a hard one."

"Perhaps it may, sir," replied the man; "when we set out to ride, we can never tell how far we may have to go. My son was down at the chateau last night," he continued, "and I was sorry to hear the news."

Francis de Langy judged from these words that Jean Marais had made a confidant of Antoine Bure; but the events of the last few days had taught him caution; and, before he held any farther conversation upon the subject of his present business, he asked, "When was your son there?"

"About three o'clock," replied the Huguenot; and, as that was long before Jean Marais had settled his plan, Francis saw that his suspicion must be incorrect.

The next words of the old peasant, however, puzzled him still more. "If you and mademoiselle," he said, "will take two of our rods and lines, you may catch some good trout in the lake. If any one passes, they will make no observation; and from the far end, there, you can look down the valley. Then, when you judge that either or both of the horses will be wanted, hold up your hand so, and I will put the bits in their mouths in a moment. In the mean time, let them feed."

"Only one will be wanted in haste," replied Francis de Langy, seeing evidently that—from whatever source the man's suspicions arose—it would be vain to try to deceive him, even before the arrival of the count. He accordingly gave him the bridles of the horses, and, following him to the stable, found there, besides the yoke of oxen with which he ploughed, a tolerably good horse of the country, small, but strong.

The fishing-lines, and two long white wands which served for rods, were speedily procured from the cottage; and, going down to the farther end of the lake, Francis cast the hooks unbaited into the water, and commenced his watch with Julie. Such an occupation naturally led their conversation to the fate and future fortunes of the count.

"How shall we hear of him? how shall we see him hereafter?" said Julie, when they had spoken upon this matter for some moments.

"He will find the means, I trust," replied Francis de Langy. "He will always know where to hear of, or to communicate with you; though, of course, for some time, his own place of residence must be kept a secret. However, dear Julie, I hope his absence will not be long, for he seems confident of obtaining a pardon from the king."

Julie shook her head sadly. "He did not seem confident with me, Francis," she answered; "he thought of going to England, and talked of our having to follow him thither."

"Well," replied Francis de Langy, "one country is as good to us as another, Julie. Though England be but a dull and dreary land, with little of the clear air and bright sunshine of our dear France, yet I have heard my uncle say that there is a great deal of good among the people; and, wherever you are, I shall find sunshine."

"And can you consent to abandon your country for me, Francis?" asked Julie. "But what will your parents say?"

Francis shook his head with a sad smile. "You forget, Julie," he answered: "they deny that I have any parents; for they wish to take from me those whom I have ever looked upon as such, and I will never acknowledge any others. It is strange, Julie, that in one day such misfortunes should fall both upon you and me."

"I trust it shows that we are destined to comfort one another, Francis," replied Julie d'Artonne. "But do you not think my father is long in coming?"

"Oh no," exclaimed Francis de Langy: "you must recollect we set out before him, and rode fast a part of the way."

Another half hour passed, and yet the count did not appear: another, and Francis de Langy himself began to grow uneasy. At the end of two hours both Julie and himself almost gave way to despair. At length, however, they saw something moving on the side of the hill, high up, just where the green turf was broken by some craggy rocks. It was the first living creature, except the old Huguenot, who had once or twice looked out of the stable, which they had seen since they commenced their watch.

"What is that?" asked Julie, pointing to it.

"I have remarked it for some time," said Francis; "I think it is a man: but yet—There are two men, I believe."

"Yes, yes," cried Julie, "there are two men. See, one of them comes partly down the hill. It cannot be my father; he would be alone."

As she spoke, one of them descended about a hundred yards; then paused, and gazed round him. The moment after, he seemed to make a signal, and the other followed. After halting for a short space of time, the person who had at first remained above began to descend; and, when he had gazed a little longer, Francis de Langy said, "It must be your father, Julie, he comes so cautiously." As he spoke, he made the sign to the old Huguenot to put the bit in the horse's mouth.

"It is not like my father," remarked Julie, watching the figure as it descended towards the path.

"He is probably disguised," replied her lover; "for in the neighbourhood of the park he would be very likely to meet people who might recognise him. This looks like a monk; but yet I think you will find it is the count. See, he is coming straight towards us!"

With a quick step the pretended friar came on, but still Julie did not dare to give way to the feelings of her heart. The moment after, however, he threw the cowl back from his head; and, darting forward, she cast herself upon her father's bosom, and wept with a heart relieved. The count pressed her in his arms, and for an instant he too yielded to his emotions, and their tears mingled together.

"Come, my dear sir, come," said Francis de Langy, taking the hand the count held out to him; "I shall not think you safe till I see you on your horse's back."

"Yes, yes," cried Julie, unclasping her arms and leading him on by the hand.

"Thank you, Francis, thank you," replied the count, emphatically, as they walked on with a hurried pace: "misfortune, they say, tries our friends. Oh! may I ever find so many come out bright from that trial as I have done this day! A young man on the hill there," he continued, "watching for me, it seems—though by whose orders I know not—has saved me from the greatest danger that I have yet met with, and led me round, out of the way of a troop of the maréchaussée, who are conveying some robbers to Clermont.

Once beyond those dark hills," he added, looking up to the mountains before him, "and I am safe."

"You must lose no time," said Francis de Langy. "At two the intendant is to be at the chateau; it is now upon the stroke of one: your absence will be immediately discovered, and instant pursuit take place."

"Quick, quick, my dear father!" cried Julie: "see, the old man is bringing up the horse."

"I think he may be trusted," observed Francis de Langy; "but, at all events, we had no choice, for he seemed already warned of the whole affair, and prepared to assist us."

"You can trust him, you can trust him," replied the count; "I have heard the highest character of his honesty and fidelity, which was the cause of my protecting his family when the bigots down at Riom persecuted them on account of their religion. How he heard of my escape I know not, for Jean Marais did not mention that he had told him; and yet the young man said his father had sent him to watch for me. Good-morning, my good friend!" he continued, addressing old Antoine Bure, "and many thanks for your help! You have executed your directions most kindly."

"No one gave me any directions but my own heart," replied the old man. "God speed you, sir! Mount the horse quick, and away. Some time or another I will tell you how I guessed all this. But will you ride in the monk's gown, noble count?"

"I have no hat with me," said the count; "otherwise I would throw it off."

"I have a hat," answered the old man, "but it would not fit you. Yet stay, now I think of it, I have a Basque *berret*. Many a gentleman wears them in the south."

"Fetch it, fetch it quick!" cried the count; and, while he was gone, Monsieur d'Artonne cast off the monk's gown, and appeared in a brown suit, with a short riding-sword by his side.

"I must load you with these, my dear sir," said Francis de Langy, producing the bags of louisd'ors which he had brought with him.

"Thanks, thanks, dear Francis!" answered Monsieur d'Artonne; "this, properly used, is as good as the invisible cloak of the fairy tale. Under cover of this, I shall pass unseen through many a dangerous place. Ha! here is the *berret;* but still I will take the monk's gown with me, in case of need;" and, rolling it up, he strapped it at the back of the saddle.

He then held Julie to his heart again for a moment, and whispered some words in her ear; after which, he placed her hand in that of Francis de Langy, saying, "I give you to him! You are his wife! Mark, Antoine Bure, and remember, in case of need: I have given her to him. Good-by, my friend!" and he held out his hand to the old man.

The Huguenot caught it and kissed it, exclaiming, "God bless you, noble sir, for all you have done for me and mine! Some day I may do more for you than this."

The count sprang upon his horse, waved his hand to Julie, and rode away up the mountain-path; while his daughter gazed after him till the wild rocky scene hid him from her sight; and then, resting her head upon her lover's shoulder, she gave her tears free course. The old peasant stood by in silence, till she raised her head and wiped the drops away again; but then he spoke to her kindly, saying, "Come in and rest, mademoiselle; you need some comfort."

"We had better, I suppose, get home as soon as possible," answered Julie, looking at Francis de Langy. "But how are you to return, Francis? You have no horse."

"Here is one at his service," exclaimed the old man; "he can send it back when all inquiry is over. I shall not want it. Good life! I could trudge all my days on foot to serve the count."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" cried Julie, to whose heart such expressions of attachment came with tenfold sweetness at a moment like that, when misfortune was lowering over her father's head, and he was flying from a dark and terrible charge.

Francis de Langy gladly availed himself of the old man's offer; Julie washed her eyes in the lake; the horse was brought out in a few minutes, and, riding back by a circuitous path, so as to appear to come from a different side of the country, the two lovers returned to the Chateau d'Artonne, which they reached before the intendant had made his appearance. Everything was still and quiet, and it was now evident that the escape of the count was secure. Julie hastened to her mother, and Francis de Langy, after giving the horses to Jean Marais, who was watching, to the Abbé Arnoux, whom he found quietly reading, unconscious of all that had taken place, except the arrest of the count, which would have horrified the good old man very much, had he not in the simplicity of his heart treated the charge as something so completely ridiculous, that he looked upon the fact of Monsieur d'Artonne being confined to his chamber as merely some form of law, from the operation of which he would soon be released.

On the situation of Francis de Langy, indeed, he had been pondering with his own quiet earnestness; and, bringing the conversation gradually round to that subject, he was entering into a minute account of his own conclusions, and the motives upon which they were formed, when the noise of wheels, and of voices speaking, caught the young gentleman's ear, announcing that the intendant had arrived. It may easily be supposed that the whole attention of Francis de Langy was now turned another way, and that he listened eagerly for every sound in the chateau. The abbé continued to speak, but not a sentence that he uttered was comprehended by his young auditor, till at length the voice of the intendant was heard hallooing loudly from the top of the stairs, and other tongues answering from below. Some ten minutes of silence next ensued, and then the door of the abbé's room was thrown open, giving admission to Marie, the countess's maid, who, with a face as pale as death, besought Francis de Langy to go to the saloon; adding, in a significant tone, "The count has made his escape, sir, and the intendant is threatening madame in a very violent manner."

Francis de Langy waited to ask no questions, but sprang down the stairs, and proceeded at once towards the room to which he had been directed. He found three or four archers at the entrance, but he passed through them unopposed, and, throwing open the door, he beheld a scene which made his young and impetuous blood boil in his veins.

The countess was standing, leaning upon her daughter, with a face as pale as ashes and a frame trembling with agitation. Julie seemed more calm and firm, but was still evidently alarmed and grieved; while the intendant, with

all his usual cold and tranquil indifference of aspect cast aside, was speaking to both in a tone which no man should use towards a woman, with a raised hand and flashing eye, as if he would fain have struck them.

"I insist upon your answering, woman!" he cried. "Where is he? Whither is he gone? If you answer me not this instant, I will send you off to the common prison of Clermont, and thrust you among the felons!"

Francis de Langy caught the above words as he entered; and, walking up to the intendant, with a brow as haughty and as fierce as his own, he exclaimed, "Silence, sir! and, for the future, use another term to these ladies, or I will chastise you on the spot. How dare you, a pitiful *maitre de requêtes*—how dare you use such language to the Countess d'Artonne? You dare not, for your life, do what you say, let the offence be what it may. What is the matter, Madame d'Artonne?" he added, recollecting himself; while the intendant gazed upon him in utter astonishment, never believing that he would venture to take so high a tone, unless he was sure of some powerful support. At the words "What is the matter," however, the intendant by a great effort resumed his calmness, at least in a degree, though his cheek remained flushed and his eyelids quivered eagerly.

"What is the matter!" he cried, with a scornful look. "Then I suppose, sir, you mean to tell me that you are ignorant of the count's escape?"

"The count has escaped?" said Francis de Langy. "I am very glad to hear it! Doubtless he has been driven to that step by such violence and unjustifiable threats as we have just now witnessed. This shall be reported to the king by Monsieur de St. Medard, who is now with him, and we will see whether our great monarch will suffer such conduct in one of his officers."

"I use no threats, sir," replied the intendant, not exactly liking his position. "Why should I use threats to the Count d'Artonne—to these ladies—when I am armed with quite sufficient powers for all the purposes of justice?"

"I really do not know why, sir," answered Francis de Langy; "you may have private motives that I know not of: I was not present at your last conversation with the Count d'Artonne; but I have heard you use threats to these ladies, couched in coarse and ungentlemanly language."

"No, sir, no!" cried the intendant. "I only told them the consequences of their conduct; I only informed them of what must result, if they refuse to tell where the count is concealed, or whither he is gone. I put the same question to them now; I put it, sir, to you—for, doubtless, you have not been without your share in aiding the count's escape from the room in which he was confined—I ask you all, where is he concealed, or whither is he gone?"

"If they can tell you," replied Francis de Langy, "it is more than I can. I am not in the least aware where he is concealed, or whither he is gone. I can safely swear it at this moment. Do you know, Madame d'Artonne?"

"No, indeed," said the countess. "I do not mean to say that I did not know he intended to escape, for he spoke with me on the subject; but I did not even aid his escape in any degree, and I have not the most distant idea of where he is."

"How did he escape, then?" demanded the intendant, fixing his eyes upon her sternly. "That, at least, you must know."

"Why, you yourself told me, sir," replied the countess, "that he had sawn out a panel between his chamber and the next. Did you not say that you found the small saw on the table?"

The intendant mused for a moment; and, seeing the impolicy of the violence to which he had given way for the first time, perhaps, in twenty years, he turned towards Julie, and, in a softer tone, demanded, "And you, Mademoiselle d'Artonne, do you know?"

"No, indeed," answered Julie; "I am perfectly ignorant where he purposes going to. Believe me, sir, if I did know, I would not deny it. I might refuse to tell you where, but I would acknowledge the fact."

"It is impossible to suspect you of want of candour, mademoiselle," replied the intendant, bowing low; "and if, under the irritation of an event for which I shall be made responsible, I have spoken anything rash or harsh, I am extremely sorry for it. It must be excused in a man of a quick and hasty temper like myself."

Francis de Langy could scarcely refrain from smiling, to hear the intendant assume a character which he fancied the most opposite to his real one; but there was more truth in what that functionary said than the young gentleman believed. He was by nature fierce and impetuous in many of his passions, and the external coldness under which he veiled them was the fruit of consummate art.

After a moment's pause—for neither Julie nor Madame d'Artonne made any reply—the intendant proceeded. "Having made this atonement, madam, for anything hasty I may have said or done, I must take measures to execute my duty in a manner which, I fear, you may consider stern. You all assure me, in the most solemn manner, that you know not where the Count d'Artonne now is. Is it not so?"

"Most assuredly," answered the countess; and her daughter and Francis de Langy made the same reply.

"Under these circumstances," continued the intendant, "it is not probable that Monsieur d'Artonne will be long without holding some communication with his family; and I shall, consequently, be obliged to put guards upon this house, and hold everybody that it contains under the *surveillance* of the police."

"Do you mean to say," asked Madame d'Artonne, "that we shall be kept here as prisoners, and debarred the privilege of air and exercise?"

"Oh no," replied the intendant; "far be it from me to be so wanting in courtesy. I will send up a sufficient body of archers within two hours, to afford an attendant to each individual who may choose to go out. This is a necessary precaution which cannot be dispensed with."

"But, sir," said Francis de Langy, "am I to suppose that, if summoned to Paris—which I expect to be the case every day, as a great change in my circumstances has taken place—am I to consider, I ask, that I am to be detained here in Auvergne? For if so, I had better write to Monsieur de St. Medard at once, to let him know my situation."

The intendant paused, and looked at the young gentleman from head to foot with a look of cold and somewhat scornful consideration. He would fain have kept him there, in the hope of detecting him in some communication with the Count

d'Artonne, which might afford a fair excuse for taking vengeance on him for his late interference. But the worthy magistrate, with his own particular views, was little inclined to detain Francis de Langy in the same house with Julie d'Artonne; and, obliged to sacrifice one object or the other, he gave up revenge, hoping that another opportunity might occur, where no superior consideration would interfere to prevent his obtaining it effectually.

He accordingly replied, at length, "No, sir; it is not by any means my purpose to interfere with your proceedings, farther than to guard, as it is my bounden duty to do, against any evasion of justice. Should you, therefore, deem it necessary to leave this place for Paris—which, considering the absence of Monsieur d'Artonne, might perhaps be most prudent and consistent with propriety—you are free to follow that course, doing me the honour of taking an archer with you as far as the limit of this generality."

"To that I can have no objection," replied Francis de Langy, smiling. "My going will depend entirely upon the letters I receive from Paris; for, as to the considerations of propriety you talk of, I suppose, sir, to your other titles of intendant of justice, police, and finance, you do not add that of intendant of propriety also."

He spoke scornfully, for there was a bitter and angry feeling in his bosom towards the intendant, not so much from his conduct to Julie d'Artonne and her mother, as from a knowledge of his views respecting her he loved, which mingled the fiery hatred of rivalry with many another sensation.

When he had done, he turned towards the window, and made some observation to Madame d'Artonne upon the weather in an indifferent tone, which might have been galling to some men in the intendant's situation, but which produced little effect upon him. The countess and Julie, indeed, could not so far control their emotions, or cast off the thought of what had just passed, as to assume the same easy tone as their companion; and while the intendant remained, which was for about half an hour longer, they continued silent and grave, watching his coming in and going out of the room with apprehension and anxiety.

In the mean while that officer proceeded to confer with the agents he had brought with him; the whole chateau was examined, many of the servants cross-questioned, archers despatched on horseback to search the country round, and the three who had been stationed in the house subjected to a severe interrogatory. A brief inquiry was also made into the case of Peter Neri, which was, perhaps, the subject of all others most likely to bring suspicion upon Jean Marais; but the guards gave their account of the affair; and the one who had been wounded, in his rancour towards the valet, threw out a doubt as to whether he had not contrived his master's escape, and furnished him with the small steel saw which had been found upon the table. "Otherwise," he asked, "why should he have picked a quarrel with me, who did nothing to offend him?"

The intendant mused; and, in the end, ordered the valet to be removed to Riom, to which place he himself followed soon after.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EARLY *on the following morning* the usual packet of letters arrived from Riom. They had all been opened, for those were days in which—though men were beginning to murmur under the oppression of an old and worn-out system, and a kind-hearted and generous monarch was steadily, though slowly, improving the institutions of his country—private rights were still little respected; and the French postoffice had almost as small a share of good faith as it has at times displayed since a revolution, which gave political liberty to the people, but left them utterly destitute of anything like personal freedom. Several of these letters were addressed to the Count d'Artonne: one to the countess, from some gay friend in the capital, full of jest and gayety. Oh! how harshly does the merriment we once delighted in grate upon the ear in the time of sorrow and anxiety! There was one, too, addressed to Francis de Langy, in the handwriting of the Viscount de St. Medard; and, as it told its own tale more briefly than we could explain it, we will give it here as it was written.

"My dear Francis"—so wrote the viscount—"in addition to the disagreeable intelligence which I had to communicate to you two days ago, I have now to give you a piece of news which I will not affect to believe can be anything but painful to you. I am going to quit France, probably for two years, to take the command in Pondicherry at the request of the king. I wished to avoid it, for I am now an old man, and have other objects before me; but my sovereign has required my services, and I obey. I may return, and I may not; and I am, consequently, very busy in making every preparation for either event. My first care has been to secure you, my dear boy, as far as it is in my power, against any greater reverse of fortune than you have experienced already. I have ordered the most solemn and formal act of adoption to be drawn up, which, with the king's consent, given long ago, and now renewed, will convey to you my estates and title, in any event, whether I return alive or not, and whether the inquiry into your birth result as I could wish it, or as I fear it may. In the mean time, I have made over to you during my absence the Chateau of St. Medard, with an allowance of forty thousand livres annually, from which you will pay the wages of all our old servants, except those I take with me; and although I leave you to act as your own master, yet I request you will not discharge any one who has been in my service more than two years. It will be better that our good friend Arnoux should continue to reside with you. Not knowing how Monsieur d'Artonne may be affected by the doubt cast upon your birth, and hoping that individual merit may in his eyes make up for the loss of accidental advantages, I do not ask you to accompany me to Pondicherry, where I fear that the prejudices of rank would not allow you to take that position in the army for which you are fitted. You will easily understand, my dear Francis, that these prejudices have no share in my feelings, and that, with every deference for the institutions of my country, I view as the very best nobility that which you yourself possess—as the noblest blood which can flow through the human heart that which prompts it to the noblest actions.

"Other motives would also render it expedient that you should remain in France, inasmuch as it is necessary you should watch narrowly all the proceedings in regard to the heirship of the house of Langy; for, whatever may be my ow'

opinion as to the probable results, it behooves you to look closely to the assertion of whatever rights you possess. I should never wish a young man to pass his early years altogether without sorrow. The character is softened by prosperity, and, if naturally of a good and plastic material, we can form it in the best mould; but it needs the fire of some adversity to harden it in the shape it has received. The portion of disappointment allotted to you has been more than to most young men; but, if I know your nature rightly, you will not suffer this somewhat overintense seasoning to warp your heart or mind, but rather to give them a higher and a finer temper; as the finest sword-blade is that which has been most strongly tried. I feel it hard to leave you, Francis, at so early a period of life; but, in point of education, more has been done with you at your present age than with many men of seventy, and I know that I can safely trust you to yourself. Errors you may commit: where is the man, at any time of his existence, who does not do so? But never let one fault lead you to another: always look upon them as weeds, which will spring up in the most cultivated garden, but which require to be rooted out as soon as they are discovered, lest they sow their seed and produce others. I will give you but little advice, Francis. In the choice of your companions you may find a difficulty; but remember always to cast that man from your society forever who does or says a thing in your presence which you would blush to have said or done yourself. Recollect, too, that vice is a contagious disease; and, the farther you keep from the infected, the less likely are you to catch the sickness. Precepts regarding individual actions are always vain, for circumstances are infinitely modified; but you have received fixed principles, by which you can gauge all objects presented to you, as men measure mountains by a theodolite, whatever be their shape or size.

"Should Monsieur d'Artonne still consent to give you the hand of his daughter, you have my full consent to unite yourself to her whenever her father thinks fit, whether I be in France or not; but, should he determine to withhold her from you, the sooner you quit her society the better. You may see her after years have passed with calmer feelings than you can now experience; but, in the ardent days of youth, for two persons who love to remain together when their union is forbidden, is but to add to their grief, and endanger their future peace. Not knowing how you are situated, I do not ask you to come to me before I go; because, by so doing, I might call you from the only consolation that you can receive under bitter disappointments. I need not tell you, however, how happy I should be to hold you to my heart once more, before I quit my native land, perhaps forever. If we do not meet, farewell, my dear boy! and, while you remember him who has been a father to your youth—which I know will be as long as you live—forget not that he brought you up to honour.

"Yours,

"St. Medard."

Francis de Langy read the letter over twice, and then pressed his lips upon it, as a lover might do upon the writing of his mistress. Madame d'Artonne and Julie had watched him as he read; and the former asked, with a faint smile, "*Who* is it from, Francis?"

"*From* the best and kindest of men," replied Francis de Langy: "from Monsieur de St. Medard."

"He is, indeed, all that you say," answered Madame d'Artonne. "I have known him long, and known him always the same. Indeed, Francis, it is to him that my hopes chiefly turn to interest the king in D'Artonne's behalf. I can think of none on whom I can rely but him."

"Then no time is to be lost," cried Francis de Langy; "he is going instantly to the Indies. Read it, read it, Madame d'Artonne!"

"What is to be done?" exclaimed the countess, running her eye over the first part of the letter. "Good Heaven! what is to be done? One hope passes away after another. Knowing how highly the king esteems him, I had fixed all my expectations on him."

"I will set out directly," said Francis de Langy. "It is painful to leave you, dear Julie, in such a situation; but your father's safety must be the first consideration. Had I not better go?"

"Oh yes, yes!" cried Julie; "go, by all means, Francis."

"Yes, go," added the countess. "We will follow you, dear friend, as soon as this intendant will let us; for I, too, must come to plead my husband's cause. D'Artonne will not return here; and I told him that we should go into the north, where our communication would be less suspected."

"You will come to St. Medard?" said Francis de Langy, taking her hand. "Oh yes, you will come thither; and let me be as a son to you, at least till this sad business is settled."

"You will be so always, I hope," replied the countess; "and I will go to St. Medard, for it is not far from Senlis, where I first hope to hear of my husband. But lose no time, dear Francis, for this business may need much solicitation; and, as the viscount is going so soon—"

"I will send to Riom for horses directly," exclaimed Francis de Langy. "But I suppose I must let this intendant know of my departure. Stay, I will write;" and, sitting down to a table, he addressed a few words to that officer; saying that, having received a letter from Paris, which required his immediate presence in the capital, he begged to notify that he was about to set out as soon as horses could be procured, and to request that the intendant would appoint any person he thought fit to accompany him as far as he judged proper, according to the intentions he had expressed the day before."

One of the archers took charge of the note, and agreed to order the horses up immediately; and Francis de Langy proceeded to bid adieu once more to the Abbé Arnoux, while Jean Marais made every preparation for the journey. The lover then hastened back to Julie d'Artonne, and the countess left them alone for a few minutes together, remembering her own feelings in other days, and judging by them of the wishes of her child. Those minutes passed as rapidly as a child's holyday; and, shortly after Madame d'Artonne returned, it was announced that the horses had arrived, with an inferior officer of the maréchaussée to accompany the carriage on horseback.

"How quickly this morning has gone by!" said Francis de Langy; "and yet, dear Julie, I can scarcely believe that it is only four days since I arrived from Paris. It seems as if a month had been crowded into that short space. And now, adieu, my beloved! She is mine, Ma-

dame d'Artonne! Her father's consent has been given: have I not yours also?"

"Without hesitation," replied Madame d'Artonne; "I never had any. Julie, you are his; is it not so?"

"Forever! forever!" answered Julie. "We are plighted by vows that can never be broken now;" and, with one more embrace, Francis left her, and hurried to the carriage.

For the two first stages he saw nothing: the eyes of the mind, like those of the sages of Laputa, were turned inward. At the conclusion of the second, however, when they paused to change horses, the guard who had accompanied him rode up to the side of the carriage to take leave, having come to the end of his district. Francis de Langy wished him good-by in an indifferent tone; but still the man lingered, and at length asked boldly for a little remembrance for his trouble.

"I think I should refer you," replied Francis de Langy, "to those who gave you the trouble; but, as I suppose these demands are usual, there is a Louis for you."

The man assured him that the proceeding was quite customary; but it was not long before he found the tax was not to stop there.

The posts in that part of the country were long; and night was now beginning to fall heavy and dark, with thick, leaden clouds rolling up, and catching upon their hard edges the red rays of the setting sun. In order to lighten the carriage, and to proceed more quickly, Jean Marais had been mounted upon a posthorse, to follow the vehicle, as was then very common in France; but, as Francis de Langy marked the angry look of the sky, he told his valet that it would be better for him to change his mode of travelling, and come in beside him. Jean marais was very well contented with the proposal; for, although he had found himself amusement in conversing with his worthy friend of the maréchaussée during the first two stages, he had contemplated with anything but pleasure a long, dull ride through the greater part of the night, with nobody to talk to but himself.

This being settled, the carriage rolled on; but, ere an hour had passed, the darkness which covered the earth was broken by a vivid flash of lightning, and one of the most tremendous thunder-storms he had ever seen accompanied Francis de Langy on his way. There was something in it, however, not altogether unpleasing to him. With the feelings that were in his heart at that moment, nothing merely beautiful could have attracted his attention; but the fitful glare of the electric flame, the loud roll of the thunder, and one or two balls of fire which blazed across the sky, woke his mind from its trance, and he gazed out eagerly from the window of the carriage, watching for the next bright flash as for some object of deep interest and admiration. Jean Marais, for his part, sat quiet in a corner of the vehicle, and, divining that his master wished for no conversation, fell sound asleep; in which state he continued till they stopped at a small, lonely posthouse above fifty miles from the Chateau d'Artonne.

"Get the horses to as quickly as possible," cried Francis de Langy; "I must lose no time, Jean."

The valet jumped out; but in about five minutes he returned, saying, "There are no horses to be had, sir. There are only three pair kept here; and Count Boot has taken one pair, and the Prince of Shoe the other two."

"*Allez, farceur!*" exclaimed the postmaster—who was also an *aubergiste*—coming to the side of the carriage; "go along, you fool! The horses are all out, sir, and won't be back till morning; we have excellent beds, and can give you a good supper. There is a *remise*, too, for the carriage."

"You had better get out, sir," said Jean Marais, in a tone that struck Francis de Langy as somewhat marked; "the place seems very comfortable."

Without more words, then, he descended from the carriage, Jean Marais whispering, as he gave him his arm, "Be upon your guard!" Nothing farther could be said, for the host was close to them.

The rain was falling in torrents; and, entering the first room of the inn, which was the kitchen, the young gentleman perceived a stout, bustling landlady busy at a wide, open fireplace, from which proceeded a cheerful blaze, with a girl, apparently her daughter, and a maid helping her in the duties of her office. In one corner of the room, reading a paper by the aid of a tallow candle, sat an archer of the maréchaussée; while at another small table near the window, finishing a half-bottle of wine and a basin of soup, was a tall, stout, middle-aged man in the garb of a peasant.

A strange feeling of recognition came over Francis de Langy as his eyes fell upon him, though the man's face was turned away from him. Advancing, however, towards the fire, he spoke a few words in a gay tone to the landlady and to the host, who had followed him, and then turned round to take a more deliberate survey of the company. The eyes of the archer were fixed upon him over the edge of the paper which he was reading; and, luckily, it happened that Francis de Langy perceived such to be the case, for it was with the greatest difficulty that he restrained his surprise and emotion, when, in the peasant seated at the other table, he recognised the Count d'Artonne.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE beginning of a new volume is like the beginning of a new year—a period in the course of our history when a consciousness comes upon us that we have done many things amiss in the past, and we promise ourselves resolutely to do better for the future; but with, alas! the same result in both instances, that of continuing to do much that is wrong, though perhaps there may be some little amendment. Reader, we will try and go on somewhat faster than we have done hitherto.

The eyes of Francis de Langy, we have said, rested on the face of the Count d'Artonne; but, luckily, he had seen that he was himself watched; and he suffered not the slightest expression either of surprise or recognition to pass over his countenance. Turning round again immediately to the woman of the house, he proceeded to make various inquiries regarding his supper, and then asked the landlord what wine he could have: to all of which demands—as is usual in such cases, whether the larder and the cellar be well stored or not—he received the most satisfactory answers; for, to believe the landlady, there was nothing edible which had ever been created that she could not set before him; and, from the reply

of the host, it was evident that the house contained every wine that had ever been made, from that which intoxicated Noah down to the thin *piquette* of the peasant.

While this conversation was going on, Francis de Langy did not fail to observe that the archer folded up his paper, and, with an unconcerned air, walked out of the room. The door being open, a good many tongues were heard talking without; and the host and maid bustled about, laying a table for their new and distinguished guest. A moment or two after the archer returned, and, walking straight up to Francis de Langy, informed him that he wanted to speak with him. The young, gentleman, accordingly, accompanied him into a corner of the room, where the man, with a wise shake of the head, inquired if he knew the Count d'Artonne. Francis's heart beat quickly, but he contrived to reply, in a calm tone, that he had the honour of the count's acquaintance: upon which the man gazed in his face steadily for a minute, and then inquired, "Are you sure that you are not the count yourself?"

Francis burst into a fit of laughter too natural not to carry conviction with it, and then answered, "Quite sure! Why do you ask?"

"Because I have here his description," replied the archer, "and am directed to arrest him wherever I find him."

"Then let me inquire," said Francis de Langy, "whether in any one particular I am in the least like him according to your account; for if so, the painter must have been a very bad one."

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried the postmaster-landlord. "The count's a man upward of forty, I know him quite well; and monsieur does not seem twenty yet."

"Ay," rejoined the archer, who had evidently drunk a good deal of wine, staring at the paper in his hand, "and the count is *blond;* and, let me see, monsieur is *noir*."

"No, not quite that either," replied Francis de Langy: "nevertheless, not the Count d'Artonne, or anything the least like him. Where we last changed horses, I saw a man a good deal resembling him; and, if you had beheld him, you would soon have remarked a difference between him and me."

"Hah!" cried the archer, "where do you say?"

"Nay, nay," replied Francis de Langy; "you need not prick up your ears, my good friend, nor look as if you were going to run after him directly: in the first place, he is six leagues off; and, in the next, I am very sure it was not the count."

There was a tone of doubt in what he said, however, which made the archer believe that it might be the count, after all; and that suspicion puzzled him not a little, for he had other purposes in hand at the moment, which he did not like to abandon. "Well, I am glad to hear it," he replied; "for I intend, young master, to accompany you on your next stage. I hear from the postillion that you came to the last relay under *surveillance*, and I think it is my duty to go on with you."

"You know your own duty best," answered Francis de Langy; "but, as I did not come here under *surveillance*, probably you may find at the next stage you have gone somewhat out of your way. If you expect to get a Louis," he continued, *beginning to* see the man's drift, "as the archer *who accompanied* me from Riom did, you are *very much* mistaken. He came with me nearly ten leagues for my convenience; but I do not want any one now; so, if you go, it is for your own, and therefore may pay yourself."

The archer bit his lip, and frowned at him with the uncertain but dogged air of a bully who is not quite sure how to act; and after a moment's pause he ended by saying, "Well, show me your papers—I will see every man's papers."

"Oh! with all my heart," answered Francis de Langy; and, taking out his pocket-book, he placed it quietly in the archer's hand, who looked over the contents; while the young gentleman cast an anxious glance towards the Count d'Artonne, who continued sitting at the table without showing the slightest emotion.

"Ah, very well," replied the archer, giving back the pocket-book when he had done; "that seems all right. But now for the rest."

"There is my servant without," said Francis de Langy, anxious to divert his attention from the count; but the postmaster interfered at the same moment, exclaiming, "Oh, ay! I had better call monsieur's servant. As for him," he continued, pointing to the count, "you know who he is already."

"What was the name you told me?" asked the other, with a pencil in his hand.

"Jerome Marzay," answered the postmaster. "Why, you must know him yourself."

The count rose from his seat, and nodded familiarly to the archer, who replied, "I think I have seen him before."

"That you have, monsieur, more than once," said the count; and the archer, turning round to Jean Marais, who entered at the moment, began to question him as to his name and profession.

"My name is Jean Marais," replied our friend; "and as to profession, I am a rogue, which, I take it, is another name for a gentleman's valet de chambre. This is the noble gentleman who patronises me—Monsieur François de Langy, Baron de St. Medard, commonly called Count de Langy, who, if it did not, unfortunately, happen that the horses are all out, might now be rolling away towards Paris as comfortably as possible; for the thunder is gone by, and the stars are beginning to blink out, like a schoolboy's eyes recovering from a flogging."

"Well, then," cried the archer, "I shall get upon my horse's back, and return to St. Pourçain. I have got a strange notion that was the Count d'Artonne you saw, and that you know it too."

"No, no," replied Francis de Langy; "I only said it was like him; but I don't think it actually was. You had better stay and take a glass of this wine. It was not him, I am quite sure."

The young gentleman had seen from the first that the archer was determined to read his information the contrary way; and, as he wished him heartily to go back, he naturally tried to persuade him to stop; a little fearful, it is true, that he might overshoot the mark and induce him to remain, yet hoping, from the state in which he already was, that a few more glasses of wine would inebriate him completely, even if he were prevailed upon to continue where he was. The archer, however, held his resolution, took one brimming glassful of the host's good wine, and then, muttering something about a louisd'or, brought his horse out of the stable and rode away to St. Pourçain; where he roused the people from their sleep, and began an immediate inquiry for the Count d'Artonne, alleging he had positive information that the escaped prisoner was then in or very near the place.

In the mean while, Francis de Langy gazed for a moment at the Count d'Artonne without speaking. It seemed evident that the postmaster was in his secret, and yet not the slightest sign of recognition could be observed between them after the archer was gone.

"Come, Master Jerome Marzay," said Francis, at length, judging it best to keep up the appearance of not knowing who he was, as long as possible; "since this good archer would not give me his company, will you? Sit down, and let us sup together."

"I have supped already, sir," replied the pretended peasant, with a boorish air, "but I'll take some of your wine, if you are good enough. It is better than mine, I dare say;" and, drawing his stool to the table, over which a cloth was by this time spread for the young gentleman's supper, he poured himself out a glass of Burgundy, adding, "Ah! we poor farmers can't afford to drink such wine as this."

"Francis de Langy took his place at the other side, and, while the good hostess put some of her savoury ragouts upon the table, both remained silent; but, a minute or two after, the landlord sent all the female members of his household to prepare the young gentleman's bed, and then quitted the room himself, closing the door behind him. The moment he was gone, the count stretched out his hand across the table, and grasped that of his young friend.

"Well met, well met, my dear Francis!" he cried; "how are they all? how is my wife? how is our dear Julie?"

Francis de Langy replied briefly, telling him generally what had occurred; but not dwelling upon the violent conduct of the intendant, lest he should inflict unnecessary pain upon the count.

"Is it not dangerous," he asked, in the end, "to travel upon the high road? You have had a narrow escape to-night."

"I have had twenty as near since I left you," answered Monsieur d'Artonne, "and the danger was not so great as you suppose. The postmaster is an old and faithful friend, for whom I obtained his present situation, and he was sure to provide for my safety; though the archer being driven in here by the thunder-storm was certainly an unpleasant event. This is the first time I have ventured upon the high road; but I was forced to do so, by finding that a whole party of the maréchaussée had followed me, whether accidentally or advisedly I know not, through the hills. But now tell me, Francis, why have you left them so soon? Do they not require your protection and support?"

"I am hastening with all speed towards Paris," replied Francis de Langy, "for an object which, if I succeed, will give them more comfort and happiness than my presence in the Chateau d'Artonne, if I were to stay there forever. Monsieur de St. Medard is ordered to Pondicherry immediately. He has yielded most unwillingly to the king's request; and I know that, even previously, he was high in his majesty's confidence and favour. He may surely ask one boon before he goes; and, if I judge rightly, that boon will be a free pardon for you, and the king's order to suspend all proceedings against you."

"That is, indeed, an object!" said the count, emphatically; "that is, indeed, an object! But, ere we part, we must arrange some plan of communication. Where do you go to first, Francis?"

"To the Hôtel de Langy," replied his young friend at once; *but then paused, and added*, with a saddened and doubtful air, "I suppose its doors will not be closed against me yet, and that my mother and my father will not be so completely the tools of an impostor as to refuse a home to their own son."

As he spoke, the tears rose in his eyes, and he covered them with his hand; for, during the last two days, his interest in the events which had taken place at the Chateau d'Artonne had banished the remembrance of his own painful situation; and all that was sad and terrible therein now rushed upon him with increased force—as a torrent, which is for a time stopped by rocks that have been cast down in its course, rushes on but the more furiously when it has overleaped the barrier.

"Yes," he continued, after a brief pause, "I will first go to the Hôtel de Langy; and there, at all events, I shall be heard of. Soon after my uncle is gone, however, I shall proceed to St. Medard; and there Madame d'Artonne and Julie have promised to join me, as it is not far from Senlis, where the countess thought she might hear of you."

"I told her so—I told her so," replied the count, who had been meditating deeply. "And now, Francis, to our arrangements; for, as I intend to travel by night and sleep by day, I must soon be on my horse's back. I propose to take the name of Latrobe; therefore, if you receive a letter with that signature, understand that it is from me. If, however, by any chance, a blank sheet of paper folded as a letter should be sent to you, recollect it is to give you notice that I am in your neighbourhood, but under such dangerous circumstances that I dare not even write under my assumed name. In such a case," he continued, "go as much out as possible, but alone; and at any time that you hear three short, sharp whistles, you may conclude that I am near, and endeavouring to draw your steps or your attention in a particular direction. I think that this is all that we can settle for the present."

"The countess will be rejoiced to know of your safety," said Francis de Langy, seeing that the count was preparing to depart; "but how can I communicate it to her? All letters addressed to the chateau, I see, are opened at Riom."

The count mused. "I know not," he replied, "I know not how to contrive that; but—"

At that moment the maid returned into the kitchen where they sat; her master and mistress followed the moment after; and the count, resuming his peasant air and jargon, rose up, thanking Francis de Langy for his treat, as he called it, and then turned to the landlord, saying, "I must be jogging, Master Lanjois; so I will just go and get my beast. What have I to pay?"

"Fourteen sous, Jerome," replied the landlord; and, counting out the money, Monsieur d'Artonne once more bade Francis good-night, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was early in the morning when the carriage of Francis stopped before the *porte-cochère* of the Hôtel de Langy, and some minutes elapsed before the heavy knocker brought the porter to the gate.

The old man bowed low and reverently to his young master; there was no change in his as

pect nor in that of any of the other servants, who soon came out to the side of the carriage. They had all known and loved him from infancy, and he was still lord in their hearts, whatever his title might be. His first question was, "Are my father and mother well?" His second was for Monsieur de St. Medard; when, to his consternation and surprise, he found that his uncle had quitted Paris to take ship on the preceding day.

Now, indeed, he felt lonely, left to struggle with the world under the most difficult and adverse circumstances; and bitterly also was he disappointed in regard to his hopes of Monsieur d'Artonne's pardon. Retiring, however, to his apartments, he threw off his travelling garb, and waited with very mingled, but with many painful emotions, for the hour of the marquis's rising. He had plenty of time to meditate, but he arranged no plan of what he was to say or what he was to do. A certain degree of pride made him judge that it would be unworthy of him to consider for a moment what should be his demeanour towards those whom he had ever looked upon as his parents; and he turned his thoughts immediately towards Madame d'Artonne and Julie, asking himself how he might best soothe them while he communicated to them the destruction of their chief hope. Rapid in the execution of all his resolutions, he sat down, shortly after his arrival, and wrote to Madame d'Artonne, assuring her that, though Monsieur de St. Medard was gone, nothing should be wanting on his part to attain the object which they had in view; but he felt that the expectations he held out must be very faint in comparison with those which he was forced to destroy, and his letter was longer and more laboured than he wished to make it.

It was just concluded when one of the servants came to tell him that the marquis had left his room; and, sealing his letter, he instantly proceeded to the saloon in which the family usually sat in the morning. All parties were considerably agitated, and Madame de Langy changed colour more than once as the youth whom she had so long regarded with maternal tenderness advanced towards her. There was such an air of affectionate respect in his whole carriage—an appearance of pleasure at seeing her again, mingled with sadness that a doubt of his being her child should ever have found place in her mind—that feelings of self-reproach rose up in the marchioness's heart, and, throwing her arms around him, she exclaimed, "Oh, Francis, Francis! however this unfortunate affair may end, I shall always regard myself as your mother."

"And I as your father," added the count. "My fortune and my name may be given by the law to another; but my warmest affection is yours, and that no law can take from you."

"Thank you, my dear father! thank you, my dear mother!" replied Francis de Langy; "I shall not only feel towards you as a son, but I shall ever retain the unalterable conviction that I am your son. Nothing can remove that belief from my heart; and, whether imposture may or may not succeed, to the end of my days I shall think, as now, that your blood runs in my veins, and not the blood of a villain who could ever consent to such a fraud upon you as he now pretends that he committed."

"We must not prejudge the question; it will soon be tried," replied the marquis, gravely: "but one of the strongest corroborations of this man's story, to my mind, is, that, for the sake apparently of revealing the truth, and doing full though tardy justice, he exposes himself to punishment either way—for the fraud he committed many years ago, if the cause goes in favour of the boy he pretends is our son; or for the fraud he now commits, if the cause goes against him. His danger is great in both cases."

"May he be punished as he deserves!" replied Francis de Langy. "But now let me ask, my dear father, where is this youth who would fain deprive your son of his place and name? You have seen him, I find. Where is he? and what is he now about?"

The marquis felt a little hesitation, and not a little discomfort, in answering the question; but, of course, that which had been done could not be concealed, and he replied, "We did not think fit to receive him into the house; but he has a lodging in the neighbouring street, where he is with a tutor finishing his education."

"Receive him into the house!" repeated Francis de Langy, looking down; "receive him into the house!"

He could not help feeling bitterly that his cause had been abandoned somewhat easily; but he would not suffer one reproachful word to escape his lips, and the only indication he gave of what was passing in his heart was the repetition of the marquis's words. As the conversation proceeded, he had reason to believe that this course of things had gone on still farther. He found that the youth who claimed his rank and name was a daily visiter at the Hôtel de Langy; that the marquis and marchioness thought him like their late son; and that his foster-father had already ensured forgiveness for the offence which he avowed, and was viewed with favour and consideration by those whom he admitted he had deceived. Every word, in short, that was spoken was a drop of bitterness in the cup of Francis de Langy; and even the expressions of tenderness and affection with which the marquis and marchioness attempted to soothe him produced more painful than pleasurable emotions.

When breakfast was over, and the party were crossing the hall, an event took place against which the marquis had wished to guard. The farmer Latouches entered at the very moment, and approached with a look of familiar ease, as one well accustomed to the house. The colour came up in the marchioness's cheek, and she walked on without taking any notice of him; but the marquis paused with stronger resolution, saying, "This young gentleman, Latouches, is one for whose sake you have injured us in times past, or whom you are now labouring to injure as deeply."

Francis de Langy gazed at him from head to foot; and, though so many years had passed since he had been in the *Ferme Godard*, a strange feeling of vague recognition crossed his mind. In the mean while, Gerard Latouches exclaimed, "Is this my son?" and approached a step nearer to Francis de Langy.

"No, sir," replied Francis, "I am not your son. I never will own myself to be so, let the result of your iniquity be what it may."

"Oh, but you must, young gentleman!" cried Latouches, nettled at the look of scorn he gave him. "You must own yourself as my son, and me as your father; ay, and do your duty under such circumstances."

"No," replied Francis de Langy; "I know enough of the law to be well aware that, what-

ever comes of this, the rights you have once cast off you cannot resume at pleasure; and that, by once denying me to be your son, and asserting that I was the child of another person, whether truly or falsely, you have severed all ties between us forever. I will not stand longer to talk with this man, sir," he continued, turning to the marquis; "I fear I may forget myself."

"No more, Latouches, no more!" said the marquis, as Francis de Langy turned away. "What he says is right: under no circumstances can you have any authority over him; neither, indeed, can you expect him to show the duty and affection of a son. You must, in some degree, bear the consequences of your own acts."

Latouches replied briefly and with perfect submission, and then proceeded to the business which had brought him thither, hinting that, as the farm adjoining his own fell vacant at the next term, he should be glad to add it to the *Ferme Godard*, and craving one or two other favours of the Marquis de Langy. That nobleman referred him to his intendant, who, being his near relation, was not likely to refuse him; especially as Monsieur de Langy added, good-humouredly, "I do not object, if there be no other claims."

In the mean time, Francis de Langy retired to his own chamber, and, sitting down, covered his eyes with his hands, giving himself up to bitter meditations. Could he stay there, he asked himself, in a house where he was every day liable to see those who were *unjustly*, he thought, endeavouring to deprive him of his inheritance—where his own parents were evidently yielding themselves more and more to the claims of another—where his rights had been given up almost without resistance? No: he resolved he would quit the Hôtel de Langy as speedily as possible. He would return to Auvergne, he thought, and seek for consolation where all the strongest affections of his heart were placed. In the first instance, however, it was necessary to put his own affairs in train for defending his rights against the adverse party; and he determined to employ the lawyers of Monsieur de St. Medard, whom he already knew and respected, rather than those of Monsieur de Langy, with whom he was not acquainted, and whom he suspected of having given weak and irresolute counsels to his father. He was preparing to set out to consult with his uncle's notary, when a formal citation was brought him to appear in a court which it indicated, and—to use some of the terms of English law—to show cause why he should not be declared the son of Gerard Latouches. The very wording of the document made his blood boil: it termed him Francis Latouches, pretended Count de Langy; and it accused him—with that sort of fiction which the law, though intended to be the instrument for discovering truth, delights to indulge in—of conspiring with others to defraud and exclude from his just rights Francis de Langy, the real and veritable son of the marquis and marchioness. Carrying the paper in his hand, he proceeded at once to the house of the notary in a state of great agitation and anger. The old man received him with kindness approaching parental tenderness, and read the paper, with a smile at the wrath it had excited.

"This is but a form," he said; "yet the manner in which these people are proceeding is very artful. They are endeavouring, as far as possible, to throw the great burden of proof off their own shoulders; but the French law will not permit that. You have been for many years in possession, and they must make out a strong case to shake you therein. Your excellent friend, Monsieur de St. Medard, has already had various consultations with several of our most celebrated jurisconsults. I will send to the same gentlemen immediately, and, perhaps, we may all have another conference to-morrow, or the day after."

"But," replied Francis de Langy, "I am extremely anxious to return to Auvergne the day after to-morrow at the latest."

"That is impossible, my dear sir," cried the notary: "after this citation, we may fairly consider the proceedings as begun; and, so long as the courts are sitting, you must not think of being more than a day's journey from Paris."

"Then I will go to St. Medard," said Francis de Langy, at once. "I cannot stay in my father's house."

"That, perhaps, will be the best plan," replied the notary: "there you are not above six or seven hours' journey from Paris, and will be within call whenever you are wanted; but, at all events, you must remain here for a day or two, for we have many things to settle. The king hurried Monsieur de St. Medard's departure so much, that there is a good deal of business unconcluded. However, he has given me instructions to pay over to you forty thousand livres annually—one half year being left with me in advance—to put you in possession of the Chateau de St. Medard, and to discharge from his funds all the proceedings in this suit. I am afraid the costs will be very heavy; but his order is unlimited, and we will make the best defence we can."

The good notary's words cast Francis de Langy into a fit of deep and sad thought, though they may not seem to the reader to have been calculated to produce such an effect; but it was, that they suggested to his mind a comparison between the conduct of his parents and that of the more distant relation who had taken such generous care of all his interests; so that the joyful emotions of gratitude were mingled with disappointment and regret. He agreed, however, to the proposal of the notary; and, on his return to the Hôtel de Langy, briefly informed the marquis and marchioness that it was his intention to go for some months to St. Medard, if they had no objection, as soon as the preliminary proceedings for defending his rights had been arranged with the lawyers of the viscount. To his going to St. Medard the marquis made no objection; not only because, Francis having been all through life accustomed to act without his control, he was not habituated to direct his proceedings, but also because he felt, though he did not acknowledge it to himself, that his son's presence was in some degree both a reproach and an embarrassment to him. He was not inclined to admit, indeed, that he had acted hastily, rashly, or unkindly towards Francis in any of his proceedings with the new claimant; but yet he felt that Francis must think he had done so, and consequently, for the time, at least, his presence was likely to produce a sensation of restraint. He commented, however, in a tone of some reproach upon the fact of his son having employed any other lawyers than his own to defend his cause.

"You must remember, Francis," he said, "that I acknowledge you as my child till it is absolutely and distinctly proved that you are not so; and

even then shall always feel towards you, and act towards you, as a father."

Francis de Langy heard him to an end in silence, but then replied, with a grave and respectful air, "I am quite sure, my dear father, that you will do all that is kind and considerate by me, but, at the same time, you will perceive that there are many motives which should induce me to take the course I have done. In the first place, from all you have said this morning, and from all that had previously occurred between you and this impostor, I was inclined to think that you had resolved in some degree to remain neuter between him and myself. Indeed, you are placed in a very painful and difficult situation; for, of course, where there is even a plausible pretext for the young man's claim, you would not like vehemently to oppose one who may hereafter be legally declared to be your son. I therefore thought it better for my rights to be defended by any other lawyers than your own. I must also tell you, that I found our kind uncle had already placed my cause in the hands of several very distinguished men."

"Oh! that makes the case very different," replied the marquis. "Of course, you could not take it from them."

But, though these words ended the conversation upon that subject, Monsieur de Langy could not help feeling that his son had lost confidence in his attachment. To change an embarrassing subject, Francis immediately changed the conversation to the Count d'Artonne, and the situation in which he was placed, expressing the hopes that he had entertained of his uncle's influence with the king being sufficient to obtain the count's pardon. News in those days travelled far less rapidly than at present, and it required many days before any events occurring in the provinces, except such as affected the public weal, became the subject of conversation in the capital. Monsieur de Langy was surprised and grieved by the tidings which he now received, but he entered warmly into the cause of the Count d'Artonne; declared he felt perfectly certain that, if the count had killed the young Marquis de Bausse, it must have been in some accidental encounter provoked by the latter, whom he pronounced a wild, vicious, unprincipled young man, whose conduct in Paris must have given pain to all connected with him.

"I will myself go to Versailles," he said, "as soon as ever the king returns from Fontainebleau, and will use my utmost endeavours to obtain a promise of pardon."

Satisfied with this assurance, Francis de Langy spent the next three days in Paris, in consultation with lawyers, and the arrangement of various other matters which Monsieur de St. Medard had left for him to conclude. During the two first days he felt some apprehension lest he should be brought in contact with the new claimant of the heirship of De Langy; but the marquis had taken care to prevent such an event from taking place, by notifying to the young man that it would be better for him to abstain from visiting at the Hôtel de Langy for the next week. Francis, however, learned accidentally that both his father and mother saw the young man each day; which fact was more painful to him than it might have been if he had known all that took place in their minds upon those occasions. There was a comparison constantly going on between him and his foster-brother, which, it must be confessed, was altogether to his advantage. His demeanour was not so supple and insinuating, but it was far more dignified and manly; and though the manners of the new claimant were graceful, and his person handsome, yet, when Monsieur de Langy returned and gazed upon Francis, there could be no doubt as to which he would soonest choose to call his son.

At the end of the third day Francis took leave of the marquis and marchioness, proposing to set out early on the following morning, but saying that in all probability he should be in Paris in less than a week, as the suit in which he was engaged would undoubtedly bring him frequently to the capital. He said this to diminish the pain and formality of the parting; but nevertheless, when Madame de Langy retired to her own chamber, she felt as if she had lost a child, and wept bitterly; and on the following morning, when she rose and found him gone, the aspect of the house seemed desolate and cheerless.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

How vacant is the home we love, when those we loved are gone! How cold, how dreary, how desolate, the sunniest room from which the heart's sunshine is departed! Francis de Langy stood in the Chateau of St. Medard gazing round him, and scarcely believing it the same place in which the joyous footsteps of youth trod not many months before. How lightly had he gone from room to room! How his heart carolled there, when, rising in the early morning, he gazed from the narrow window through the thick wall, either at the bright aspect of the woody country round, in the warm glow of summer, or at the wild sea of dry branches, perhaps silvered o'er with frost, in the clear, cold sparkle of the wintry day! Six months—scarcely six months—were passed, yet all was changed; but the change was in his own heart, and so it is with us ever through life. It is not alone, as the old Roman said, that the times change, and we change with them, but that we change faster than they do; and like the glasses of various hues with which we are sometimes furnished to gaze at some splendid picture, or some celebrated view, the colour of the feelings within us at the time gives their tone to our vision at each different period of life, and we see things from the beginning of our days to the end, not as they are, but through the medium of our own sensations—sometimes magnified, sometimes diminished—sometimes bright with a fictitious sunshine, sometimes dark through the shady glasses of disappointment and despair. Thus, too, we may hope it will be hereafter, when, having shaken off the dim veil of our mortal nature from before our eyes, the spirit shall see the works of God in the clear lustre of their own existence.

Everything here is as we estimate it, and the changes in our hearts make the changes that we feel. In the last six months how much had happened to Francis de Langy to give a different aspect to everything he beheld! He had gone forth a boy, he had come back a man—not, perhaps, in years, but in sensations. He had thought, he had acted for himself; he had loved, he had feared, he had suffered bitter disappointments; he had suffered the touch of care, sorrow, anxiety, apprehension. He had become experienced in man's feelings, and he came back a man; so, well might the place of his boyhood look altered from the altered eyes with which he viewed it.

The chaplet on the brow of manhood is a heavy one, and happy is he who can wear it without feeling his temples ache beneath the burden. Almost everything in the Chateau of St. Medard was the same as when he had left it: all the old servants were there, everything was in its peculiar place; the house-dog bayed under his window as before, and the horse-boy was whistling the same air in the stable-yard which he had whistled on the very morning of his departure. Every note came back familiarly to Francis de Langy's ear, and formed connecting links between the past and the present; but when he looked round and saw in the hall the vacant places of Monsieur de St. Medard and of his good old friend the Abbé Arnoux, he found that there was a great gap which the heart yearned to fill up again. Thus, his first sensations in the Chateau of St. Medard were melancholy enough; but he had scarcely been three minutes in the place before one of those little incidents happened, which partially scatter the clouds of life by the warm rays of human affection, and made him feel at home again. He stood in the hall with the old porter who had let him in, none of the other servants—who had all been taken by surprise—having yet come to welcome him, when suddenly he heard some steps running overhead like the quick pattering of a child's feet, and in a minute after his good nurse, whom we described long ago, ran into the hall with her face beaming with smiles.

"I was sure it was you, Francis," she said, running up to him with extended arms, as she saw nothing in the handsome young man before her but the boy whose early years she had tended; "I was sure it was you, when I saw the carriage drive up."

Francis de Langy had to bow down his head to receive the salute which good Louise Pelet bestowed upon both sides of his face; and then, drawing back, the little woman looked at him from head to foot, with her bright blue eyes twinkling with satisfaction, and her tongue going with vast volubility. From all the questions she had to ask, and all the little pieces of news she had to give, one would have thought that Louise Pelet would have remained there half the day; but Louise was never known to stay a whole quarter of an hour in any place except in her bed, and, ere ten minutes were over, she exclaimed, "But I must go and see that your bed is well aired, and tell the cook to get you a nice dinner, and have a fire lighted for the evening in the little saloon; these autumnal nights are growing cold." So away she went, running hither and thither with all her usual activity, and was soon plunged in all those household cares which it was her joy and glory to perform with the most scrupulous accuracy and promptitude. It was not exactly bustle, for she seldom raised her voice high, or went out of her way, or did a thing hastily; though in everything she was quick, eager, and exact. To make her young lord comfortable in her own way now became her greatest pride; and, during his afterstay in the chateau, Louise was always in continual motion, very seldom coming near him, indeed, but quite satisfied, to be sure, that by her own incessant activity everything was going right and smoothly. Once or twice in every day, it is true, she would look into whatever room he happened to be sitting in, as it were merely to show her face and to see his, and to judge thereby whether he *had all that he wanted*. He might be at dinner, he might be taking his coffee, reading, writing, or sitting with one of the very few neighbours, it was all the same to Louise; in she came, took her look, and away she went again; or, if she had anything to say, some news to tell, or some question to ask, would advance with her peculiar quick step, take hold of the back of his chair, lean over his shoulder, and speak her two or three brief sentences, scarcely waiting for a reply before she was away again. Louise never pretended to have a good temper, and, knowing her own infirmities, she kept herself as much as possible at a distance from the other servants of the house; never, by any chance, saying a bad word of any of them, and always having something in extenuation to say if they were blamed, but scolding them heartily for anything they did wrong if she came across them herself. At first, on her young master's arrival, she did not seem at all disposed to treat Jean Marais very hospitably, and once or twice her voice was heard elevated to a very shrill tone in her brief conversations with that worthy personage. When Francis mentioned his name to her, however, and said how much he had served him on various occasions, she replied, good-humouredly, "Oh, yes, he is a *bon garçon*, I am sure; but I'll keep out of his way, for he is too free for me."

Jean Marais himself, in the mean time, conformed with wonderful facility to the quiet customs of the Chateau de St. Medard: having an opportunity of varying a life, which might otherwise be somewhat monotonous, by expeditions to the small town of Senlis, which was some five or six miles distant, he did not appear to find it dull. Before he had quitted Paris, he had made himself fully master of the whole story regarding the new claim to the heirship of De Langy, which the servants of the marquis discussed freely with him, not in the least suspecting his connexion with Gerard Latouches. It might seem natural, the reader may suppose, for Jean Marais, on learning that his young master was probably his own cousin, to lose in a degree his respect for him; and one would be still more inclined to imagine that such might be the case, when it is admitted that Jean Marais had entertained shrewd suspicions that a change of the two children brought up at the *Ferme Godard* had taken place, ever since his last visit to Gerard Latouches. But, strange to say, if there was any alteration in his conduct at all, it was only more respectful towards the young Baron de St. Medard, or Count de Langy, as he was still called; for Jean had his peculiar notions on most subjects, and he had a great reverence for a high-bred and noble-minded man in unmerited distress. Stranger still, however, it may seem, that his suspicions in regard to Francis's birth were shaken rather than confirmed by the fact of Gerard Latouches having acknowledged the fraud.

"If it is true," he said to himself, "he must have been very sure it would be soon found out, otherwise he would never have owned it."

Doubts still rankled in his mind, however; and he determined on the very first occasion to ride over to the *Ferme Godard*, though the distance was considerable, and see if he could discover anything to confirm or remove his suspicions.

Early after the arrival of Francis de Langy at the chateau, he wrote a second letter to the Countess d'Artonne, telling her of the intention that he had at one time formed of returning to Auvergne, and the causes which had obliged him to abandon it. He reminded her of her promise to come to

St. Medard, and urged her to fulfil it as soon as possible; assuring her that the Marquis de Langy would make interest with the king for her husband's pardon, and pointing out that her personal solicitations might greatly facilitate his suit. He dared not refer to his interview with Monsieur d'Artonne, lest his letter should be opened, which, indeed, it was; but he said, in the end, that, as it was so long since the count had been heard of, he doubted not he had effected his escape into Switzerland.

Three weeks elapsed ere he received an answer, but then it only conveyed disappointment. Madame d'Artonne informed him that she could not obtain the intendant's permission to quit the chateau, which was still partially occupied by the police. She was treated with every sort of kindness and consideration, indeed, she added, and the intendant was perfectly courteous and polite; but to all her entreaties to be permitted to go to Paris he returned evasive answers, and she saw that it was clearly his intention to keep her in Auvergne.

The quick heart of youth beat vehemently when Francis received these tidings, and he determined to make arrangements for going to the Chateau d'Artonne himself, even if it should be but for a day; but his lawyers strongly opposed his doing so till some of the formal steps in the suit at issue, which they described to him, had been taken by the other party. Strange to say, however, the new claimant did not seem to press forward the proceeding with the haste which might have been expected; and in more than one letter from the old notary of Monsieur de St. Medard it was remarked, "Your *party** is going on with the utmost caution; he is resolved to lose nothing for want of prudence at least." Thus, all matters were delayed for about a fortnight longer, which brought about the middle of November, and signs of an early and severe winter were showing themselves. The weather, however, was clear and bright; and, having determined to wait no longer, but set out for Auvergne in the beginning of the following week, Francis de Langy wandered forth on the Saturday evening in that meditative mood which has been described by all poets as peculiar to the young lover. His thoughts certainly were more busy with Julie d'Artonne than with anything else: he thought of her in her young beauty; he thought of her as he had seen her under the influence of many emotions; he thought of that varying face in all its lovely changes of expression; and he longed, with the thirst which none but the young and ardent lover can feel, to drink deep draughts of affection from the well of those pure lustrous eyes. They were sweet dreams that he indulged in; but, as is ever the case, apprehension, the snake which generally lies beneath the flower of human enjoyment, showed its dull head while he thus meditated on her he loved. He wondered that he had not heard from Madame d'Artonne; he thought it very strange; he fancied something unpleasant must have happened to prevent her replying to his last letter. Could Julie be ill? he thought. Had her health failed under the pressure of such constant anxieties and griefs as she had lately been called upon to bear? His heart felt cold at the vision which imagination presented, and he had wellnigh turned his steps homeward in order to set out that very night. But then again he reflected that his letter had not been gone a fortnight; that he had therein told the countess of his intention to return for a time to Auvergne; and it was more than probable, he concluded, that, in the expectation of seeing him soon, she had not written, lest her letter might miss him by the way.

As he thus thought, he ascended one of the highest hills in the neighbourhood, which the reader must recollect if he have visited that part of France. It is not steep, at least on the side next to Senlis; but rises gradually, through some woods and moorish sort of lands, till it overtops everything around. Thence the eye stretches over a fair and undulating country for many miles on every side, seeing the spires of towns and cities beneath one, catching at once Senlis and Beaumont, and then running on past Chantilly, till Beauvais itself is distinctly seen, with its cathedral rising large and dark above the rest; while, beyond, the country softens off, and all becomes dim and lost, like the objects of early memory. Francis de Langy paused, and gazed around him. There is always something elevating, something invigorating, in the contemplation of nature's face; it seems as if from the works of God breathes forth to the heart of man somewhat of the high and divine spirit in which they are made; and Francis de Langy felt his courage and his resolution rise to grapple with the ills of life, whatever they might be, as he gazed over that wide prospect, with the flood of evening radiance glowing in the skies above him, and the purple light of the evening sun pouring over the wide-spread lands below. After stretching his sight to the utmost verge of the horizon, he turned his eyes downward again towards the Chateau of St. Medard, which stood upon its little woody knoll below him, at the distance of about three miles. He saw the cattle of the neighbouring farm winding homeward from their pastures; he saw a flock of sheep following their shepherd to the village; but another moving object caught his eye; it was a carriage drawn slowly along by horses that seemed tired. Francis de Langy watched it along the high road to Senlis with feelings of some interest.

"Some people going home to those they love," he thought; "God make their meeting a happy one!" But then the carriage came near the turning which led to St. Medard, stopped there for a moment, and then suddenly quitted the highway and rolled along the road towards the chateau. Oh! how the heart of Francis de Langy beat as he ran down the hill, and sped with a foot of light back towards his home!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was as he thought. In the courtyard of the chateau stood the carriage; old Joseph and Jean Marais were handing down trunk-mails and portmanteaus, and another servant of the Count d'Artonne, with one of the domestics of the chateau, was carrying them in one by one as they were laid upon the stone pavement. As soon as old Joseph saw Francis de Langy, he stopped in his work, bowed low, and was beginning to tell the young gentleman how happy he was to see him again, and all about their journey, and a great many things besides; but Jean Marais, who knew better, stopped him, saying, "Let monsieur pass, Joseph. He will talk to you by-and-by;" and Francis de Langy, with a nod to the

* The French term for an opponent in a suit at law.

old man, entered the house and ran rapidly to the little saloon. The step—the well-known step—of him she loved called Julie from the window, and, bounding forward to meet him, with the innocence of the child brightening the love of the woman she sprang to the arms that were open to clasp her, and clung to his bosom as he pressed her to his heart.

"Oh, this is joy indeed!" cried Francis; and Madame d'Artonne, wiping away a tear from her eyes, came forward and held out her hand, saying, "I must be welcomed too, Francis."

"And I also," exclaimed the good Abbé Arnoux; "though Julie has the first right, of course."

Where is the artist who could ever paint a cataract? They may represent the white expanse of falling water, the foam, the rocks, the spray; but where is the motion? where is the rush of the torrent, the ever-changing glistening of the dashing stream, the life—the busy and tumultuous life—of the quick waves? It has never yet been done; and those who attempt to convey by description moments of eager and tumultuous joy, such as Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne knew at that moment, will likewise fail in conveying aught but a cold, inanimate picture to the mind of the reader. The eager question, the rapid reply, the look of love, the pause of enjoyment, the pressure of the hand, the sigh of obtrusive memory, the anxious scanning of each feature to see if time has inflicted no injury, the thousand nameless shades of expression upon the face, the varying tones, the words understood and answered ere half spoken, and the confused and agitated emotions, gushing, as from a fountain, from the heart of love—these defy description, and leave the pen or the tongue all powerless.

Let us pass over the next hour, then, and, having done so, seat ourselves with Julie, and Francis de Langy, and Madame d'Artonne, and the good Abbé Arnoux, round the wide fireplace of the saloon, cheerful with many a blazing log; and—while Louise Pelet bustles about to make preparations for the new guests, Jean Marais and the old butler of the chateau lay the cloth for supper in the *salle-à-manger*, and the cook toils and looks furious in her vocation—let us listen to the tidings from Auvergne, which were of no slight interest to those who heard and those who told, and of no mean importance to this story.

Madame d'Artonne had received the letter of Francis de Langy, announcing his intention to visit them at their own house; and not a little glad were they, she said, at the thought of his coming, as the intendant still continued the same course of conduct, and opposed her quitting Auvergne. The same day, however, on which her young friend's letter had arrived, a rumour had reached the chateau that a high appointment—no less than a seat in the ministry of France—had been conferred upon the intendant himself. The next day that officer had visited the Chateau d'Artonne with smooth and plausible demeanour, informing the countess that, being elevated far above his deserts and expectations, he might have an opportunity of serving the count which had never occurred before. He promised her that he would use it zealously, and assured her that nothing but the deepest sense of duty had ever caused, or would cause, him to behave with even the appearance of severity towards any member of a family whom he so much esteemed and loved. "Now," he said, "I can act in a different manner; *for, not having to* deal with the case individually, so that there can be no breach of duty implied, I can appeal to the king, and urge him most strongly to supersede all proceedings in the case of Monsieur d'Artonne."

"He made me quite believe," said Julie, commenting upon what her mother had said, "he made me quite believe that he had our interests sincerely at heart; especially as he said, in leaving us, that, as his authority as intendant was at an end, he could no longer oppose our proceeding to Paris, where he himself was going, and where he would not fail, the moment he saw the king, to plead our cause to the best of his ability."

"Little, indeed, did we expect," continued Madame d'Artonne, taking up the history again, "that the very next day, as we were making our preparations for setting off, we should receive a formal notice that the estates of my husband were entirely sequestered till such time as he should appear to take his trial, he having been found guilty of contumacy even before we knew that such proceedings were taken against him. It is usual, I believe, under such circumstances, to make an allowance from the estates to the wife and children of the accused person proportioned to their rank and the station in society which they have filled. You may judge of my surprise, then, Francis, when I found that the sum of ten thousand livres per annum was all that is granted for the support of myself and Julie during the absence of the count."

"Accept it not, my dear madam," cried Francis de Langy, "accept it not at the hands of this man. Here, in St. Medard, you will not want it. You know how willingly, how gladly I will share everything with you, and, thank God, I have abundance by my uncle's kindness, which no one can take away from me. What I suspect, and what I know, of this intendant matters not; his designs are all selfish, and he is working for them by base and ungenerous means."

"You are uncharitable, Francis," said the Abbé Arnoux; "in this instance, it is not the intendant who is to blame, but the court, or the administrator of the sequestered domains. It is with them rests the discredit of having made so small an allowance for the support of Madame d'Artonne."

"But depend upon it," replied Francis de Langy, vehemently, "the intendant is at the bottom of the whole. Do you suppose that he is without influence over the judges and other officers of his own generality? No, no, my dear friend. He has done this; no other person whatsoever, unbiased and impartial, would think of assigning such a pittance to the wife of the Count d'Artonne."

"But, of course," said the abbé, "they would only act according to law."

"Alas!" replied Francis de Langy, "what is law in France? The will of the king, excellent, perhaps, when we have the extraordinary combination of a good king, good ministers, and good magistrates; but terrible as an instrument of tyranny, where the private passions of many are suffered to interfere. But how, dear lady," he continued, taking the countess's hand, "how have you contrived to defray the expenses of your journey hither? All that was in the chateau was given to the court. Why did you not write to me? Is not all I have yours and Julie's?"

"Luckily, Francis, I did not need your kind-

ness," replied the countess; "I had the lands assigned as my own dowry. Those they could not sequestrate, and the tenants came eagerly in to pay their rents, even before they were due, otherwise I should have had to apply to the intendant for an advance of the pitiful sum allowed me. I think I would rather have died."

"It was what he aimed at," cried Francis de Langy, eagerly; "it was what he aimed at. Oh, how I rejoice that the villain has been disappointed! He sought to bend you to him, to cast a net round you, to force you to depend upon him. But, thank God, he has failed."

"Francis, Francis," cried the abbé, "is this Christian charity? You are too vehement, my dear boy; you are far too vehement. One would think, to hear you, that this intendant were your rival for the hand of our fair friend Julie, here."

Francis smiled bitterly: "I know him, my excellent friend, better than you do."

"Nay," said the abbé, "I know him not at all; I never saw the man. But I once heard his voice, which seemed to be sweet and gentle."

"I do know him," replied Francis de Langy, more calmly, but still in a decided tone; "and I feel sure that, ere long, Madame d'Artonne will find he is not without an object in all his proceedings. It is right that both she and Julie should be upon their guard, for now he is armed with greater power than ever, and may, perchance, seek to make a traffic of his sovereign's mercy, as I feel sure he has heretofore done of his justice."

"I am afraid you are right, Francis," replied the countess; "but here comes your servant to say that supper is ready, I suppose, so let us banish all these bitter thoughts for a time, and draw as much happiness from our glad meeting as may be. We may, perhaps, have one evening of peace; who can tell what to-morrow may bring?"

"Who, indeed?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Days rolled by, as they will, in joy or sorrow; weeks passed, as they will pass whether man would have them fleet or stay; and Francis de Langy was still at the Chateau of St. Medard, with those he best loved. It must not be thought, however, that those hours fled without anxiety or without change, although, to say sooth, the interruptions of the calm were but few, and very remarkable. Tidings came from time to time from Paris; this step or that had been taken in the suit regarding the heirship of De Langy; the marquis wrote twice or thrice, in terms of great kindness and affection, to his supposed son, assuring him that he took a lively interest in all the proceedings, but at the same time telling him that, although he had applied both to the king and his ministers in regard to Count d'Artonne, he had made but little progress in his suit, the constant answer being that nothing could be done until the count surrendered and took his trial, in which event the most favourable view would be taken of his case. Once, indeed, he said that the king had answered him angrily, reminding him how he himself had pleaded against a murderer, and bidding him remember that the royal word had been pledged on that occasion not to show any lenity where the plea only was that the death had taken place in a chance encounter.

No news of the Count d'Artonne reached the chateau, though Jean Marais visited Senlis every day, and all means were taken to ensure that no letter should miscarry or message remain undelivered; and thus anxiety was kept alive in the breasts of the whole party, the arrival of the post and the return of Jean Marais from the town being two regular periods of expectation and disappointment every day. At other times, the hours slipped by in that dreamy sort of state which is sure to be produced by long-continued uncertainty. The mind habituates itself to anxiety, takes advantage of any circumstance to limit its influence to fixed periods, and then, though it cannot altogether cast it off, bears it almost unconsciously.

It were vain to say that Julie and Francis de Langy were not happy. They loved and were together, and that is happiness. The interchange of mutual thoughts, the words and looks of affection, the morning or the evening walk, the united contemplation of nature's face, the reading the same page, the exploring untrodden paths through the lore of other days, or flying on the wings of fancy through the lustrous atmosphere of poetic dreams, the giving themselves up to walk hand in hand, under the guidance of some great master of the lyre, like the old Italian poet, through the worlds of imagination, was enough to fill many a day with pleasure; not so bright, perhaps, as many others, but which passed not away altogether like the enjoyments of sense, or, at all events, leave no stain and bitterness behind.

The calm order of the Chateau de St. Medard underwent no interruption. The Abbé Arnoux pursued his usual studious course, remaining reading the greater part of the day, visiting the sick and the poor in the neighbourhood for several hours ere nightfall, and listening to the conversation of others during the evening, adding, from time to time, a comment or a lesson, in which very often child-like simplicity was mingled with manly wisdom. Little alteration was caused in the demeanour or habits of *Louise* Pelet by the arrival of the Countess d'Artonne and her daughter. With Marie, the countess's pretty maid, she seemed to cultivate a certain sort of intimacy, but as soon as she had done everything to make her completely at home in her chateau, she handed her over naturally to the tender attentions of Jean Marais, who certainly did his best to make the time pass pleasantly to the fair stranger.

Three days after the arrival of the countess at the chateau, Louise ran into the library where her young master was seeking for a book, and, stopping directly before him, looked in his face with a peculiar smile, saying, "Ah! she is very pretty: ah! she is very charming, and a dear, good girl, I think, too;" and, before Francis de Langy could make any reply, she was out of the room again, with a nod and a laugh, as if she would have said, "I know all about it, and think it will do very well."

Days, we have said, and weeks had passed, the aspect of the year was changed, bright skies had passed away, and dull, heavy clouds, borne upon a whistling and a fitful wind, swept over the sky, occasionally pelting against the windows of the chateau in dull and pattering sleet, occasionally falling in large flakes of snow. There had been a heavy storm during the whole of one night, the wind had howled in hollow gusts about the chimneys, the fire blazed clear

and bright, as if the air were frosty, and the next morning, when the whole party rose, the ground was entirely white, and two or three inches of snow lay upon the window-sills. A fog hung over the whole scene, not very thick, indeed, but sufficient to make the neighbouring trees look dim and ghastly, while fine, small particles of frozen rain kept falling thickly, and hourly increasing the heaps below.

"I think we must confine ourselves to the chateau for the day," said Francis de Langy, "unless something should call me to Senlis."

It was about two o'clock when he spoke; at three the post arrived, and a single letter was put into his hand. He instantly recognised the writing of the Count d'Artonne, and broke the seal in haste. There was nothing but a blank page within; and, remembering all that had been agreed upon between himself and the count, Francis de Langy concluded that Monsieur d'Artonne was near, but in circumstances of great danger. He determined immediately to go out and ride about the country in the hope of meeting him, but, at the same time, judged it would be better not to harass the mind of Julie and Madame d'Artonne by informing them that he had received such intimation of the count's proximity and danger. Folding up the letter hastily, then, he said, "I shall be obliged to go out, I fear;" and, turning to the servant who had brought the letter but not quitted the room, he added, "Tell Jean Marais that he must accompany me immediately on horseback."

Julie gazed at him earnestly with an inquiring look, but he made no answer to it; merely saying that he would be back before dark, he left the room and proceeded to the stables. Mounting his horse as soon as it could be prepared, he issued forth and rode along towards Senlis; ere he had gone far he paused, turned back, and took out several dogs with him, but refused the company of the gamekeeper, much to the worthy man's astonishment. Jean Marais, however, who was the most discreet of valets, expressed no wonder and made no observation, but rode after his master, looking carefully to the right and left as they proceeded. Sometimes they took the high road, sometimes the by-ways; but when they were within about a mile of Senlis they turned to the right, made a circuit, and came round towards the chateau again by another path; then, diverging again, they proceeded farther into the country, tracing almost every road within several miles of St. Medard before night set in. The day was as miserable as can be conceived: cold, chilly, foggy, varying every hour from thin falling drift to large flakes of heavy snow, while sometimes a disposition to rain showed itself, but quickly broke off again; and, as night came on, the intensity of the cold increased. The dogs, who had at first rushed joyfully forth, barking and shaking their ears, and rolling in the snow, now followed dully behind, with hanging heads and tails, and disconsolate looks, finding neither game nor amusement. Jean Marais, on his part, bore up stoutly, consoled himself with a low whistle as he followed his master, and did not even seem surprised when Francis de Langy turned round and said, "Do not whistle, Jean Marais."

"Oh, very well, sir," replied the valet; and, riding a little nearer, he added, "This is a pleasant day, sir; like a sullen woman in a fit of the vapours, not knowing whether to cry, sulk, or scratch. But it is growing dusky, sir."

"I know," replied Francis de Langy; "but I shall not go home till night falls."

"No, sir, I suppose not," said his companion; "but I was thinking that if you were to take the other road which runs from Senlis to Chantilly, and thence come round by Lachapelle, we might stumble upon something. As we passed by the end, about ten minutes ago, I thought I heard somebody whistle down there."

"Indeed!" cried Francis de Langy, eagerly; "I heard nothing of the kind, and I intended to take that road up instead of down after we had passed through the village. Are you sure you heard a whistle?"

"Not quite," replied Jean Marais; "but I think old Roland is; for, as he was trotting along between you and me, looking as dull as a farmer's wife coming home from market with her eggs unsold, he stopped and cocked up one ear, turning round his head towards the lane, as much as to say, 'What do you want down there?'"

"Let us ride back!" cried Francis de Langy. "You go the same way we have come; I will take the next turning and come round by the paths through the wood. Go on till you come to the first road on the left, turn down it, and we are sure to meet."

"Oh, I know every inch of the road," replied Jean Marais; "and if I hear my whistler again, I suppose I must stay till you come?"

This being settled, master and servant separated, the dogs following Francis de Langy as their oldest acquaintance. The young gentleman quickened his pace and rode round as he had said, but he met with nothing till he issued forth upon the road which Jean Marais had mentioned, nor heard a sound except the chattering of some birds in the wood. Night was beginning to fall apace, and he just saw the dim figure of Jean Marais riding slowly towards him, when one of the dogs at his side stopped and snuffed at something on the ground, giving, at the same time, a low growl towards the wood. Francis de Langy instantly sprang to the ground, and, bending down, saw the mark of a footstep on the snow. "Down, dog, down!" he said, as the hound leaped up upon him. "If there be any one there, and a friend to St. Medard, let him whistle three times."

He spoke loud, but one faint whistle was the only reply. "Here, Jean Marais!" he cried, "take my horse, there is some one here: keep back the dogs for the present;" and, pushing through the bushes, he followed the footsteps, which were distinctly marked into the wood.

Several of the hounds would follow, notwithstanding the chidings of Jean Marais; but Francis de Langy kept them back till one of them tried to rush past him with a loud bark, and Francis saw before him, by the light that glistened from the snow, a man sitting at the foot of a tree, in an attitude of extreme lassitude.

"Good God! is it you?" he cried, advancing to the side of the Count d'Artonne, and chiding back the dogs.

"Yes, indeed," replied the count, faintly; "but I am exhausted and worn out. Yesterday I was hunted from Beauvais, and walked for twelve or thirteen hours without stopping; to-day I have found every road I wished to take guarded against me, and I had crept in here in despair. Francis, I fear you are come too late."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Francis de Langy; "do not say that; you are close to St. Medard, where we can easily conceal you for some time. Jean

Marais! Jean Marais!" he continued, raising his voice.

"Here, sir, here!" cried Jean Marais, coming forward. "Ah, sir, is it you? What, we have found you at length, and in bad plight, too, it seems! Well, precautions are never taken in vain; if they don't serve one purpose they'll serve another. I thought I might want something to keep out the cold when my young master determined to enjoy the beauties of to-day, so I e'en filched a biscuit and a little wine. Monsieur will forgive me if you drink it, Monsieur d'Artonne. But take the biscuit first, take the biscuit first," he continued; "if your stomach is empty, as I judge it must be by your sitting on the snow, the wine would do you harm without something to eat."

Eagerly did the count devour the light biscuit that Jean Marais had brought, and then putting to his lips the small dried gourd, about the size of a strong man's fist, which the provident valet had not unfrequently with him to supply his own or other people's necessities, he took a long draught, saying, when he had done, "Thank God! I have not eaten or drank anything for six-and-thirty hours."

"Good practice for Lent!" said Jean Marais, taking back the gourd and shaking it at his ear; "but how is this, Monsieur le Count, it is half full still? I shall carry it more lightly when it is empty. Finish it, finish it, sir!"

The count took it and drank again, saying, "This has saved my life, I believe. Lend me your hand, Francis; I think I can walk now."

"You must not walk far, sir," said Jean Marais. "My horse will carry you to the chateau, and perhaps I had better carry you to the horse: it is not fifty yards."

"Oh no!" replied the count; "I can walk that distance."

"But the footsteps, the footsteps!" said Jean Marais; "snow tells tales, sir, as every good hunter knows."

"Oh, we will soon efface the footsteps," replied Francis de Langy. "What do you think I brought the dogs for? Here, hunt them over the ground, and then bring them close together after us, as Monsieur d'Artonne and I walk towards the horses."

"On my life," cried Jean Marais, "he improves rapidly; he will beat me at my own trade ere long. Sir, I honour you for your device;" and, making the dogs spread themselves abroad, he soon covered the whole space of ground with traces of their feet; and then, gathering them together, he followed close behind, while the count, leaning on the arm of his young friend, slowly made his way towards the spot where the horses had been left.

Monsieur d'Artonne mounted with difficulty; and then, turning their bridles homeward, they rode along in the darkness, the valet walking by the side of the horses, and the dogs following him.

"We had better avoid the village, sir," he said, speaking to his master, "for there may be people looking out; and then, when we get to St. Medard, how do you intend to get in? You must not let all your people see the count!"

"Certainly not," replied Francis de Langy; "but you must go on before, Jean Marais, and contrive to get them out of the way. Then we will come round by the back of the farm, through the park gate on the north side, and into the chateau by the little north door, which will bring us directly to the back staircase leading to the corridor by my room."

"It won't do, sir," said Jean Marais; "a thousand things might put us out. There's the accursed poultry woman with her hens and turkeys; the gamekeeper will be looking after his dogs as soon as he sees them, giving them their soup, and going backward and forward for an hour; the groom will be looking out for the return of his horses; and the butler has been cooling his old nose for this half hour, depend upon it, looking for the arrival of his dear young master, and thinking you frozen to death. How am I to dispose of all of them? No, no! my task must be within human capability. If you will take my advice you will stop at the little summer-house at the west corner of the park; we can easily open the window, and the count can get in without ever dismounting. There's a sofa in it for him to lie down upon; and when all is still in the chateau, we can bring him in without anybody perceiving it. When he is safely deposited, you and I will go back together as we came, only I will lead my horse so long as we are upon the road, in order that, if there be any trace of footsteps left, they may continue to the end."

Francis de Langy was too wise to oppose any amendment of his plan, and the suggestion of Jean Marais was instantly acted upon. The only thing that went at all contrary to their wishes was, that they met two peasants returning homeward; but as nothing resulted affecting this tale, we need not stop to describe the anxiety which their appearance produced. As the only light that existed was derived from the snow, neither party could distinguish the other with any degree of accuracy, and the peasants did not even pause to say "Good-night," not knowing that it was their young seigneur who passed them.

The summer-house to which Jean Marais had referred occupied an angle of the park wall, with a window looking each way; and though from the side of the park it was raised by some six or seven steps from the general level of the ground from the road, which there passed over a bank, the window-sill was not higher than the head of a tall horse. Francis de Langy easily contrived to open the window, and aided the count with one hand while Jean Marais held the bridle of the horse, and, at the same time, offered his stout shoulder as a step for Monsieur d'Artonne to put his foot upon. The entrance would have been easily effected by any man in health and vigour, but the state of exhaustion into which the count had fallen rendered the feat somewhat difficult. It was accomplished at length, however; and then, proceeding along the park wall, master and man returned to the chateau, and entered by the great gates. It happened luckily that they did so, for they found a lieutenant of the maréchaussée in the hall, and two or three archers at the door. Francis de Langy started when he saw them, and the colour came into his cheek, but, advancing promptly to the officer, he demanded, in a somewhat stern tone, to what he was indebted for the honour of his visit. The lieutenant replied very civilly, however, that, having learned that the Countess d'Artonne with several servants was then residing in the Chateau de St. Medard, he had come thither to notify to her domestics that the Count d'Artonne being a fugitive from justice, and condemned *par contumace*, all persons were forbidden, under severe penalties, to harbour or comfort him.

"This you know, sir," continued the lieutenant, "is a usual and necessary proceeding, otherwise I should not have intruded upon you at all, especially at this late hour of the evening."

Francis de Langy gave him no encouragement to remain, and finding that the notification had been made before he arrived, he bowed him out of the chateau, and saw the iron gates closed against him and his men. On farther inquiry, Francis found cause to suspect that, notwithstanding all his courteous expressions, the lieutenant of the maréchaussée had farther objects in view than the simple one which he stated, for the archers had gone over the lower parts of the house, and had made manifold inquiries of all the servants, both in the chateau and the offices round, as to the persons who had been seen coming and going in the neighbourhood. Of course they had gained no information, and the answers of the servants were so distinct and straightforward as to leave no room for suspicion even by a suspicious race.

Whispering to Jean Marais to carry some refreshments to the count, Francis proceeded to join the countess and Julie in the saloon. The eyes of both were turned upon him with an eager glance as soon as he entered, and it was evident that they both conjectured rightly what was the object of his long ride on such a dreary day. He, too, was not a little anxious to communicate the result to those most deeply interested; but the good Abbé Arnoux was seated in his chair by the fire, and, with every sort of reverence for his excellent preceptor, Francis did not think fit to intrust the fate of the Count d'Artonne to the keeping of more persons than necessary.

"I am very wet," he said, "so I will go and change my clothes, and be with you again immediately;" but, bending down over Julie as he passed her, he whispered, "Your father is safe, my beloved. Give your mother some intimation whenever you can without being overheard."

He was, indeed, as he had said, drenched to the skin, and, casting off his clothes, he proceeded to change his dress entirely. Nor, if the truth must be said, did he stop there; he paid some attention to his toilet, wrung the wet from the thick curls of his hair, and arranged them as he fancied might look best; for Francis de Langy was, after all, a sharer in all the feelings of youth, and was not at all indisposed to look well in the eyes of her he loved. He had not yet finished when he heard a step near his room door; the next moment, without any application for admission, it opened, and the face of Jean Marais presented itself, looking eagerly around. Withdrawing a step, he beckoned to somebody in the corridor, saying, in a low tone, "Come, come, there is nobody here," and the Count d'Artonne himself entered, and cast himself into a chair.

"Always take an opportunity when you have got it," cried Jean Marais: "the archers have given the servants enough gossip in the kitchen for two hours at least, so, leaving old Joseph to keep guard, I brought the count in at once. But now, monsieur, where do you intend to put him, for we had better domicile him in the first instance?"

"In there," replied Francis de Langy, pointing to the door of a room which was situated in one of the square towers of the chateau, and had been used by him as a study during his boyhood, "in there; there is no communication with it but through this room. It is the safest place in the house."

"But Madamoiselle Julie will like to see her father sometimes, I should think," said Jean Marais, "and she will have to pass through your room, monsieur!"

"Julie will not object, and the count will trust her there," replied Francis de Langy, with a smile at his servant's affectation of prudery: "is it not so, my dear count?"

"I would trust her with you anywhere," said the count, holding out his hand to him warmly: "you are her brother, Francis, till you are her husband, and Julie may well regard you in such a light."

"Well, well, then," said Jean Marais, laughing, "I don't object, then, either; but I will go bring monsieur some supper, for hunger, when he likes it, can be a worse enemy than all the maréchaussée put together."

"But my wife and my daughter, Francis," said the Count d'Artonne, "tell me, what of them? Are they here? That man's words seem to imply that they were either in the house or coming soon. Oh, Francis! you cannot tell what it is, after one has been a wanderer upon the face of the wide world—cast upon the cold compassion or mercenary attention of strangers, often deprived even of that—lonely, desolate, unfriended, with none to help, or counsel, or support, or console—you know not what it is, I say, even to think of being restored to the warm touch of kindred affection—to the embrace of wife and child. Are they here, or are they coming soon?"

The count was so much agitated that Francis thought it might be almost dangerous, in his weakened state, to tell him that madame and Julie were actually in the chateau, and believing that a little kindly double-dealing might be pardonable, he said, "They are coming soon, my dear count. I hope you will see them to-morrow. My good friend the Abbé Arnoux is here; for many reasons, we must not let him know of your being in the chateau. I will go and speak with him, however, lest he think me long absent. In the mean while take some refreshment, and I will be back directly; no one will come in here but Jean Marais."

Thus saying, he left the count, and calling to Jean Marais at the foot of the stairs, told him that he wished Monsieur d'Artonne to be left in ignorance that the countess and Julie were actually in the chateau till he had taken some refreshment. After which he summoned good Louise Pelet into the great saloon, which was vacant, and without a fire.

"*Ah! mon Dieu*, monsieur," cried the quick little woman, "why do you stand here in the cold after the miserable ride you must have had? I will run and get some wood."

"No, no, Louise," cried Francis de Langy, catching her arm, "I have but a few words to say to you. Can I trust you with a great secret, Louise?"

"Certainly, sir," replied the *bonne*.

"I believe I can, Louise," continued the young gentleman, "but this one is a secret on which my liberty depends, and perhaps the life of a person very dear to me."

"Speak! speak, sir!" said Louise, "that is to say, if it is needful, for I am not fond of secrets, though I never told one of my own in my life, or any other person's, either."

Francis de Langy gave her full credit for the truth of her assertion, for Louise was much too rapid and taciturn to be at all fond of gossip—a disease peculiar to slow and idle people—for no

and, besides, it is quite possible that this gentleman you are seeking may have concealed himself behind some of the wine. You had better come down and remove it out of the bins."

"Do you mean to assert, sir, that he has never been here?" demanded the officer.

"Nay, I won't assert that," replied Jean Marais; "I will speak to nothing beyond my own knowledge. He may have been here when I was a baby in arms, or at any time, indeed, before I entered my master's service; neither can I pretend to say that he is not here at the present moment; he may be so without my knowing it; only all I can say is, that, from the time I was first groom of the chambers in the Chateau de St. Medard, I have never seen him nor heard of his being here."

"Where is your young master, mademoiselle?" demanded the officer, turning to one of the maids.

"He went out early this morning, sir," replied the girl.

"What do you call early?" asked the officer.

"Oh, in the gray of the morning," she replied.

"Does he go out every day?" was the next question.

"He has done so lately," answered the girl, "but not so early as to-day."

"Do you know where he has gone to, sir?" continued the lieutenant, turning to Jean Marais.

"I mind my own business, sir," replied the valet, sullenly, "and never ask my master impertinent questions."

"You can give impertinent answers, though," replied the officer, moving towards the stairs.

"Have you searched all these rooms?" he continued, when he had joined the archers whom he had left below.

"Every hole and corner," answered the men; "but he might have got down by that little staircase."

"That he could not," answered Jean Marais, "for the door at the bottom is locked. You have given yourselves a great deal of trouble and disturbed a peaceable family for nothing, and if I had my will I would march you up and down these staircases till you hadn't a leg to stand upon."

The officer gave him an angry glance, but said nothing, and, descending to the ground floor, he made the old butler open the cellars, judging that Jean Marais's mention of them might be a ruse to prevent him from searching them. He then returned to the hall, and, after pausing a moment in thought, went up stairs again, forbidding any one but two of his archers to follow. His steps were heard sounding along the passages for some minutes, and it must be confessed that the valet's heart beat somewhat more quickly than usual, till at length the officer and his followers descended without having made any farther discovery.

"I never thought he was there," said the lieutenant, mounting his horse; "and, indeed, I am sure he escaped us that snowy night. The labourer at Lachapelle told us he had seen three men whom he did not know. Depend upon it the count was one of them, and is in Flanders by this time."

Speaking thus to the exempt, who had accompanied his party, he rode away, the other merely replying, "Well, it cannot be helped, we have done our duty."

The moment the last archer was seen riding down the hill, Jean Marais ran up to tell the countess that all was safe; but, as th was in a state of great confusion for after, the maids and the men running thither, and talking over the whole aff arate groups, nearly an hour passed opportunity could be found of libe count from his strait confinement.

Francis returned not long after, an felt a glow of indignation rise in his cl thought of the Chateau of St. Medard jected to such perquisitions. His us ever, had taught him to examine the f of all his feelings before he gave wa and he could not help smiling at his c when he remembered that the maréch in reality, just cause for the proceedi had irritated him.

From that time everything passed v ly; the police of that district had co conclusion that the count had got be sphere of action, and the numerous par had been inquiring for him in all th round about were recalled quietly to t ters. Monsieur d'Artonne might ha his time at the chateau in perfect sa could have been content to endure th ment, but gradually it became burde him. The hope of obtaining any ass pardon before trial gradually faded a reflection that the frontier was very tinually offered an object of desire an tion, and from time to time plans were for getting him safely across the front rious obstacles presented themselves time, but at length it was determine attempt should be made, and Jean Ma once more called to council as to the b of effecting the object in view.

The only great difficulty seemed t want of a proper passport. The fronti that time strictly guarded, both by the p custom-house officers, and no Frenc was allowed to quit his native country permission of the government. This for a time seemed even to put the inve nius of the valet at fault; but at leng much consideration, he said, "I will do will do it. I must have a week, tho then you shall have the passport."

"How do you intend to manage?" d Francis de Langy.

"Don't ask any questions, sir," said t "this is a business with which you have anything to do. I will manage th and stand the risk myself; only, if I g scrape, you must do the best you can fo try to get my pardon."

"That I will certainly do, Jean," repli cis de Langy; "but consider well what about, Jean. I am sure Monsieur d' would rather risk passing the frontier w passport than have you to do anything ourable or ruinous to yourself."

"That I would, Jean," said the coun must do nothing of the kind for me."

"Oh, as to dishonour," cried Jean "there is no dishonour in cheating a rogues, and if it prove ruinous it wi want of luck. I will do it; I will do shall have a passport, monsieur, but must ask any questions."

At the end of the week, faithful to h Jean Marais laid before the count a pa due form for Monsieur Latrobe, merc Lyons, travelling into Flanders and

He also produced various papers filled to identify the said Monsieur Latrobe, and, upon the strictest examination that the count and Francis could give, the whole seemed to be in due form and perfectly correct. Jean Marais, whose love of adventure was unconquerable, declared his determination to accompany the count himself, in the quality of a servant, till he was safe upon the sea; and, everything having been arranged, Monsieur d'Artonne took leave of his wife and daughter on the night of the twenty-third of December, and, passing unobserved out of the chateau de St. Medard, once more commenced the anxious life of a fugitive.

CHAPTER XL.

The night was dark, but clear and frosty; the sky was sparkling with stars; and, as the Count d'Artonne and Jean Marais walked quietly through the park and out at a distant gate, the valet hurried on, looking neither to the right nor the left, while the count, on the contrary, gazed up more than once towards the sky, and twice paused to take one last look at the Chateau de St. Medard. The one thought of nothing but the enterprise in which he was engaged, and how to carry it on successfully; while the other thought fondly and tenderly of those he was leaving, and calculated with a sickening sensation of apprehension the distant period when they might meet again—if ever. Memory, too, so easily awakened by a single word which speaks of the past, ran back over the times gone by, and contrasted the peaceful happiness that had fled with the anxious care of the present and the stormy aspect of the future. The count sighed deeply as they passed through the gate and closed it behind them; but Jean Marais whistled a few light notes of a popular air of that day, feeling all his faculties of mind and body invigorated by the clear frosty atmosphere of the night. Such it is, to be accustomed to vicissitudes or not. After a walk of five miles, the valet stopped before a shed on the edge of a low marshy piece of ground; and, opening the large doors which shut out the night-wind, he led out two stray horses, which he had bought four or five days before at a distant fair. Both were saddled and bridled, and upon each were a pair of saddle-bags. "I hope you are learned in the price of silks, sir," he said; "for the right-hand pocket is full of samples, which you must talk very learnedly about in case of need. I bought them at Beauvais two days ago, that you might take orders for the house of Latrobe and Company, should you meet with a purchaser."

The count smiled; and, to say truth, his feeling of confidence revived from the light bearing of his companion; for there is nothing which so much depresses as the aspect of despondency, and every shade of fear and apprehension is decidedly infectious.

Mounting their horses, they rode on, avoiding Senlis, and taking the way towards Tournay; nor, indeed, did they meet with any adventure worthy of record during the whole of their journey. It passed as quietly and as tranquilly as if no dangers of any kind had beset their path; and, indeed, so it often is in life, that those things which we most apprehended, and in which there existed the most reasonable cause for apprehension, pass over *easily and without a mischance*, while fate overtakes us in a summer day's sport, or strikes his victim in the midst of long-anticipated enjoyment.

Jean Marais and the count passed the frontier without difficulty, their passports being duly examined and registered; and the whole seemed so easy and gradual, that, as they rode along within the territory of Flanders, the count could scarcely believe that he was in another land, and that the danger which menaced him was past. He thanked God, however, with his whole heart, when he entered the town of Ypres, and heard the jargon of a different country spoken merrily in the market-place.

Directing their steps towards Nieuport, they were obliged to wait for several days before a ship was found ready to sail for England, and then the one that they met with was merely a broad-bottomed, round-headed Flemish barge; but the weather was clear and the wind favourable, and Jean Marais saw the count depart cheerfully, leaving the shores of the Continent behind him for that little island which had acquired in former days the name of "The Wanderer's Home."

When this was accomplished, our friend Jean sold the count's horse in the first market he could find, and began to retread his steps towards the Chateau de St. Medard; but in this instance he committed a great error, which he would have avoided had he had the advantage of studying under our respected friend Rob Roy. We are told that it was the practice of that skilful merchant never to return from any of his trading expeditions by the same road that he went. But Jean Marais, over-confident from great success, forgot that very important maxim, and approached the frontiers of France on exactly the same road by which he had quitted them. On approaching the gates of the town of Arras, a momentary doubt of the prudence of his proceedings came across his mind, and, drawing in his horse, he hesitated as to whether he had not better go back again. As misfortune would have it, however, two or three of the town-guard were walking up and down before the gates, trying to keep themselves warm in the cold frosty weather which had then visited the world. As Jean Marais pulled up his horse they eyed him suspiciously, and, seeing that retreat might be more dangerous than advance, he quietly rode on, and was passing forward to the inn when one of the guard stopped him, exclaiming, "Hollo, comrade! whither away so fast? Be so good as show your passport here."

"Oh, with all my heart!" replied Jean Marais, his usual coolness not abandoning him. "Here it is!"

The guard took it, and walked with it into a little house by the side of the gate, where he and another man conferred for so long that Jean Marais began to think the circumstance rather suspicious, and was considering whether it might not be quite as well to put spurs to his horse and gallop away as hard as he could. Before he could execute this half-formed purpose, however, the guard and his companion came out again, and told him, with a significant air, to dismount. At a sign the other two guards came up, and the unpleasant words, "You are the very man we have been wanting!" sounded in poor Jean's ears like a clap of thunder.

"Where is your companion?" was the next question asked, as they led him into the guard-house.

"What, do you mean Monsieur Latrobe?" said Jean, determined to put a good face upon it to the last. "He is gone to England; but why do you stop me? is my passport not in order? If there is any fault in it, it is his, for he gave it to me. I am but a poor ignorant servant, and cannot tell whether the passport is right or wrong."

"The passport is forged, young man!" said the commander of the guard, who was within, fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner; "it is forged, as you know quite well."

"Not I, indeed!" said Jean Marais. "How should I? This gentleman hired me to accompany him to Nieuport; as we were to pass the frontier, he got me my passport himself: all I know of him is, that he is a very good gentleman, and has paid me well."

"I don't doubt that," replied the officer; "and the police will pay you well too. Did you ever hear the name of the Count d'Artonne?"

"To be sure," replied Jean Marais; "but this was Monsieur Latrobe, merchant of Lyons;" and, determined to turn even the mistake he had made to some account, he added, "Do you think, sir, if I had known I was travelling with a forged passport, I should have come back by the same way I went? Could not I have gone round by Peronne quite as well?"

"There is something in that," muttered the officer. "Bring in his bags; and be so good as to turn out your pockets, young man. Search him! search him thoroughly!"

The unpleasant process was immediately commenced, and, with an eye of considerable anxiety, Jean Marais saw the various articles which his bags contained pulled out, one by one, and laid upon the table. To say truth, he was not very sure of what might be found there himself; for he had been obliged to pack the bags hastily and in secret, snatching a moment when he could do so unobserved. Various articles of apparel appeared at first; then some patterns of silk, which had got into his baggage by mistake; then some money, and one or two small articles he had bought in Flanders, which appeared to complete the store; and the guard, putting in his hand into either side of the large leathern pockets, declared there was nothing more. Jean Marais felt a momentary triumph; but, as most other triumphs, it was soon clouded. Having finished his examination, the guard threw down the bags carelessly on the floor, and out rolled something which at first sight appeared nothing but a two-sous piece. Jean Marais could not, however, prevent himself from turning a little pale when he beheld it, though the eye of the officer was fixed upon his countenance.

"Let me see that!" said the latter; and on its being placed in his hands he smiled grimly, saying, "What do you call this, my friend? Look here! a sous polished on one side, with the official seal cleverly engraved upon it. Now, master, what have you to say? Compare that seal and the seal upon the passport."

"I know nothing of it," replied Jean Marais, boldly; "my master gave it me in change as a sous; and, seeing that it was not like other sous, I thought it was some foreign coin, and put it in my bag yesterday."

"Ha!" said the officer, "ha! Away with him; all that will be investigated hereafter. Take him to the baudets—or stay; call some of the town sergeants, I can't spare you;" and, in the space of about five minutes, poor Jean Marais found himself walking between two guards up to the town prison.

As the very first step, he was thrust into a cell, where he remained for the whole of that day and the next, without any communication with any one, except with the jailer. On the following morning he was taken before the magistrates of the town and examined at length. Investigations in the prison followed, and numerous proceedings, into the details of which we shall not enter, as the particulars of French procedure would be very little interesting to the English reader. Jean Marais made as skilful a defence as the circumstances would admit, and, although various attempts were tried to induce him to inculpate others, not one word passed his lips which could in any degree affect the inhabitants of the chateau of Medard. His caution, indeed, went so far that he did not even write to his master; and Francis de Langy remained in ignorance of his fate, and of that of the Count d'Artonne, till he suddenly received a small slip of paper from an unknown hand, containing the following notice: "Jean Marais has been convicted of the forgery of public papers, and sentenced to eight years in irons. He is at Bicêtre."

These tidings were too true; poor Jean Marais had been tried and condemned with very little delay, and it must be acknowledged that the sentence of his judges was just. It is true that he was condemned for that which he did not himself believe to be a crime, for there are particular persons whose minds are so constituted by nature, or have been so twisted by circumstances, as to render them insusceptible of the idea of any law but that code which they form for themselves. If this be a vice, I am afraid all the world are more or less tainted with it, for we shall very seldom find our appreciation of crimes and delinquencies either altogether conformable to the laws of our country or to the laws of God. A man grievously insulted by another knocks him down and beats him heartily. All this is quite contrary to law, and yet it would be difficult to find any one who, in his heart, would pronounce him culpable. In greater things, alas, it is the same; and each man picks out of the great mass of offences his own little store of reservations, which he thinks very justifiable, though harsh legislators have condemned them.

Now nothing on earth could have persuaded Jean Marais that he was committing the least wrong in the world in manufacturing a passport for the Count d'Artonne. He rather thought it laudable than otherwise; but still, as Jean Marais had a good deal of philosophy in his nature, he was perfectly prepared to be punished for it if he was caught. He did not even accuse the laws of harshness or injustice, and it seemed to him, when the whole thing was over and the sentence pronounced, that he had been playing at cards with the authorities, and that they had won the game. Perhaps nobody but a Frenchman could have viewed it in this light; but that nation has a happy instinct which leads them to make the best of everything, and Jean Marais possessed it in a very high degree. The painful part of the business, however, soon came. The order for removing the prisoners from Arras to Bicêtre arrived, and the unpleasant process of being chained to another convict and carried in a cart to Bicêtre, to wait the departure of a chain for the galleys, was gone through by our poor friend with the first feeling of despair he had

ever entertained. It was a feeling which those who make the laws and frame the punishments which are intended to be the safeguards of society should take especial care never to arouse in the heart of any but the most abandoned. It was the despair of ever recovering the station and character now lost—of ever casting off the stain, and the shame, and the companionship of vice—of ever doing well from that day forth to the end of life. Cautious, cautious, indeed, should the legislator be before, as a part of the punishment for any one offence, he says to the culprit, "Thou shalt never more return to virtue; take thy place henceforth among the children of crime!" and yet this is proclaimed by the sentence of almost every judge in almost every land, and will be so so long as laws are directed only to punish, and not to reform. But there is, also, such a thing as education in vice, as well as encouragement to it, and the great school has always been—where? Not the gaming-house, the tavern, the brothel, the den of thieves. No, readers, no—the prison! There is the finishing school, where, under the most expert masters in every kind of iniquity, young and ignorant offenders are trained up to supply worthily the great society of rogues and vagabonds throughout Europe. Oh! had the great philanthropist, when he devoted his life to improve the corporeal treatment of the prisoners, to purify the air they breathed, and diminish the diseases that daily carried them down to the grave—oh! had he directed his attention to change their moral treatment, to purify the atmosphere of vice which spreads around them, and to diminish the fatal diseases of the heart and mind that carry the spirit down to hell itself, he had done even a better work than the noble one he so nobly performed!

It was into one of these abominable schools of vice that Jean Marais was about to be transferred from the prison of Arras. The journey was long and terrible, and the companion to whom he was chained was one of the worst of those depraved criminals who go on in a long course of habitual crime without ever stepping beyond a certain limit, so that vice and punishment succeed, like the alternations of a fever, through the whole extent of a life which is often protracted to an extraordinary length. Hardened, desperate, and abhorring all who are in any degree better than himself, his companion of the chain proved, for a certain time, as unpleasant a companion as Jean Marais could have met with. He seemed to have made up his mind, as soon as he discovered that Jean was not what he called *affranchi*, or free of the trade, to torment him to the utmost of his power; but Jean, who knew himself to be in no condition to resist, showed such an indomitable good-humour, that he even won upon the villain who travelled by his side, and, having acquired in the prison at Clermont a few words of the *argot*, or jargon, of the fraternity, his companion applied himself to perfect poor Jean in the language which he himself spoke. Jean proved an apt scholar, and as he was not at all unwilling to acquire any knowledge that might be useful at an after period, he showed so much zeal that his instructer imagined he was inclined to become as great a rogue as himself.

"Ah," he cried, with pride and satisfaction, at the end of the fifth day, "you will soon be able *jaspiner arguche* as well as any of us, and you will find it very useful, especially if you want to take the air, which, of course, you will try for as soon as you can."

"If you mean make my escape," replied Jean Marais, "that I certainly will. If I had thought I should be condemned, I would have done so long before, for I have got out of a worse prison than Les Baudets."

"Oh, oh," cried his companion, "then you have been in the *garuche* before! but if you want to know how to *decarer*, you and I can soon get it up between us, for I dare say I shall be your *faraudel* at the *tune*, and I can always find a way to play upon the *violin*."

This latter expression somewhat puzzled our friend Jean Marias, and his countenance plainly expressed his wonder how his companion's playing upon the violin could have any effect upon his escape.

"Ha, ha, ha!" cried the other, "I mean I shall be your bed-fellow at the bagne, and we will find a means of filing our irons."

In such instructive conversation the fourteen or fifteen convicts passed their time in the wagon that drew them towards Bicêtre, relieving the more serious considerations of making their escape, knocking the archers on the head, and other such interesting speculations, by telling stories of their lives, and boasting of the offences they had committed. There are certainly two sides to the world, and on one, the side which Jean Marais now saw, all things were reversed. Instead of boasting of high deeds, or making a pretence of virtuous conduct, these men seemed to place the point of honour at the other extreme of the moral line, and to detail not only the crimes they had actually committed with pride and satisfaction, but, as there is always a variety in vice, to fabricate iniquities they had probably never had the opportunity of plunging into, adorning the history of their lives with a multitude of fictitious offences.

Poor Jean Marais did not become the more pleased with his society the more he saw of it, and if no other motive had induced him to determine upon making his escape, if his pardon did not very soon arrive, the desire of delivering himself from such company would have made him take that resolution.

The convoy of prisoners stopped at Compiegne, and, in talking over his situation with his companion, he expressed an eager desire to communicate his situation to some person who, he thought, might help him.

"Oh!" said the other, "if you've got a *kind wheel* to give me I will soon make it run, and we will find a *flyer* and some *thin* for you to *embroider*."*

Jean Marais was, by this time, sufficiently master of the language to understand; he meant to say, that if he had a crown piece he would soon procure him pen and paper to write upon; and the consequence was the production of the letter, or labellard, as the convict called it, which was despatched through one of their acquaintances in the town of Compiegne to Francis de Langy, at the Chateau de St. Medard. Poor Jean Marais, however, was destined yet to pass through a great number of scenes before he obtained his liberty, and the act in the drama was Bicêtre. Avoiding the town of Paris, the convoy of convicts, with the archers accompanying it, passed on till they reached those famous

* Si vous avez une roue de derriere je la ferai courier, et vous aurez une voltigeante et de la mince pour broder.

heights between Ville Juif and Gentilly, which have seen, perhaps, more varied kinds of sorrow and despair than any other spot upon the globe, be it where it may. This is no rash expression of the romance writer; no extravagant exaggeration of the truth, although there have been prisons full of horror and crime which, at first sight, one may suppose no less dark and horrible than Bicêtre. But a few words, a very few, upon the history of that place, will show him that we speak by the card.

Bicêtre was once a splendid chateau, built in 1204, by John, bishop of Winchester, and continued the scene of much revelry, vice, treason, and folly, for two centuries. Some time after that, however, its object was changed, and it was appropriated to a threefold purpose, every one of which renders it but the abode of misery. It is a poors' house, a hospital for lunatics, and a prison. Destitution, madness, and crime have now, for some centuries, been its tenants; and thus, could the history of Bicêtre and its inhabitants have been displayed to the eyes of man, we say fearlessly, that no spot upon the face of the earth would present such a record of agony as that. It was to this dark abode that, in a glowing day of the early spring, Jean Marais was drawn, and, passing through some iron gates and a court, which was thronged with destitute poor, who there received a miserable subsistence, the wagons entered a second court, on the other side of which was the prison. At the gate the horses stopped, the archers drew up on either side, and the convicts were marched one by one into a small bureau, where their names were put down in a register. They were then ordered to proceed, and, strictly guarded as they went, they were led on into another large square court, when Jean Marais paused and gazed around him with a sickening heart, and a feeling of horror and dismay.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Here is a letter, sir, brought by the king's courier," said the old butler, just as Francis de Langy was getting into the *calèche* to proceed to Paris, in the hope of obtaining a pardon for Jean Marais; although, to say the truth, that hope was faint, for the difficulties which had been made even to receiving any application on behalf of the Count d'Artonne were very discouraging. "Here's a letter, sir, brought by the king's courier."

Francis de Langy instantly perceived that the address was in the hand of the Viscount de St. Medard, and, breaking open the seal, he found a few lines to himself, informing him of his kind friend's safe arrival at the Isle of France, and another letter enclosed for the Abbé Arnoux. Leaving Francis to pursue his journey to Paris, we must beg leave to look over the abbé's shoulder, while he reads the contents of Monsieur de St. Medard's letter, which he did, be it remarked, with evident interest and satisfaction.

"My dear abbé," he said, "here I am, once more, in lands which I have not seen for many years, and amid scenes which, though they were once perfectly familiar to my eye, now *burst* upon me with all the freshness of novelty. *The luxuriant* vegetation of southern climates *is certainly* one of the most striking things in the world; the quantity and variety of the fruits, the enormous size of the leaves, the rapidity of the growth of plants, all fill one with astonishment, especially when one considers the burning suns under which such fresh and magnificent foliage is produced. I have been on shore some four or five days, and the vessel will probably remain here at least a week longer. I shall make the best use of my time in reconsidering all my impressions of the objects presented by this climate; for at Pondicherry I shall have more to do with man and man's works than with those of nature, or God, if you will. I have done my best, then, to clear my mind of all previous views, and I have asked myself what signs of the hand of God I perceive in the things around me. That is the course you would have me pursue, I think; and I cannot help acknowledging that it does seem as if, in all this array of vegetable magnificence, by whatever immediate agents it may be brought into existence, there were an end and object worthy of a high and intelligent Being. It is true that we can perceive a certain hydraulic process by which these vast and spreading leaves, these enormous stems, these rich and juicy fruits, are raised up from the soil in a wonderfully short space of time, and that we can account for the whole, in short, upon mechanical principles; but still there remains the extraordinary and beautiful fact, that those mechanical principles should be so nicely adjusted and applied as to produce such trees, such fruits, such leaves, in the very place where a burning sun renders them most grateful, most necessary to the sentient creatures placed in this part of the globe. I say it is an extraordinary fact, my dear abbé, and although I will not admit that it absolutely proves the existence of a God, still it is a step gained towards your theory, which I willingly admit. It will require my mind, however, to be satisfied of the universality of such indications of design, before belief will go farther with me than to conclude that the combinations are accidental. Sometimes, I am inclined to think, we find them very convenient, sometimes very inconvenient.

"But, however, I suspend my opinion; and, in the mean time, I cannot help expressing my admiration of all that I behold. I was sitting in a garden yesterday, actually watching the progress of vegetation: I say watching it, for here one can perceive absolutely the details of the process. The leaves grow beneath my eyes; and the sap, rising through its thousands of channels, casts out millions of other tubes as it goes on, in endless variety, yet with *infinite* exactness. It is really worth while *coming* to the Isle of France to watch the operations of the vegetable world on a scale sufficiently large for the human eye to mark all that takes place with accuracy."

"All?" said the abbé, as he came to a break in the viscount's letter: "all? Who ever yet detected the thousandth part that takes place in that even with which he is best acquainted? But let us see what farther: here is more written at a later date."

"You will not think it strange," continued the viscount, in a part of his letter bearing date the next day to that of the portion which has gone before, "you will not think it strange, my dear Arnoux, or childish, that I should write to you of a goat and her kid; but those animals are abundant here, and I have been watching two of them in the yard of the governor's house. It is

a strange and a beautiful sight to see the tenderness and the patience of the mother, the sports and the rejoicing of the little one in the glories of its new existence; but what interested me more than all was, the strange contrivance of nature to give food to the young one, of the kind best calculated for its young and tender state. That the very fact of her producing a young offspring like that should give her the means of supporting it with nourishment of a peculiar kind, perfectly adapted to it in all respects, is, certainly, startling in itself; and I say with you, that if these things are produced by chance, it is a very strange one; and I do, I own, find it difficult to admit that even general laws, as some people have called them, or, what is more philosophical, inherent properties in the existing universe, should produce such nicely-adapted results, throughout such infinite varieties of being, without what is called design. It was not the poor goat that led me to this alone, but I got puzzled and confused; I found my former conclusions unsatisfactory, insufficient to account for all that I saw; and I went away to the school of anatomy, where the chief professor is an old acquaintance of mine, a philosopher, that is to say, according to the common acceptation; I mean a doubter of things that other men believe. He was very glad to see me again, and, after the first salutations, I asked him to show me what his pupils were about. Unfortunately, there was no dissecting going on, but he let me see some very beautiful models, in wax, of the eye, the tongue, the ear. I was astonished. What beautiful contrivances! what wonderful devices to give us all the senses that we possess! He explained every part as he went on; he said, this is for this purpose, which he mentioned; that, for another. The object of this is to produce such and such effects; the design of that is to arrive at such motions and at such sensations. 'Look at the formation of the ribs!' he said, when he saw me somewhat surprised; 'it seems very simple, and merely produces a sort of box to contain the lungs, the heart, and the superior viscera; but, in fact, it is a very curious and complicated contrivance, fitted with hinges and pliable cartilages, ropes and pulleys, for the purpose of expanding and contracting the space within in the act of respiration; and, what is, perhaps, more wonderful than all, on the inferior side of each of these ribs is a nicely-formed groove, which gives shelter to bloodvessels and nerves, and protects them from all injury.'

"'Design! purpose! object! contrivance!' I exclaimed: 'then who is the fabricator of all this wonderful machinery?' 'Oh, nature,' he answered; 'she acts by certain laws and fixed principles.' 'The laws!' I exclaimed; 'what, without a lawgiver? Design, without a contriver? A great object arrived at, by the most beautiful means, without an intelligence to devise those means? Oh no, no!' I returned, Arnoux, to my own chamber, with my whole thoughts in confusion; I caught a faint glimmering of a magnificent and beautiful scheme, in which it seemed that infinite varieties of creatures, possessing that active and sensible existence which we call life, were formed by the will of a high and beneficent Intelligence—surrounded by objects calculated to give them happiness, protection, and support—and endowed with faculties infinitely varied in extent for different classes and sorts of enjoyment, from the insect on the *edge of a flower to the philosopher* contemplating the heavens; and, in the midst of this scheme, I pictured to myself the great Intelligence that planned and executed it, looking at its past perfection, and pronouncing that it was very good. But, in the midst of all this, I thought of death, destruction, and decay, passions, crime, violence, and wrong—the beings that were made for joy and satisfaction, rending and devouring one another, and all that wonderful creation blighted, blasted, and destroyed. Everything fell again into confusion to my eyes; the darkness seemed doubly dark; and I ask you, Arnoux, you who have guided me thus far, what is it that has done this? If a God made the beautiful world, in all its perfections, what is it that has disfigured it?"

"Sin! sin! sin!" cried the abbé, dropping the letter: "it is sin, my son!" and, casting himself on his knees before a crucifix, he prayed.

CHAPTER XLII.

As diseases and plagues affecting the body are generally diffused over the whole world at particular periods, each country suffering, in its degree, nearly at the same time, so moral pestilences and social maladies are equally epidemic, and we find, at particular epochs, almost all countries suffering from them alike. Indeed, a curious historical table might be made, showing, in parallel, the vices and follies of each particular epoch, with their modifications in various countries; the military madness of one period, the sanguinary fury of another; the bloody fever of civil wars appearing in its season over the whole world; the licentious scabies spreading abroad in another; the spasms of fanaticism, the atony of infidelity, the St. Vitus's dance of levity, and the *delirium tremens* of revolution, following each other periodically, and affecting the whole frame of society.

One of the great evils of the past age whereof we write, and no civilized country was exempt from it, was the long and tedious delay to which almost all matters of business were subject, and more especially in the courts of law. It was the same in France as it was in England, in all civil processes between individuals; and a curious difference appeared between the conduct of their civil processes and the trial of criminal offences. The latter were generally very rapidly concluded, except where the power of an arbitrary monarch interfered; the others were drawn out to months, years, lustres, sometimes centuries. One fact, however, may perhaps explain this difference. In criminal cases, little was to be got by lawyers but blood; in civil causes, there was property, the revenues of which were transferable, and transferred to the pockets of the gentry of the robe. This seems to be the only rational reason why, when two or three days is fully sufficient to determine to the satisfaction of all a man's right to live or die, the title to a field, or a thousand pounds, can seldom be settled till the field is sold and the thousand pounds spent.

Slowly and tardily proceeded the cause of the claimants to the heirship of De Langy, and when Francis arrived in Paris, about seven months after the new heir had started up, he found that scarcely anything but forms had been gone through. The notary, the avoué, the advocate, assured him, however, that in two or

three days more the cause would have a preliminary hearing before the courts, and part of his time each day was spent in the halls of parliament; the rest of the morning was given up to efforts for the purpose of obtaining the pardon of Jean Marais. He first applied to the Marquis de Langy, who promised to interest himself in the matter, and kept his word; but he also attempted to engage many of those whom he had known and associated with in the happy, peaceful days of early youth, which now seemed to have fled forever, long before early youth itself had fled; but here he learned one of those sad and bitter lessons which every man has, sooner or later, to take up in life, unless his position be a high and commanding one, which renders men subservient to it, and eagerly disposed to obey the behests of him who possesses it. When he spoke to the old in behalf of his servant, they listened and shrugged their shoulders, and evidently showed they considered the application as a trouble and an annoyance. When he spoke to the young, they either treated it lightly and passed it by with a jest, or else assured him they were already engaged in pleading the cause of some one else with the minister or with the king, or that they had no interest whatsoever, or that it was impossible to obtain such a favour. In fact, he found difficulties, coldness, delay, insincerity, falsehood, indifference; but no friendship, no zeal. And such is the world. Try it, reader, and you will find it so.

Day after day he returned home from courts of law and from polished circles, with that coldness of heart which the young and inexperienced feel in their first encounter with the hard realities of a selfish and corrupt society.

It was now, as the reader, if he have computed exactly, will know, the early spring of the year, before the sun has made any great progress, ere the days have lengthened or become warm. He had passed the evening in the place so happily and poetically named the *Salle de Pas perdus*, the Hall of Lost Steps, where the suiters in causes tried before the parliament were accustomed to waste the weary hours of expectation ere their causes came on for hearing. He had found some little matter for interest in watching various persons as they paced up and down from one end of that long stone-paved hall to the other; and many was the dark, many the sad history, which he thought he could trace upon those sad and care-worn countenances. Now went by a man advanced in life, with a pale face and shrunken features, and a haggard eye bent, sightless, upon the ground, while the thread-bare coat, the ill-washed collar and ruffles, the black-hilted sword, worn white at the edges of the sheath, spoke that fiercest kind of poverty which fastens on the well-born and the well-bred, and sucks the heart's blood with the mouth of a vampire. Speechless, silent, mournful, he walked along, the ever-bitter presence of his own despair shutting out from his sight all other objects. Then came a more angry kind of grief, one roused into rage by loss, and disappointment, and delay, with an irregular step, an eye generally cast down, but raised at the sound of every opening door, hands clinched with twitching, with convulsive eagerness, and lips muttering the reproach and curse; he took the accustomed walk of the long-expectant suiter. Then came the widowed mother and her stripling son, looking in vain for their denied inheritance, with meek, sad countenances, and often tearful eyes; she in sad communion with her own painful thoughts, he grieving for himself and her, and striving to win her from her gloomy reveries by idle prattle, that only rendered them more bitter and more deep. Ever and anon, however, would pass by the fluttering advocate, with his conceited air of conscious importance; or the successful litigant, smiling and chattering, and taking snuff from his gold box; or the smooth attorney, mocking the victims of the law with soft soothings and insincere consolations; or the grim notary and *greffier*, the executioners of many a hard decree. It was a sad, an humbling, a despairing scene; and, as the day drew towards a close, the dropping sound of rain, fast falling from the far-projecting eaves, was heard between the intervals of steps, while the light grew dim and gray under the heavy clouds that covered the skies, rendering the aspect of the whole more melancholy.

"Is there any chance of its coming on to-day?" said Francis de Langy to his advocate, as he looked out for a minute.

"Oh yes, yes," replied the man; "you must stay for another hour. I will send to call you whenever it comes on."

He knew at the very moment that there was not the slightest chance of the cause being heard for a month. What made him, then, thus play upon a client's feelings? Is it that the mind of man, when long accustomed to witness and to deal with agony, anxiety, and care, learns to take a cruel pleasure in protracting the pangs of expectation, exciting anticipations that are to be disappointed, hopes that are to be broken? No, he did it mechanically; it was part of the jargon of his craft, the latent motive, perhaps, being to make the client think that something was doing, that men were busy with his cause, that they were giving him his money's worth of time and attention; but even this he did not acknowledge to himself, and very likely would have made the same answer to one who asked him, What is it o'clock? There is a great difference between the two sorts of cruelty, the indifference to another's pain and the fondness for inflicting it; and the latter, thank Heaven, is very much less common than the former.

On receiving this reply, Francis de Langy left the hall for a moment and told the servant to take his horses home, for it was now one of those still, quiet falls of rain, which promised to continue long, and he did not wish to keep either man or beast out under such a sky. He then returned and passed the weary time till the court rose, when he, in common with the rest, quitted that hall of disappointment. When he came out upon the steps, the rain was still falling; and of the throng that issued forth along with him, some paused for a few minutes and looked about before they quitted the shelter even of that inhospitable roof; some went recklessly on, so occupied with their own feelings that they seemed scarcely conscious of the inclemency of the weather. Francis de Langy wrapped his roquelaire about him, drew the hilt of his sword up underneath it, and took him onward towards the Hôtel de Langy. The streets were nearly deserted of all but one or two men who, with large flaming torches in their hands, were running quickly along to light the dim and lack-lustre lanterns which were then common in the streets of Paris, and the posts of which ere long furnished to the most ferocious people in the world gibbets for the murder of the noblest and best among them.

It was now nearly dark and, through the tall, narrow streets of the city, by the faint, smoky glare of those lanterns, Francis de Langy took his way onward, with a feeling of sickening disgust towards the great capital of which he was a denizen, which he had sometimes felt before, but never so strongly as at that moment. He had not gone a hundred yards before he heard a step behind him: it was coming somewhat quick, and he turned to see whose it was. A man was following, dressed in the ordinary garb of the second class of the day; but, as there was nothing extraordinary in his appearance, except that he was a tall, powerful man, below the middle age, Francis de Langy pursued his course, taking no notice. The man, however, somewhat slackened his pace till they had passed through one or two other streets, when suddenly the step that followed became very much quicker, and the man coming up, said, in a low tone, "I want to speak with you, sir."

The young gentleman turned and looked in his face, replying, "Well, I am ready to hear what you have to say."

"I cannot do it here, sir," replied the man; "if you will come with me to the house where I lodge I will tell you what I want, and it is a matter of some importance."

"I am afraid," replied Francis de Langy, "you must tell it to me here or not at all. I am not a stranger in this city, sir, as perhaps you suppose, and am well aware that it is not expedient to follow people whom I do not know to their lodgings whenever they choose to ask me."

"You are quite right, sir," replied the stranger; "but I will soon give you reasons which will induce you to come with me without hesitation, for I know you well, though you do not not know me, and I am well aware that you are much less a stranger in Paris than I am."

"Indeed!" said Francis de Langy: "pray, who do you suppose I am?"

"The Count de Langy," replied the man, "related to the Viscount de St. Medard, and not long ago you were staying in Auvergne, at the house of the unfortunate Count d'Artonne. Now, sir, I give you my word that what I have to say is of importance: will you come with me?"

Francis de Langy paused for a moment or two, and then replied, "Very well: go on, I will follow you."

It was not altogether, indeed, the mere fact of knowing his person which induced Francis de Langy to trust the stranger, for he was well aware that such information could be easily obtained; but there is a weakness in human nature which requires long experience of the world and its various forms of roguery to remove, and which, indeed, when it is gone, leaves a void behind that we know not well how to fill up. We judge by face and manner long after we have learned to doubt mere words, and when we have acquired suspicion of all three, we find that we as often deceive ourselves as we were before deceived by others. Francis de Langy, though so young, had lately been taught not to trust with that wide confidence which is only the gift of inexperience; but the face of the man was frank and honest in expression, his manner earnest and sincere, and he had still a sufficient portion of happy credulity to rely upon them coupled with the knowledge of his name and station which he displayed.

Following, then, at a quick pace as the other strode on before him, *the young gentleman* suffered himself to be led into some of the poorer parts of Paris, behind the Quartier de l'Université, till at length his companion stopped at the door of a little auberge where several market carts were standing, showing that it was a house of call used by the country people who supply the French capital with the infinite variety of productions required for its daily consumption. The sight at once removed all idea of danger, and he made no difficulty when the stranger, pausing for a moment at the door, asked him to follow him up stairs. A candle was procured, and, up the narrow passage and creaking steps they went to a small chamber on the first floor, where his guide gave Francis de Langy the only unencumbered chair, and then, setting down the light upon a little table, seated himself on the foot of the bed.

"Now," said the young gentleman, gazing in his companion's face and trying to render more distinct by an effort of memory features which he fancied he recollected faintly, "now tell me what you want—but first say—have I not seen you before?"

"Never, that I know of," replied the man, "except, perhaps, in casually passing in the streets, or on the road; but what I have to say is simply this—do you not now know where the Count d'Artonne is to be found?"

"No, I do not!" replied Francis de Langy. "You ask me a question which, as you well know, if I answered it in the affirmative, might bring me into danger; however, I can safely and truly say I do not."

"That is unfortunate," replied the stranger, in a tone of disappointment; "that is unfortunate; but perhaps you doubt me? If so, I can give you proofs that I am better acquainted with the affairs of the count than you imagine."

"Then why apply to me?" asked Francis de Langy; "I can only repeat that I do not know where he is, though I know that he is not in France."

"Can you transmit him a letter, or a message?" asked the stranger, fixing his eyes upon the young gentleman earnestly.

"Not at present, certainly," replied Francis; "I cannot speak as to the future."

"Who can?" exclaimed the other; "but have you hope, expectation, probability of being able to do so? The future is God's will; but we generally lay schemes for using it, as if it were our own."

"First give me some notion of who is the person that asks all these questions," replied Francis de Langy, for the other had spoken in somewhat of an impatient tone. "You ask information on points, my friend, that even when one has intelligence to give one does not discuss with absolute strangers."

"Who I am has nothing to do with the matter," replied the man; "but I will show you in a moment that I know all about the Count d'Artonne, and have been in his confidence even since his arrest. Do you know a person of the name of Latrobe?"

"Yes," replied Francis de Langy, "but that gives me no assurance, for I have heard that the police have arrested a man who was formerly my servant for having a passport in that name to cover the escape of the Count d'Artonne. You might, therefore, very well be an agent of police, and in possession of that name."

The man laughed as the young gentleman spoke of an agent of police. "You are very

cautious," he said, "for one so young. But I will come nearer to the point, then. Do you recollect meeting Monsieur Latrobe at an inn on the road between Riom and Paris, and arranging with him various signs and modes of communication?"

"I do!" replied Francis de Langy, now convinced that the stranger must, indeed, have held some late communication with the count himself. "Speak; what is it you want? I see I can trust you."

"I want," replied the man, "to communicate to the Count d'Artonne some intelligence which it is most necessary for him to receive. Can you convey it to him?"

"I do not know," replied Francis de Langy; "at present I certainly have not the means; but I doubt not that at some future period—and that, most likely, ere long, he will give notice either to myself or Madame d'Artonne of where he is to be found."

"We must take our chance of it, then," said the man; "but recollect that it is very needful he should have the letter which I have here written as speedily as possible, for if he do not return to abide his trial within six months it will be too late for him to save either his estates or his name."

"Then the purport of this letter," said Francis de Langy, putting his finger upon that which the man held in his hand, "is to induce the count to return and abide his trial?"

"Assuring him," replied the stranger, "that if he do he will not be condemned."

"If I am to convey it to him," said the young gentleman, after a moment's thought, "I must have some means of informing him who the person is from whom I received it. I cannot take any part in inducing him to return unless I can give him, at the same time, the means of judging whether such a course is likely to be dangerous or not. Have you explained yourself to him fully in the letter?"

"No!" replied the stranger: "every letter, as you well know, is liable to be opened at the post-office, and, of course, I have not ventured to tell him anything, but have merely given him advice to return, and the assurance that he will not be condemned."

"Then the letter must rest upon the credit of him who sends it?" said Francis de Langy; "and once more, I say, before I undertake to forward it, you must give me some intimation of who and what you are. I must be able to tell him, in short, from whom I have received it."

"You may tell him," said the man, "you have received it from the person who accompanied him for four days and four nights on his journey away from Auvergne; that will be sufficient for him. Let him know, also, that I will meet him wherever he pleases when he returns, and give him the needful information by word of mouth."

"But how can he tell where to find you?" asked Francis de Langy.

"There may be a difficulty there, indeed," said the stranger; "for I, too, am a wanderer, and in peril every hour. But I will tell you: I will call to ask for you at the Hôtel de Langy, at dusk, on the first of next month."

"I shall not be there," replied Francis. "At the Chateau de St. Medard you will find me almost at any time; but that is some leagues distant, near Senlis."

"I will come, I will come," replied the man; "it matters not to me how far distant it is."

Some farther conversation ensued which it is needless to detail, and at length, Francis de Langy parted from his mysterious companion with a conviction that he was sincere in his wish to serve the Count d'Artonne, although at the beginning of their conversation he had entertained very strong suspicions that he was neither more nor less than a disguised agent of police.

CHAPTER XLIII.

On the day that Francis de Langy took his departure from the Chateau de St. Medard, and at about the same hour of the day, a carriage rolled forth from the gates of Paris, the form and appearance of which indicated that its owner was a man of importance, if not of distinction: for there is a great deal of difference between those two terms. In the days we speak of, painting, gilding, ornamenting, in many ways, afforded to the coachbuilder the opportunity of marking the difference in rank between those who were to tenant his rolling habitations far better and more easily than the coachmaker of the present day can accomplish, when painting, gilding, and carving are utterly abolished, and the only distinction is in the taste and grace with which the whole fabric is put together.

The carriage we speak of was a tall, flat-sided machine, something like a magnified sedan-chair, supported by high springs, and having under it a double crane-necked perch. It was painted of a bright yellow in the panels; black or dark-green, with a line of giltwork round the top; and a good number of bosses and other ornaments, likewise gilt, appearing in various parts of the vehicle. A wreath of flowers, painted by the hand of an artist who should have had nobler work to do, waved in the utmost perfection of art round each of the panels; and although the whole had a staid and sober appearance when compared with many a vehicle of much inferior value which it passed, yet the eyes of the tasteful and discriminating could at once discern that it came from the hands of a superior workman, and must belong to some person of high quality or office.

Leaning back in the carriage was a gentleman, still dressed in a neatly-cut suit of black, excessively neat in all his apparel, and precise, clean, and unruffled both in dress and demeanour. A portfolio of papers lay beside him in the carriage, and from time to time he took one out, and read it with a calm, cold air, as if nothing on earth ever moved him from his ordinary insensibility.

About half way to Senlis, after the road had been for some time almost utterly solitary, the sound of wheels caught his attention, coming through the front window, which was open; and he had just time to raise himself gently and slowly, and give a glance out of the window, when another carriage, proceeding towards Paris, passed rapidly along the road. A faint smile of satisfaction, which fled as soon as it appeared, crossed the gentleman's countenance as he caught a momentary glance of the countenance of Francis de Langy. He drew back instantly, however, into the corner of his own vehicle, and remained there talking to himself, with his head bent a little forward and his eyes fixed upon one of the tassels of the window, evidently giving himself up to a revery, from which he did not awake till the vehicle approached Senlis, when he stopped the postillion, telling him to take the left-hand road,

which would lead direct to the Chateau de St. Medard. He was much too great a man for any reply to be made to him, and the man obeyed at once, although he would fain have said that the road by Senlis was twice as good, that to the left being stony, sandy, and seldom travelled. To hear, however, was to comply; but it took nearly two hours to accomplish a journey which might have been performed in half the time. It did not want above two hours, or two hours and a half at the most, of nightfall, when the stranger reached the chateau; and, on descending from his carriage at the steps of the house, he asked deliberately for Monsieur le Comte de Langy, although he had passed him on the road and looked him in the face not very long before. From this the unlearned reader might suppose that the visiter was a perfect stranger to our friend; but in this conclusion he would be altogether mistaken, as he will perceive when he is told that this calm, cool, and deliberate personage was no other than Monsieur de L——, formerly Intendant of Riom and Clermont. He next inquired for the Countess d'Artonne, on being informed that the young master of the chateau was absent; but fortune, who, as the reader must have perceived if he have lived long in the world, is rather fond of cold and calculating rogues than otherwise, favoured the intendant's views and purposes at that moment most especially, by bringing across the open part of the park, which was visible from the spot at which he stood, the fair form of Julie d'Artonne, walking slowly along with a sad and thoughtful air, and her eyes bent upon the ground.

"Stay!" he said, ere the servant could reply; "I see Mademoiselle d'Artonne there; I will go and speak to her, and will return to have the honour of waiting upon Madame d'Artonne in a few minutes."

Thus saying, with a step which was so easy that it absolutely seemed slow, though in fact it was very quick, he followed Julie as she proceeded up one of the great walks of the park, and in about three minutes was by her side. Julie d'Artonne turned as soon as she heard a step, and beheld Monsieur de L—— with surprise, but with no great satisfaction. As he made a movement to take her hand, however, she felt that she could not refuse to give it; on which he immediately bent down his head, and raised her hand with an air of mingled respect and gallantry to his lips. He then asked, with an appearance of much interest, after her health and after that of Madame d'Artonne, and concluded by saying that he was delighted at the opportunity of having a few minutes' conversation with her concerning her "excellent father."

Julie bowed her beautiful head in silence; there was a decided coldness in her manner, which might have daunted a less resolute person than him who walked by her side; but Monsieur de L—— had the consciousness of power, and he estimated both his talents and his situation at their full value. He was aware, in short, that he was a man not easy to be frustrated, and he consequently proceeded as calmly and pleasantly as if Julie had displayed no coldness or reserve.

"I dare say, Mademoiselle d'Artonne," he said, "that you think it strange that you have neither heard from nor seen me before, when I promised you distinctly at our last interview to do everything I could to forward what I knew must be your wishes."

"From *what transpired, sir,* regarding the sequestration after your departure," replied Julie, "my mother and myself believed that you must have taken a different view of the case; and therefore the fact of our not seeing you or hearing from you did not at all surprise us."

"It is strange," replied the intendant, looking down with an air of thoughtful consideration; "it is very strange how persons unacquainted with the ordinary routine of business may be led to look upon the actions of their friends in a completely false point of view. With the matter of the sequestration, my dear young lady, I had no more to do than the pen in my inkhorn. The papers were brought before me merely as a matter of form, and I could no more refuse to sign them or make any alteration in them, than I could give the sign-manual for your father's immediate pardon. They were among the last documents brought to me, and I quitted Auvergne immediately after they were signed; but, if I had remained months or years, I could not have made the least alteration therein. I trust that you will believe me; and, indeed, my after conduct ought to convince you, for since then I have not failed to use every means that it is possible for man to employ to induce his majesty to supersede all proceedings against your father whatsoever. But my efforts as yet have been of no avail. You doubt me," he continued, as Julie merely replied by slowly bending her head; "but you do me great wrong, Mademoiselle d'Artonne; you know not the deep, the intense interest that I take in your father and yourself. Luckily, it so happens," he continued, "that I have about me the means of convincing you;" and, taking out his pocket-book, he opened it and produced an official letter which he handed to Mademoiselle d'Artonne, saying, in an emphatic and feeling tone, "Read that, my dear young lady, and do justice to one who has perilled his fortunes and the favour of the king to serve your family."

Julie took the paper, unfolded it, and read. "Sir," it began, "we have read your application on behalf of Alphonse Count d'Artonne, and we have to reply, that we see no reason for changing our previously expressed resolution, not to interfere except under the circumstances which we have before mentioned. Signed Louis;" and lower down the name of a minister.

Julie gave it back with glistening eyes. "I have indeed, sir, done you wrong," she said; "pray forgive me, and tell me what are the circumstances to which the king alludes."

The intendant paused, and seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then replied, "I am almost unwilling to state, mademoiselle, what they are; although upon them depends your father's safety."

"Then why—why should you hesitate to tell me? I fear there is something very terrible in them. But you need not be afraid I can bear it, whatever it may be."

"Oh, my dear young lady," replied Monsieur de L——, "under some circumstances how willingly would I explain! but it so happens that I know many things which must render what I have to say most painful to you, as taxing your filial piety in a manner much too hard."

"There is nothing too hard, sir, I should think," replied Julie, "for a daughter to do for a father's safety. Pray explain!"

"Well, then, mademoiselle," said the former Intendant of Riom, "you must know I have had the opportunity and the happiness of serving his majesty as he considers well upon an occasion of importance, and he promised me that he would

grant any favour I asked for any one of my near relations. This is some time ago, and the king doubtless thought that I would apply for some of the high posts or offices which from time to time became vacant in favour of my brother, who, as you doubtless know, is a distinguished magistrate. I did not apply, however, for my brother was content; but as soon as I arrived at Paris from Auvergne, and had humbly thanked his majesty for the high functions to which he has called me, I demanded the grace and pardon of your father as the sole request I had to make. The king started and looked displeased, saying that when he made the promise which I have mentioned he never expected that I would intercede for a criminal. I represented that I doubted not, indeed, that I felt sure, that your father was not so criminal as he imagined; that he must have killed the young Marquis de Bausse in some chance encounter; but he replied that he had sworn to regard such chance encounters as murders, and he had pledged himself to act accordingly to the Marquis de Langy at the time of his eldest son's death. I was still pressing him upon the subject when one of those who were near suggested to the king to ask me if the Count d'Artonne was any way allied to me. I was obliged to acknowledge he was not, and the king's reply was then very simple, that he had only promised to grant me a favour in behalf of one of my relations, and therefore, in rejecting my petition, he did not violate his word."

The intendant paused, and Julie clasped her hands, exclaiming, "Then it is hopeless!"

"Nay, not hopeless, Mademoiselle d'Artonne," replied Monsieur de L——, in a low but impressive voice: "it depends upon yourself. You can at once restore your father to his country, to his home, to his honours, to his estates. You can sweep away at once the clouds that have come over your house, and give it back its sunshine; nay, hear me," he continued, "I know it must be most painful to you—"

"What is it you mean, sir?" said Julie; "how can I do this?" and as she spoke she raised her head and gazed in his face, unconscious of his meaning.

"By giving me your hand," said Monsieur de L——, "you would immediately take away from the king his only excuse for rejecting my petition in my father's behalf. Monsieur d'Artonne becomes at once my relation, and he is safe. I know it must be painful to you. I am well aware of all the circumstances; I know them all; that you have been taught to believe yourself engaged to a young gentleman, I doubt not, every way deserving you; that your father's consent has been given, and, that you may think, perhaps," he added, watching the changing expression of her countenance, "that you do not love me, and, consequently, our union could not be happy; but, dear lady, you are very young, and woman's heart, formed for all excellence, generally follows her duty, if there be not some very great fault in those to whom the care of it is intrusted. Every day we see women marrying men whom they do not love, and, if they are good and wise men, learning to love them most devotedly."

"But, sir," replied Julie, simply, "I love another."

A slight flush passed over the intendant's cheek and brow. He knew the fact right well, but yet he did not like to hear it acknowledged. "True," he said; "but yet you are very young, Mademoiselle d'Artonne, and at that age a disappointment of such a kind is soon recovered from, and the deep and devoted attention of one who loves you most sincerely, the splendours of a court where you would take one of the highest places, and the consciousness of having made a noble sacrifice for a father's safety, would soon prove sufficient compensation, and you would learn to return the affection of one who had done his utmost to serve you and yours, and who would devote his life to make you happy."

Skilfully and carefully did he apply his words, reading his fair companion's face as a book, and adapting everything he said to that which he saw written there. He marked her brow contract slightly when he spoke of her soon forgetting her first love; he beheld a faint smile pass over her lip when he talked of the splendours of a court; but when he mentioned the high consolation of having saved her father, he saw a deep sadness come over the fair face of Julie d'Artonne, and he fancied that he had won the day. He was undeceived in a moment, however, for Julie replied the next instant, with a face of deep sadness, but with a degree of firmness that showed not the slightest remains of doubt or hesitation in her mind, "It cannot be, whatever may be my wish or inclination to sacrifice anything, everything, life itself, for my father; there are circumstances that render it now impossible."

She was much agitated as she spoke, but not with the agitation of a girl called upon in very early life to accept or reject the hand of a man who loves her. All the feelings which such a situation naturally produces were, with Julie d'Artonne, swallowed up in consideration for her father, and therefore, though agitated, as I have said, though her lip quivered and her frame shook, yet it was not the blushing agitation which, more or less, affects every woman in questions of love. Monsieur de L—— marked it all, and judged rightly of a good deal that he saw; but still there was something that he could not account for, with all his knowledge of the world, with all his keen perception of the human heart. To the man who does not understand high principles, who, at best, calls them convenient prejudices, there is always one leaf in the book of knowledge shut; there are motives that are unknown to him, there are actions which he cannot comprehend.

"May I ask what circumstances can be so imperative upon a daughter as a father's safety, as a father's deliverance, his restoration to honour?" said Monsieur de L——. "Do you object to explain to me what are the circumstances that render this impossible, Mademoiselle d'Artonne?"

"Oh, no!" she replied, "certainly not, to explain them to you generally. You have asked me, sir," she continued, with a blush, "to become your wife, and I thank you most sincerely, both for the good opinion which must have prompted you to do me that honour, and for the kindness towards my father, which, I am sure, has had the greatest share therein. But, sir, before my father himself left France, he united my hand to that of another, and, by his command and under his directions, I have pledged myself by vows which bind me to Monsieur de Langy as irrevocably as if I were actually married to him."

"But, surely," said Monsieur de L——, "if Monsieur de Langy, or whatever his name may ultimately prove to be, loves you with that high and disinterested attachment which you deserve,

and which is more commonly found in the young than the old, he will set you free from such vows when he knows all that is at stake."

"I will never ask him," said Julie, quickly, "and I don't think my father would ask him either, if he were to return to stand his trial to-morrow."

From the countenance of Monsieur de L——, no one could have divined the bitter sensations that were taking place at his heart; the anger at the difficulties which opposed themselves to his views, the determination, only strengthened by resistance, to overcome all those difficulties and work out his own will, the jealous anger and hatred that he felt towards Francis de Langy, and the resolution to crush and trample upon him, if human cunning could be found strong enough to effect its object: all was calm, thoughtful, and grave externally, and he replied in a cool and deliberate tone, catching at the last words that Julie had spoken: "I take it for granted, of course, Mademoiselle d'Artonne, that your father will eventually return to stand his trial, otherwise the absolute loss of all his estates to himself and his family must ensue. It is my own full conviction, from all I heard of the evidence while I was at Riom, and I know it was also the conviction of the president, Lagrange, before whom the trial would have taken place, that your father would have been pronounced innocent, or, at all events, acquitted of the capital charge. It may be a comfort to him to know this, if you have any opportunity of communicating the fact to him; and, as circumstances prevent you from taking the only means of ensuring to him his safety before his return, it is some satisfaction to know that the danger to him is not great, except by his persevering in staying away."

"But," said Julie, "he would, of course, be immediately arrested if he returned, and might be subject to a long and painful imprisonment before his trial. I know he dreads that imprisonment very much."

"Oh, there is no fear of that at all," said the intendant, with a smile; "you may assure him from me, that there is not the slightest chance of his being arrested. Before he went, and after he had escaped, it was necessary to take every means of securing his person for trial; but after he has proved his intention of abiding the decision of a lawful court, by returning openly after his escape has been fully effected, no one will take any notice of his being in France till he surrenders himself at Riom. You may assure him from me, that such will be the case. And now, my dear young lady," he continued, with a graceful bend of the head, "let me wish you every sort of happiness in your future life. To have contributed to that happiness, to have devoted all my thoughts to increase it, and, in fact, to have made your days pass like the spring sunshine, producing flowers before your footsteps wherever you went, would have been to me, had it been possible, the greatest earthly delight. Not being possible, as you say, I may grieve over my own disappointment, and but wish that you may be as blessed with another as I would have endeavoured to make you. I will now go on for a moment and pay my respects to the Countess d'Artonne, but I will say nothing to her in regard to the proposal I have ventured to make you, lest she should exert her influence and entreaties with you to make you secure your father's safety at the expense of your own peace of *mind*."

"Oh, sir," replied Julie, with the tears in her eyes, "I feel that you are indeed generous and kind;" but he waved his hand gently, as if entreating her to say no more, and entering the chateau with her, paid a short visit to the Countess d'Artonne.

When seated in his own carriage, however, and proceeding towards Senlis, the intendant clinched his hand tight, and let it fall heavily upon his knee.

"Curses upon her obstinate pride!" he said; "but she shall be mine if power be worth anything in this world. I fear he is not in Holland, or I would drive him out. But I will punish this youth first. I shall find some means."

CHAPTER XLIV.

When Francis de Langy returned from his interview with the stranger, he found his father crossing the vestibule with a letter in his hand.

"Ah, Francis," he said, "this concerns you, I am sorry to say. It is the king's answer to my last application concerning the Count d'Artonne. Read it: you will see how hopeless the case is."

Francis took it and read. To him the contents were new; but they would not be so to the reader, even if we were to repeat them here; for the letter was the same which Monsieur de L——, now one of the king's ministers, had put into the hands of Julie d'Artonne not many days before.

"Pray, what are the circumstances," demanded Francis de Langy, "to which the king alludes, and under which he says he would interfere in favour of the count?"

"Simply," replied Monsieur de Langy, "that it can be shown, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the Marquis de Bausse was the person to attack Monsieur d'Artonne, and that the latter killed him in his own defence."

Francis de Langy shook his head, and returned the paper to his father without comment. He recollected the two conversations which he had had with Monsieur d'Artonne after his arrest, and he felt convinced that the condition required by the king could not be complied with. The conviction was very painful to him, for he had still entertained the hope that the monarch would interfere, as was very frequently the case both during his reign and that of his predecessor; and, retiring early to his chamber, he gave himself up to sad thoughts as to what would be his own destiny and that of the family with which it had become so intimately linked during the last year. But fortune had not yet spent all her malice upon him, and the very next day another blow was to be struck, which greatly aggravated all that had gone before.

He had spent the morning with the marchioness, but had not seen Monsieur de Langy, and was about going once more to the palace, in order to see whether any steps had been made in his cause. His foot was actually in the stirrup, when one of the servants, running out, informed him that the marquis wished to speak with him in his cabinet; and, turning back, he immediately proceeded thither, hearing, with some surprise, as he approached, the voices of several persons speaking. On entering, he found three gentlemen, whom he knew well were distantly related to the house of De Langy; and was not

a little astonished to find that, instead of greeting him as usual, they only received him with a stiff and formal bow.

"They have prejudged the question against me," thought De Langy; "already, it seems, I am no relation of theirs;" and he returned their greeting with a haughty bend of the head.

"Here is very sad news, Francis," said the marquis, "very sad news indeed; yet I trust it may not be true. I hope that it is not so; nevertheless, these gentlemen, by the proceedings that they think fit to take, compel me to make the matter known to you while there may be yet some reasonable doubt."

"Pray let me hear this bad news," said Francis de Langy; "I have lately been so accustomed to receive painful tidings, that I scarcely ever expect to hear anything else. What is the sorrow for the day, my dear father?"

"Why, sir," said one of the gentlemen, stepping abruptly forward, "I was informed yesterday by Monsieur de L——, that the Thetis frigate, in which Monsieur de St. Medard was proceeding from the Isle of France to Pondicherry, has been lost in a storm three days after she set sail. Every soul on board has perished, and—"

"Stay, stay, stay!" cried Francis de Langy, sinking into a chair, as pale as death, and covering his eyes with his hands: "stay, in pity let me learn to bear this, ere you tell me more. Lost! every soul lost! Oh God, how strange and wonderful are thy decrees! Alas! alas! this is a terrible blow, indeed!"

Everybody was silent for a few minutes, seeing him more deeply and terribly affected than they had anticipated, and the Marquis de Langy rang for a glass of water, thinking that he would faint.

It was Francis de Langy himself who spoke first. "Now, sir," he said, after a few moments' thought, "what more? There was an 'and' upon your lips when I stopped you, I fear somewhat rudely. May I know what you were about to say?"

"Why, sir," replied the relation, "these gentlemen and myself being the collateral heirs of Monsieur le Vicomte de St. Medard, in default of Monsieur le Marquis here and his son, have been advised, as there is a doubt in regard to your own parentage, on whom Monsieur de St. Medard has thought fit to settle his property, to put in our solemn protest against all the donations and bequests, whether by settlement or will, which he may have made to you, to take place after his death. This we do to guard our collateral rights in his landed property, and I hereby tender you our protest in due form."

Francis de Langy took the paper which he held towards him, and glanced his eye casually over it without gathering much of its meaning. "In fact," he said, at length, forcing his mind from the more engrossing subject which was before it, in the loss of Monsieur de Medard, "In fact, sir, I am to conclude—for I really do not understand all these terms of law—that you wish to annul the act of adoption which my uncle entered into and the king confirmed?"

"It is upon the question, sir," replied another of the relations, "whether Monsieur de St. Medard was really your uncle or not, that the whole case turns. If you were really his nephew and he really your uncle, there can be no doubt the *act of adoption* stands; but if he performed it *under a mistake* regarding the relationship, we *hold that it is* null and void."

"But I have understood," said Francis de Langy, "both from himself by letter and from his notary, since he departed, that he had taken measures to confirm that adoption since the question of my birth arose."

"We are advised, sir," replied the last speaker, "that he did not perfect those papers."

"But, of course," replied Francis de Langy, "they show his intention, which is also shown in his letters to me."

"We have nothing to do with letters, sir," answered the relation, "nor with intentions; the law requires acts."

"Oh! I understand you," replied Francis de Langy: "you do not doubt whether there was really any intention to adopt me as his child, whether I was his nephew or not; but you propose to take advantage of any want of formality in the papers, in order to frustrate what you know to have been his wishes?"

"No, no, sir; not exactly so," replied the others; "but to guard our collateral rights, as I said before. Indeed, they are remote; and what we do is more for the benefit of Monsieur de Langy than ourselves."

"Oh! I beg you would spare yourselves all trouble on my account," exclaimed the marquis, sarcastically. "It is my intention, if my poor uncle should unfortunately have left some of the papers informal or unfinished, to renounce on my own part all claim to his estates in favour of one whom I have always looked upon as my son, whatever be the result of the suit now pending; and I am perfectly sure that the young gentleman who claims to be my heir will gladly make the same renunciation."

"Ask him not, my dear father, ask him not," replied Francis de Langy; "for most assuredly I would never accept aught at the hands of one who robs me of my name and my inheritance."

"Nay, nay, Francis," replied the marquis, "use not such harsh terms. How can you tell that he robs you of your inheritance? How can you tell that it is not really as has been said?"

"I feel it here," replied Francis, laying his hand upon his heart; "I feel it here, my father. I might be the son of a peasant, but I cannot be the son of a knave!"

"Well, gentlemen," said the collateral heir, who had taken such good care of his ultimate rights, and who had been the chief spokesman for his fellows, "having done all that is necessary in this business, we will take our departure. Whether Monsieur de Langy and his son have power to convey these estates to any other to our detriment may become a question hereafter, if it be tried."

"Make your mind easy, sir," said Francis de Langy, "it shall never be tried on my account. I wish you good-morning;" and sitting down as the marquis saw his visiters to the door, he covered his eyes with his hands, murmuring, "And is he really gone, he, on whom alone I had any dependance?"

On the marquis's return, however, he rose, and after a few words more he left the Chateau de Langy, saying that he must go to the notary's and ascertain the facts. The old man received him kindly, but with an air of sympathy and grief, which showed that he had heard rumours at least of the loss of the Thetis, and the death of Monsieur de St. Medard. Francis de Langy touched upon that part of the subject but briefly, for the foolish shame which almost all men have of giving vent to grief in tears prevented him

from dwelling on that which he felt was likely to master him. In answer to his question regarding his adoption by Monsieur St. Medard, the notary replied, "Why, I am afraid it would bear a suit. The last paper could not be prepared in time, and therefore is unsigned; but the others clearly prove the intention of the viscount. However, I will consult an advocate about it."

"Do not take the pains," said Francis de Langy: "I am sick of the law, and I do believe that, according to the Divine injunction, which we should follow from better motives than I fear we do, if a man sued me for my cloak, I would give him my coat also;" and thus saying, he left the notary.

With a heavy heart and a thoughtful brow, Francis took his way back to the Hôtel de Langy. The prospect before him was cheerless enough, it must be acknowledged; if then the cause in which he was engaged regarding the succession of the house of De Langy was decided against him, he lost also the estates of St. Medard; he lost the allowance even which he had received from the viscount; he lost everything, in short; for although the notary had assured him Monsieur de St. Medard's personal property, his money, his goods, his chattels, being left by will, went to him beyond all manner of doubt; yet the sum was so small comparatively, that the income to be derived from it could not amount to more than four or five thousand livres, or about a couple of hundred pounds in English money. Had it been for himself alone that he was anxious, he would scarcely have cared for the loss of fortune; the buoyancy of youthful hope, still strong in his bosom, would have borne his heart high above the waves of adversity. He felt within himself powers and resources of many kinds; he feared not, he cared not, for his individual prospects; but when he thought on Julie d'Artonne, his heart sunk. He pictured her to himself struggling with poverty, bowed down by petty cares, removed from the station in which she was born, deprived of the comfort of luxuries to which she had been accustomed, and instead of sharing what he had hoped to offer her—honour, prosperity, and high rank—living as the wife of a poor and nameless man, exposed to the thousand ills which must follow such a station.

Such were his thoughts when he re-entered the Hôtel de Langy and proceeded to his father's cabinet, knocking before he entered. The marquis's cheek was somewhat flushed, and he was evidently discomposed.

"I have written this paper, Francis," he said, "to give you full assurance that, during my life, you will never be disturbed in possession of the estates of St. Medard. I wished," he added, "that another person should join me in the act, and have been to him, never doubting that he would do so readily. He declines, however, and perhaps we ought not to blame him."

"I blame him not at all, my dear father; but, perchance, he may think himself heir of De Langy too soon."

Francis hesitated whether he should take the paper or not, for he was determined not to avail himself of it under any circumstances; but to avoid all discussion with the marquis on the subject, and not to seem ungrateful, he, after a moment's pause, received it without comment, determined to destroy it as soon as he reached his own apartment.

"In case this cause should be decided against me," he said, with a faint smile, remembering how necessary it was that the Count d'Artonne should know where to communicate with him or the countess, "should this cause be decided against me, as, perhaps, it will, I shall beg to be your tenant in the Chateau de St. Medard, to which I shall return this evening."

"You are jesting, Francis," said the marquis, reproachfully: "the chateau is your own, during my life, at least, and the estates also. I think, perhaps, it may be better for you to go back, for this day's news has been a great shock to you, and a little repose and quiet must be beneficial. From all I hear, it is impossible that the cause can be decided for weeks, if not for months to come."

"Then the lawyers have deceived me shamefully," replied Francis de Langy.

"They always do," replied his father, and what was true then is not far from the truth now.

Not long after Francis de Langy bade adieu to the Hôtel de Langy, and returned with a sad heart to his own abode. It was late ere he arrived; night had long fallen; and, as he was not expected, the saloon was vacant, the little party at the chateau having broken up a few minutes before. While the old butler ran to bring lights, the young gentleman stood before the wide chimney, and gazed upon the crackling wood that still burned upon the hearth, casting a fitful glare around the room. The vacant chamber, with its dying fire, seemed to him like the end of life, when the lights of existence and the bright faces that cheered it have been taken away, and nothing is left but the embers to cast faint and flickering gleams upon the things around, before they too go out, and all is cold and dark. His voice had been heard, however, and the sound of the carriage-wheels, and before the old man returned with candles Julie had run down to welcome him, and his arms were once more round that bright and beautiful form, the very touch of which seemed to revive hope and consolation in his bosom. The moment after Madame d'Artonne joined him, and both eagerly asked what news.

"It seems very ungrateful," replied Francis de Langy, in a sad tone, "for the joy of seeing you both again; but I wish I had been an hour later, or that you had gone to bed an hour before."

"Then your tidings are bad, of course," said Madame d'Artonne. "Your cause is lost, my poor Francis; but do not be cast down; Julie can be very happy, and make you happy too, without the name of De Langy."

"It is worse than that," said Francis de Langy: "I have made up my mind to lose my rights and be deprived of my inheritance; but I have had a greater shock. Monsieur de St. Medard is, I fear, lost in the Thetis, between Port Louis and Pondicherry."

Madame d'Artonne clasped her hands, and gazed in his face with horror.

"Good God!" she cried, "is it possible?"

"Let me tell all at once," said Francis de Langy, "that there may be nothing painful left behind for to-morrow. It seems that the papers which were necessary to confirm me in the possession of this property, in case I should be pronounced not the son of the Marquis de Langy, were not altogether completed before my uncle went away, and that, consequently, the estates of St. Medard will be lost to me if this cause be

lost. There is some small sum in money and effects, which I must possess, a pittance; Julie, affording an income less than that of many a wealthy farmer. Can I ask you, Julie, to share such a fate?"

"I require no asking, Francis," replied Julie, casting her arms round him; "I am yours, and if misfortune gives me but the opportunity of showing you how deeply, how devotedly I am yours, I shall regret it only on your account, and not on my own, for the delight of so doing is more than sufficient compensation for any change of circumstance that may befall me. Do you think I care for wealth, Francis, if you love me still?" and her tears fell upon his cheek.

Madame d'Artonne looked on with a sad smile: "Should misfortune still pursue us, my children," she said, "and Francis lose his suit, on which so much depends, we will go to join my husband in another land; but you have not told Francis, Julie, that you have seen Monsieur de L——, and that he advises your father's return."

"He is an artful villain," said Francis de Langy; "and if he have given that advice, it is, in my eyes, the strongest motive for warning Monsieur d'Artonne against such a course."

"Indeed, Francis," said Julie, "I believe you do him wrong; I have much to tell you regarding his conduct when he was here, which, I think, will alter your opinion of him. In the mean time, however, my mother has written to my father, telling him exactly what the minister said."

"Written to him?" exclaimed Francis de Langy: "then you must have heard from him!"

"Yes," replied the "countess, a few words coming by the ordinary post told me to write to the Chevalier de Riom, at a town called Dover, on the English coast. It was in my husband's handwriting, and therefore I conclude that Riom is the name he has taken."

"I must write to him also," replied Francis de Langy; "but in the mean time, tell me, Julie, what did this intendant say?"

"Nay, nay, I will tell you that to-morrow," said Julie, "for you want rest, Francis; I will tell you all, do not fear."

"I am sure you will," replied Francis de Langy; "but as for rest, dear Julie, I fear I shall not get much of that. However, I had better tell my sad news to Monsieur Arnoux, if he be not asleep. I have often heard him say he would rather receive painful tidings at night than in the morning, that he might have the whole night to ponder upon them undisturbed, and to pray to God for comfort and support. I wonder if he is asleep?"

"I should think not," replied Julie, "for he went only a few minutes before we did;" and Francis de Langy, accompanying his fair companions up stairs, proceeded to the chamber of the abbé.

CHAPTER XLV.

We must take the reader back to Bicêtre, where we left one of our important personages confined previous to being sent to the galleys, as it used to be called in former days, or to the Bagnio, as it was named at the time we *speak of*— in other words, to hard labour in *some public* dockyard. Jean Marais had been immediately taken to that part of the prison called La Force, where it was usual to keep prisoners condemned to the galleys before they were despatched upon their ultimate destination. The liberty to commit every sort of crime was in that day, as well as in the times of Vidocq, granted to the prisoners in Bicêtre; and, as that famous personage has justly observed in the fraternity of rogues, the ordinary order of estimation is reversed, and the greater the villain the more distinguished member is he of that society. Poor Jean Marais, with all his wit and *savoir-faire*, would have been but wretchedly off in Bicêtre had it not been for the lessons of *argot* which he had taken along the road; for the slightest approach to honesty was an offence against the community, of which he was now a member, and ignorance of the practice of rogues and vagabonds was sure to subject a convict to pillage and ill treatment. He saw some of his companions from the northern provinces stripped before his eyes of almost everything they possessed, and left nearly naked in the midst of the court, and it was only being able to speak the cant tongue, joined to the praises which his master of languages bestowed upon him, that saved him from the same fate. He showed, too, at the canteen, and at the *Sarat*, that he had a strong head and a strong arm; but, nevertheless, as may well be supposed, the contamination of example, the witnessing of nothing but crime and roguery; the hearing of nothing but blasphemy, falsehood, and vice from morning till night, was not likely greatly to improve the morals of Jean Marais, had he been long confined to the atmosphere of Bicêtre.

Such, however, was not the case; and there not having been time for strong natural sense to be overpowered by evil precept and example, he was rather disgusted by all he beheld than induced to imitate it, and he more than once asked himself, "Is it possible that *I shall* become like one of these?" He determined, however, if ever he were free again, not to look upon getting into Bicêtre as so light a thing, but to take especial care not to put himself in the same predicament, either for his own gratification or that of others.

It luckily so happened that, at the end of three days, a detachment of convicts called a chain was sent off for the port of L'Orient, and it was the fate of Jean Marais to be among the rest, for which, to say the truth, he felt very thankful when the news was first communicated to him; but when he saw the whole horrible preparations for securing the prisoners on the road, which were performed upon a chain of prisoners taking its departure the day before; the riveting of them by the neck to a long chain passed through the midst of the detachment, the cutting their hair close, the searching them for any money they might have on their persons, and the brutality of the officers and the guards, and the horrible language and conduct of the wretches thus chained together to any one of their own unfortunate body who expressed the slightest distress, grief, or apprehension, soon made him feel inclined to bear even the horrors of Bicêtre rather than undergo the dreadful degradation which was there presented to his eyes.

We shall not dwell upon what were his own sensations when it became his turn to go through the same process. Suffice it that, on the preceding evening, the companion of his former voyage came up to him and held out a handful of two-sous pieces, asking if he would buy them. Jean Marais did not comprehend what he meant, but the man laughed, saying, "Go along, thou art a blockhead; I know you have got some *joue* in your *filoche*. Don't you know if you go to-morrow, as they say you will, they make you give up everything except six balls? The captain will take care of it on the journey, and give it you as you want it. But you'll not get much of it, if you are such a *gouze* as to give it up. Don't you see these bits of copper open and shut,* and you can put into them as many Louis d'ors as you like! They won't take sous from you, you know; but keep your Louis d'ors quite quiet. You must pay a franc a piece for them, but it's worth your while to save your Louis."

Jean Marais entered fully into the excellence of the scheme, and took all the hollow two-sous pieces he could get, of which precaution he found the great utility at an after period. The next morning, the chain of convicts to which he was attached set out, placed in a large wagon, back to back, with a little straw in the bottom to cover their feet, but nothing whatever to shelter them from the inclemency of the weather. There was a hard, sharp wind blowing, the rain came down in torrents, the captain of the chain seemed doubly cross and irritable with the badness of the weather, and the guards, or Argousins, disposed to keep themselves warm by exercising the sticks with which they were armed upon the backs of several of the unhappy convicts. Everything that tyranny and brutality could do to aggravate misery was not wanting, and a dark, revengeful feeling sprang up even in the heart of Jean Marais, which might have induced him, had he been able to effect such a purpose, to dash out the brains of some of the guards against the wall of the outhouse in which they slept on the third night after their departure from Paris. Force repressed it, however, and on the following day a touch of kindness in a human being like himself awoke better thoughts within him. The chain was just stopping for the miserable supper afforded to the convicts, when a travelling Capuchin came up to the door of the wretched little inn, and asked for a glass of water. The host gave it him, and the eye of Jean Marais rested with eager envy upon the old man as he drank the cool, clear beverage, which nature has provided for her children, and for which, when real thirst presses upon us, the taste is sure to return. The Capuchin marked his eager glance and somewhat bloodshot eyes, and coming nearer to him, he said, "Art thou thirsty, my son?"

"Dreadfully," replied Jean Marais.

The old man went back to the door, and taking out three sous from his wallet, he bade them bring some good wine and water, which, when it came, he carried with his own hand to the convict. Jean Marais blessed him from his heart, and marked well that the good friar had drank nothing but water himself, though he mingled wine with that which he gave to him. The Capuchin had done so not without thought, for he judged from the countenance of the prisoner that he was ill, and that the water plain might do him harm. Nor was he mistaken; for, by the time that they arrived at L'Orient, poor Jean Marais could not stand, and his first lodging at the Bagnio was in the hospital.

There, freed from his chain, and treated with much kindness by some of the good Sisters of Charity who attended the sick convicts, he soon began to recover from the fever which bad treatment, and perhaps still more, depressing passions, had occasioned. He was in no haste, however, to show himself convalescent, and his first thought, as he felt the blood flowing more calmly through his veins, was how to regain his liberty. If death itself were to be the consequence, he resolved to attempt an escape; and, fortunately for him, the circumstance of having been brought in sick, and placed at once in the hospital, greatly favoured his purpose. His own clothes had been left with him, his hair and beard had grown, the guardians of the gates had taken no particular note of his appearance, and everything that he saw showed him that no such opportunity of evasion would ever again present itself. He continued, therefore, to affect great feebleness; showed an unwillingness even to move from his bed when the physician of the hospital judged that it would be better for him to do so; and when he had risen, he merely tottered to the window and sat himself down, looking out with a vacant air. From the spot where he sat he could look upon the miserable courts and quays, to which the convicts were confined for their labour; and many a group he perceived at their different employments, manacled together by the leg two and two, and dressed in red cassocks, with a green-pointed cap and a tin plate upon the front of it. Various bands were at the moment going out for their different destinations in the port, and all were noisy—either giving vent to their passions in curses, execrations, and the most horrible and revolting blasphemies, or drowning their feelings in loud and exaggerated merriment. On the other side, he saw the gate of the Bagnio, which stood open during the day with numbers of persons passing in and out, and apparently no great vigilance maintained; for, in truth, the persons who had the management of those horrible receptacles of vice and infamy trusted entirely to the keen eyes of the supervisors of the different gangs, who were called *Gardes Chiourmes*, and to the peculiar dress and chains of the convicts, which were examined every day. Their close-cut hair, too, which gave them in general an air almost idiotical, was another distinguishing mark upon which they greatly relied; and the result of Jean Marais's examination during that morning was, that if he could but get out of the hospital unperceived, he should have no difficulty in making his way into the town. But he had remarked that the gate of the hospital was strictly guarded, and the number of persons, especially Sisters of Charity, passing continually to and fro, would even prevent him from getting

* *Brider* and *débrider* were the words used by the worthy convict; but, as the reader has probably had enough of the language of French thieves to give him some idea of the richness of that tongue, we shall beg leave to translate the rest.

out of the ward in which he was at the time into the court below. Money, however, he knew would do a great deal, especially as it was the habit in those days to employ convicts who had endured a certain portion of their punishment in attending the sick in the hospitals. Taking out, therefore, unobserved, some of the Louis which he had concealed in his copper pieces, the first time one of those attendants passed by, whom he had fixed upon as a personage likely to listen to any sort of seduction by which money was to be gained, he beckoned him to the window where he sat, and soon found that he had not mistaken his man. The worthy attendant grinned at the sight of the gold, but at the same time shook his head with a sigh, saying, "I don't see how it's to be done. If you were strong enough one might manage the thing easily, for the wall of the garden next the town is not eight feet high, and you might be over in no time; and if you wait till you're well enough, they will mark you so that you can soon be caught again. To-morrow I know they will cut your hair, and give you the hospital dress."

"I can manage very well to-night," replied Jean Marais; "I am stronger than I seem. If you will open the door of the ward for me when all these people are asleep, and take me to the wall next to the town, I will get over, and you shall have these three Louis for your pains."

"Oh, that will be done in no time!" answered the man. "But remember, you'll have to run long and far before you get out of the way of *la curieuse*—I mean, the police."

"Never fear, never fear!" replied Jean Marais; "I will do it. The air on the other side of the wall will soon give me strength; but I must be as weak as ever while I am here."

"Ay, do, do!" said the man. "I will come to-night; but now I must go away."

As he spoke, one of the Sisters of Charity came up to him, and asked what the patient was saying to him.

"I think he is foolish," replied the man; "he wants to go and see his parents."

"Ay, poor fellow! I dare say he does," replied the Sister of Charity. "God grant he has not broke their hearts!" and she went on to the bed of another.

Affecting still to be very weak, Jean Marais soon retired to bed, and his confederate, under the pretence of strengthening him after the fever, procured some wine for him, of a far better quality than was allowed in the hospital. A little after midnight he came back with a lantern, by the light of which Jean shaved his long, rough beard, dressed himself in the clothes which he had brought with him, and, descending the stairs with the incorruptible guardian of the sick convicts, without any difficulty made his way into the court, and thence into what was called the garden. The fresh air turned him a little giddy, it is true, and he felt himself weaker than he had supposed; but a little more wine, which the man had with him in a gourd, refreshed him, and he speedily got to the other side of the garden. The wall proved somewhat higher than he had expected, but his new-found friend, on receiving the money that had been promised him, proffered his back as a temporary ladder, and by his aid Jean Marais soon reached the top, and easily let himself down into the street beyond. He was now in the midst of a town of which he knew nothing, with several hours of darkness before him, the certainty of his flight being discovered early on the following morning, and instant pursuit taking place. Fortune, however, favoured him; for, scarcely had he gone down two streets, when he met a party of young men, roaring drunk, proceeding from one house of revelry to another, and ready to enter into companionship with any one who chose to join them. In a minute Jean Marais was one of them, and, wandering on till they came near the gates, he entered in their society into a cabaret, much frequented by the soldiers of the guard, some of whom were drinking there at the moment.

Our good friend Jean took especial care to doff his hat as he entered the public room, seeing that the brim had been cut off before he left Bicêtre, as one of the distinguishing marks of a convict attached to the chain; and, casting it down in a corner with the rest, it passed without notice. Some warm wine and cards were soon procured, and, joining the party of soldiers, a night of revelry commenced, which did not pass over without all those little incidents which usually attend such orgies. Laughter, songs, disputes, quarrels, succeeded each other rapidly; but as Jean was sober and the rest were drunk, he contrived with great skill not only to avoid any contest himself, but to keep his new companions tolerably peaceable, and make friends with the soldiers, by whose means he hoped to pass the gates unquestioned. One or two of the party whom he had first met were soon stretched upon the benches with their senses completely overpowered with wine; and when daylight came in, and the soldiers started up to depart, Jean Marais found means to furnish himself with a hat in a more perfect condition than his own. He was not, however, by nature dishonest, although, as the reader must have perceived, he was by no means without his peccadilloes, and was not so much troubled with scruples as might have been desirable. But every man, not totally abandoned, has some odd notions of honour peculiar to himself; and in taking up the hat which suited him, Jean Marais said to himself, "Hang it! I won't steal the thing," dropping at the same time a Spanish crown, which he had just received in change, into the brimless beaver which he left behind.

"Where go you, comrade?" said one of the soldiers, whom he had made particularly his friend by taking his part in a dispute about the cards.

"I must get away as fast as I can," replied Jean Marais; and he named a village which he knew lay at some distance from L'Orient as the place of his residence. "My master, if he finds I have been out all night, will rate me soundly. But he's such a sluggard, I shall get home before he is up. Are the gates open, I wonder, yet?"

"They ought to be," replied the soldier. "Come along, come along; if they are not, we will have them opened for you, and when you come in again, ask for me at the gate, and we'll have another bout."

"Ay, that I will," replied Jean Marais; and, under the kind auspices of his military friends, he was soon beyond the walls of the town, and wandering at liberty in the country.

As the reader doubtless knows, there is not in the neighbourhood of L'Orient any great shelter for a fugitive. A rich and cultivated, but flat country, without much wood, extends along the borders of the sea; and though our friend Jean had soon quitted the high road and plunged among the villages and hamlets which lie between Hennebon and the port he had just quitted, he found nothing to encourage him to stop till he had gone between three and four leagues, when, traversing a wide piece of sandy heath, he came to some woody ground covered with low, stunted trees, neither very closely planted nor thick in the branches, but which dazzled and confused the eye, and afforded him such shelter as he sought. He was very much fatigued, however, and not choosing the ground for a bed, less out of consideration for his health than with a view for security against pursuit, he climbed up into a low oak, and after some difficulty, found a place among the branches where he could rest without danger of falling. Sleep soon overpowered him, and he must have remained in the same situation for some hours; for the sun had got round into the west, and was not very far from the horizon when he woke with a start, and had wellnigh fallen down to the bottom of the tree. The sound of human voices showed him at once what had roused him, and looking a little to the right, he saw two archers of the maréchaussée riding slowly along at the distance of some twenty yards.

From their conversation, part of which he heard, he gathered that they were returning from a fruitless search for some prisoner, and very naturally concluded, though perhaps wrongly, that he himself had been the object of their perquisitions. As soon as they were out of sight, he descended from the tree and took his way onward, walking as fast as he could go for the next two hours, avoiding all villages, however, till the setting sun warned him that it was time to seek some place of shelter. He flattered himself that he was now at least seven leagues from L'Orient, and, consequently, believed that he might venture in safety into the first place of public entertainment he met with. A little hamlet in a hill soon caught his eye, and to it he was directing his steps, with the glorious light of a spring sunset shining in the sky, when the small country road he was following crossed another, and he perceived, by a fingerpost, that in his previous anxiety to avoid inhabited places, he had lost the right direction, and was taking his way back direct towards L'Orient!

At the same moment, as misfortune would have it, the two archers whom he had seen an hour or two before appeared coming along the road behind him; but Jean Marais was a man of great presence of mind, as the reader has already perceived, and, without appearing to hesitate, he trudged on till the men overtook him.

"Where are you going, good man?" cried one of the archers.

"To L'Orient, sir," replied Jean Marais, without the slightest embarrassment. "I am afraid I shall not get there till the gates are shut. I wish I had your horse, monsieur."

"Ay, I dare say you do," replied the archer; "but you can get one at Grand Herpont, there, before you, if you've got the crown pieces in your pocket to pay for it."

Jean shook his head with a laugh, and the man continued: "How far have you come to-day?"

"From Beand," replied Jean Marais, who was a tolerably good topographer.

"That's a long walk," said the other. "Did you see a fellow with a shaved head on the road as you passed along?"

"What, a convict?" said Jean Marais, looking straight in the man's face. "Why, some of your own people passed me with one an hour ago, going back to L'Orient. They came from the side of Landenan, and must have caught him somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hennebon."

"Ah, then, we have had our ride for our pains," said the other man. "Come along, Jacques, we must quicken our pace;" and, bidding Jean Marais adieu, they rode on.

Well satisfied to be free from them, Jean walked on to the village, which was not above a hundred yards distant, and there refreshed himself with a hearty supper, after which he once more betook himself to the road, and walked on for three or four hours, till fatigue compelled him once more to take shelter in a wood, where he passed the remainder of the night very comfortably. By daybreak he was again on foot, and before the close of that day was safely ensconced in a small inn at Pontivy, among a number of small traders who came to buy and sell at the spring fair of that place, which commenced on the following day. Under cover of the bustle and excitement of the period, Jean went out into the fair, and, after wandering about for some time, succeeded in purchasing for himself the coat, breeches, gaiters, and broad-brimmed hat of a Breton peasant, and, for the sum of three Louis added thereunto, one of the excellent small horses of that country. A bridle and saddle left him only five Louis remaining; but he had purchased security for the time being, at least, and calculated that the sum he still possessed would be sufficient to bring him into the neighbourhood of those who would take care that he should not long want a fresh supply.

CHAPTER XLVI.

It was a sweet day in spring, when nature was all rejoicing, and the sky without a cloud. The air was soft and balmy, the glad birds were singing in every bush, the insect world was fluttering abroad, and the voice of hope was in everything, as Nature cast off the grave-like trammels of the winter, and burst into new life. The same sensations were in the hearts of Francis de Langy and Julie d'Artonne, as they walked on side by side, just as the bright evening sun was sinking slowly behind the trees of the park, and the tongue of the never-doubted enchanter who sings us into sweet dreams, for

the cradle to the grave, spoke to them also the never-failing tale of happier days to come. Oh! the bright, never-failing treasures in the storehouses of young imagination! thence, with but little search, the goddess can always draw forth some splendid veil, jewelled and rich, and decked with infinite stars, to cast over the grim features of the future, frown they never so sternly.

Thus, though all the prospect before them was as dark as ever it had been, though not one step had been taken towards happier fate or more favourable circumstances, vague expectations of some change for the better accompanied the lovers forth upon their evening walk, and assumed, as they proceeded, more distinct and tangible shapes. They first called up fears and dreads but for the purpose of banishing them.

"I almost regret," said Francis de Langy, "both that I sent the letter with which the stranger in Paris intrusted me, and that your mother, Julie, told Monsieur d'Artonne the expectations which that false and treacherous intendant held out. I put faith in neither the one nor the other, and I trust the count will not attend to them. It is now a fortnight since I wrote, Julie, is it not? and surely, if Monsieur d'Artonne had any intention of returning, we should have heard from him by this time."

"It is more than a fortnight, Francis," replied Julie, "but you seem as anxious now to quit France as you were formerly to stay here."

"Because," replied Francis de Langy, "I trust we may find happiness beyond the sea, Julie. The tie of birth is all that now remains between me and this country, at least if this suit takes the turn that it seems likely to do. In a new land new prospects will spring up, and wherever you are shall be my country to me. Your mother, too, is eager to go, Julie; but I do hope and trust that before we go this dear hand may be mine: indeed, it is but right and necessary that I should have such a title to protect you."

"But would there not be difficulties!" said Julie. "We are both so young, Francis."

"Oh no," replied her lover, with impetuous eagerness, "there will be no difficulties. Your relations, dear Julie, will not interfere, if your father and mother consent; for, indeed, at the very first breath of adversity they seemed to have cast you off, and forgotten the relationship; and mine, deprived of wealth and station, will not trouble me with much opposition. Indeed, dear one, you must be my own before we go."

Julie made no reply, but gazed on in silent thought. Whether that thought was sweet or bitter, let the reader learned in woman's heart decide. She said Hem, not Nay, however, and that was enough to fill the bosom of Francis de Langy with happy visions.

Thus they pursued their way for a short time, when suddenly the cracking of a postillion's whip, an unpoetic and unromantic sound, caused them to stop and look along the road, down which they perceived, coming at a quick pace, a gentleman with a postillion, riding what was called *à franc étrier*, a custom now reserved almost entirely for couriers, but then practised by many persons encumbered with but little baggage, and anxious to go quick.

"It is my father," cried Julie, as soon as she saw him, and her countenance turned as pale as death; for the happy dream which hope had conjured up before her of love's home in another land vanished away at the sight, and there was nothing in its place but a fear. She hastened, however, with her lover, to meet the count, whose features and person soon became distinct, though, when her heart told her it was he, there was nothing to be seen to distinguish him from any other traveller. In a few minutes she was in her father's arms; but remounting his horse again, he rode back before them to the chateau, and when they arrived they found him with the Countess d'Artonne.

Tears were upon the cheeks of both husband and wife, but the count spoke hopefully, nay, cheerfully. "The assurance of the intendant," he said, "had not altogether been satisfactory to him, especially as Madame d'Artonne had conveyed the message with some expressions of doubt; but those assurances, coupled with the letter which Francis de Langy had forwarded, from one who had proved himself a sincere friend, induced him to believe that some circumstances must have transpired in the examinations at Riom to give a more favourable aspect to the case than when he had made his escape. He did not mention the name of the person by whom the letter had been sent; but Francis saw, and was sorry to see, in some further conversation with the count, that he had suffered his judgment to be biased by the weariness of a solitary life in a foreign land, and by his anxious desire to see his native country again. At all events, it was an important step that he had taken; he had made his choice between the endurance of small but constant evils, and one great peril, which, once passed through, could never return, and both Francis and the count's wife and child could not but look forward to the result with anxiety and dread. A fresh cloud, dark, stormy, and threatening, had come over the sky from which the light breeze of hope had so lately been wafting those lesser vapours, which had only shut out the path of the sunshine of life. Thus, though they were all rejoiced to see the fugitive once more, a tinge of sadness was over all their prospects, and in every interval of conversation gloom fell on the countenances of all.

It was late when they parted to retire to rest, and all discussion regarding future proceedings was reserved till the next morning. The count, indeed, seemed to have made up his mind to all that was to be done, to have considered the matter well, to have looked the future in the face, and, consequently, was more calm and cheerful than any of those who surrounded him. The only thing which seemed much to trouble his tranquillity was the fate of poor Jean Marais, and he repeated more than once, "If it be possible, I must not let him suffer from his devoted gratitude to me. Whatever were the plans he proposed to pursue, however, they were frustrated by events over which he had no control." At daybreak on the following morning, Francis de Langy was awakened by a violent knocking at the great doors of the chateau, and starting up, confused, he ran to the window, and the cause of the noise was explained by the first object his eye fell upon. There was a chaise de poste

at the door with a large party of maréchaussée, and, hurrying out as fast as possible, he was running down to forbid the doors to be opened, in order to give time for some consultation with the count, when he met Monsieur d' Artonne himself, who, it would seem, had been roused earlier than his young host. He was somewhat pale, but his air was firm and collected.

"I have seen them, Francis," said he, "I have seen them. Do not try to stop them; it is all in vain now. We will tell them of the assurances given by the intendant, and if they will not listen to them we must even submit."

While he was yet speaking, the doors of the chateau were thrown open, and the hall was in a minute filled with archers of the maréchaussée, having the same lieutenant at their head who had searched the place before.

"Now, sir," exclaimed the lieutenant, as Francis de Langy went down the stairs to meet him, "will you deny that Monsieur d'Artonne is here now!"

"Certainly not," replied the young gentleman; "he is here: there he stands."

The lieutenant walked up to him at once, and laid his hand on his shoulder, saying, "Monsieur d'Artonne, you are my prisoner. You will be so good as to get into the chaise de poste at the door, in order to proceed instantly to Riom."

"You will permit me, I suppose," said the count, "to make some preparations, and to take leave of my wife and child? But, in the first place, let me inform you that I returned to France openly and unconcealedly, upon the distinct assurance given by Monsieur d'L——, one of the high officers of the crown, that I should not be subject to arrest or imprisonment till a day arrived appointed for my trial."

"My orders, sir," replied the lieutenant, "are direct from Paris: I have nothing to do but to obey them. Madame d'Artonne and your family can be called to take leave of you; what necessaries you want with you can be packed up by a servant: being now under my arrest, I cannot lose sight of you, even for a moment."

A scene now took place of a kind which does not bear description. Agitated and terrified Madame d'Artonne and Julie could not fail to be, and yet both strove to be as calm as might suffer their love to appear, without grieving him they loved. But little time was given for the party: the officer, now having power in his hand, used it to wipe out his former disappointment, and, in five minutes from the time that his hand was upon Monsieur d'Artonne's shoulder, he had hurried him into the chaise de poste, taking his seat beside him.

The carriage drove rapidly away, and then Madame and Julie gave way to the tears they had previously suppressed.

"We must part again, I fear," said Madame d'Artonne; "I must follow my husband to Auvergne as speedily as may be."

"No, my dear madame," replied Francis, "we do not part, for I will accompany you. You want a son, Julie wants a brother, both a protector, and I must do my best to be so. It is all in vain my staying here to watch the proceedings in this cause. Heaven only knows when it will terminate; and it is not worth my while to stay, day after day, frequenting those dull courts. I have heard of men thus wearing away their life, grinding down soul and body on the hard stone of the law. Our good friend Arnoux will stay here and let me know what takes place. Say not a word, my dear lady, I am resolved."

It was arranged as he wished, but he had calculated too rapidly in regard to Monsieur Arnoux. The good abbé mildly expressed his determination to accompany his former pupil to Auvergne. It seems at first sight strange that men in years always attribute to long life the gift of experience; they think that knowledge must be gained by time, and are always convinced themselves that, just according to the period they have lived in the world must be their knowledge of the world, and the ignorance of those who are younger than themselves. But so it is, and perhaps it is very natural, for they have no gauge by which to measure the amount of what others have acquired but that which they have acquired themselves; and thus the good Abbé Arnoux, simply because he had seen more than sixty years, fancied that he had infinitely more experience than Francis de Langy, who had not seen twenty, forgetting that the only serviceable experience is derived from an acquaintance with men, and things, and events, and not from hours, or months, or years; so that many a one is a child at seventy, and many a man, full grown in intellect and old in experience, has not a gray hair on his head.

"No, my dear Francis," he said, "you want some one, in the difficult circumstances in which you are placed, to guide and counsel you. You always were quick, and reasoning, and intelligent; but you cannot have the experience which is acquired by age and knowledge of the world, and I must go with you to supply any deficiency in that respect."

Francis could not refrain from a smile; but he yielded to the good abbé's wish the more willingly as he thought that, if anything called him from Auvergne, it might be a comfort both to Madame d'Artonne and to Julie to have the excellent old man with them. All was now the bustle of preparation in the Chateau de St. Medard. Horses were sent for from Senlis, the carriage of the countess was brought forth, and its ample sides stored with all that was necessary, and a hasty meal was taken in the saloon while waiting for the return of the messenger. The horses arrived; and while, with due deliberation of French postillions, the personages who had brought them were tying them, not harnessing them on, Francis de Langy proceeded to visit various parts of the chateau, putting by various papers, and locking up drawers and cabinets. He was surprised in the corridor, as he came out of his own room, to meet good Louise Pelet, habited as if for a journey.

"Why, Louise!" exclaimed her young master, laughing, "are you going too?" and, somewhat to his surprise even then, he found that it was so.

In her rapid and abrupt manner, Louise explained, with very few words, her intentions, which, as far as she had the power of carrying them into execution, were always as irrevocable as the decrees of the Medes and Persians.

"Oh yes," she said, "I'm going too. As you are going to marry Mademoiselle Julie, she

must have somebody to wait upon her whenever the *noces* take place. Besides, she had better have a woman with her now. Madame's maid is but a gay, flighty girl—in love, too, I believe, with that scapegrace, Jean Marais, for she's been doing nothing but cry since he's been sent to the galleys. Then, monsieur, if you are going away so far as Auvergne, how do I know that you'll ever return? So you see, sir, I'm going, too;" and, with a low courtesy, and a gay little laugh, she ran down to put the bandbox she carried upon the vehicle.

The proceedings of Louise, however, caused some little delay, as it was with difficulty so many persons could be accommodated in the carriage, and the only choice for Francis de Langy was either to wake the servant he proposed to take with him or to leave him behind. He chose the latter, for the money he had in the chateau was of no great amount; and, this being settled, the party set out.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A WRITER may surely be permitted to complain to his indulgent and compassionate readers of the difficulties under which he labours, and more especially when the very nature and constitution of the reader's mind forms a part, and a very principal part, of that difficulty.

Now, to write for an English public a story, the scene of which is laid in a foreign country, and which relates to foreign manners and customs, is no such easy task; for every man in this world intrenches his powers of belief, through which his imaginations may be attacked, within circles of strong fortification. In the first place, the very headquarters, the prætorium of his camp, is what he has seen and known himself. Anything within that limit is instantly received as a friend; in other words, is credited instantly. Beyond that is the circle of things which he has commonly heard, but does not know by the evidence of his own senses, the daily occurrences in his own country, his own society, and his own age. Here, too, anything that he meets with is suffered to pass without challenge or much examination. Beyond that, however, come spots upon which he has placed sentinels, extraordinary events, customs, and manners, that he does not know of; things not in themselves at all improbable, but which are new to him; and here, if a stranger puts his foot, he is immediately stopped, obliged to give an account of himself, and to give many a password at the risk of being driven back, or, perhaps, shot; and beyond this again a glacis, revelins, horn-works, half-moons, redoubts, and outworks beyond number, among which nobody is admitted without his eyes being blindfolded, a passport or a flag of truce in his hand, and the strictest precautions to guard against treachery. In short, reader, although every one acknowledges that truth is more wonderful than fiction, no one acts upon the admission and receives truth as a friend, unless he come in the most homely garb it is possible to assume, more especially if he have a foreign *air about him.*

Nature, men say, is the same everywhere, and very possibly the assertion may be true. But as there can be no doubt that the features and complexion of a Spaniard, a Frenchman, and an Italian, are all different from those of an Englishman, so there are vast differences between the way in which a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or an Italian would act in certain circumstances, and the way in which an Englishman would act. The reason of this disquisition is, that we are going to place before the eyes of the reader a scene, and make him acquainted with an event which would be perfectly improbable, and wellnigh impossible, if the scene were laid in England, but which is quite probable, and has actually more than once happened in France.

In a fine spring morning in the month of May, a tall, stout, well-looking man, dressed in the broad-brimmed hat, brown coat, knee-breeches, and slate-coloured gaiters of a Breton peasant, and mounted upon a stout, well-looking Britanny pony, rode up to the little gate before the *Ferme Godard*, which, as the reader well knows, was many a long mile from the fair land in which the horse at least had its birth.

When last we spoke of the *Ferme Godard*, we showed a vast improvement which had taken place in its appearance since the time when Gerard Latouches first married, and brought home Marguerite, his wife. But now an alteration of a different kind was to be remarked. The appearance of the farm had fallen off, especially about the house: some of the wooden railings before it had been torn down, and used by the peasantry for fire-wood, the little garden before the door was utterly neglected, the windows of one room only were open, the rest were all closed, and the cows, which a boy was driving out to pasture, looked rough, lean, and miserable.

As the stranger dismounted from his horse and undid the gate, the cowboy aforesaid called out in an indifferent tone, "She is not there: she is gone to the town."

"Whom do you mean?" said Jean Marais. "Do you mean Madame Latouches?"

"I mean Jennettone," replied the boy, and sauntered on after his cattle.

"Well, I shall find some one, at all events," said Jean Marais; and, fastening his horse to the paling, he walked in and laid his hand upon the latch.

The door, however, was fastened, and it gave a little at the top, when Jean Marais pushed to open it; yet it was clearly locked, and the key taken out.

"Safe bind, safe find," said Jean Marais; and then he looked at his horse, and then at the door, and considered for a moment or two what he should do.

He was turning to mount to ride away again, when the window which was not boarded up with rough shutters struck his eye; it was low, as in fact was the whole building, and saying to himself, "A window is as good as a door at any time, if it isn't too high," he walked up to it, intending to throw it open. It, too, was fastened, however, but as he made the attempt, a faint voice, broken by a low cough, said, "Who is there?"

"That's a difficult question to answer," said Jean Marais to himself, with a very peculiar ex-

pression of countenance; but walking straight up to the door of the house, he put his powerful shoulder against it, stretched out his right foot to gain a purchase, and with a strong push burst it open, muttering, "Demande pardon, Monsieur Latouches, but you are a great rogue, I've a notion," and he walked into the house.

At first all seemed vacant: the rooms on both sides of the passage were open, but dark, and Jean Marais, who, as the reader knows, was well acquainted with the *Ferme Godard*, passed into a little transverse corridor, which led him direct to the chamber, the window of which he had tried. To his surprise, however, he found that door locked also, but the key, luckily, had been left in it, which saved him the trouble of opening it by forcible means; and, unlocking it, he entered with an inquiring look around. The air was close and hot, faint and sickly, and on a low pallet bed near the window lay the emaciated form of her whom we have once depicted as the pretty maid of the Marchioness de Langy.

She was dressed, and had a little table beside her, lying down apparently for repose; but her countenance told very plainly that life was not to be long a guest in that bosom. The colourless lips, the clear, ashy gray of the flesh, the sunken cheeks, the eager and restless eye, as she gasped for breath, the quick heaving of the breast, as well as the thin, bony hand that rested upon the table beside her, all spoke that the great enemy of mortal life had nearly achieved his conquest.

As Jean Marais entered, she seemed to hide something behind with her left hand; but the moment she recognised him, a smile full of joy and satisfaction came upon her lip. "Oh! Jean, Jean," she cried, "God has sent you to me!" But before she could tell him why, she seemed so rejoiced to see him, a fit of coughing seized her, and, sitting up, she gasped, and struggled with the paroxysm for several moments, while Jean Marais drew a chair, and placed himself by her side.

"Why, how goes it, Marguerite?" he said, in a kindly tone. "How came you to be locked in here, and nobody with you! You don't seem to be well."

He did not tell her that he had heard she was dead, and had made up his mind Gerard Latouches had married again.

"Ah! ill indeed, Jean," she said; "but I think I shall get well yet, in spite of him," for she still clung to that strange expectation of life, which in some long and lingering diseases never expires but with life itself. "But I say God, I am sure, has sent you to me. Here, Jean, here is a letter, which I have written to-day. Take it, and promise me you will deliver it—it is the first time I have been alone for an hour, and I wrote it directly. It contains the truth, Jean, the whole truth—all the wickedness which that man, Latouches, forced me to commit—take it, take it, Jean, and swear you will deliver it."

"To whom?" said Jean Marais: "to Madame de Langy? I dare not set my foot there, my good Marguerite."

"No, no," cried the sick woman, "it is to Martin Latouches, the count's intendant, who lives at Ailly, near Langy. He is a good man, and was always kind to me, and used always to say he must attend to *his master's* interests. Do you promise, Jean, do you promise upon your soul?"

"Oh! yes," replied Jean Marais, "I'll deliver it to him."

"Well, then," cried the woman, who had kept the letter in her hand all the while, "get a light and some sealing-wax; there used to be a piece of wax in the table drawer in the kitchen, but they have not let me out of this room for many a month."

"I will get it, I will get it," replied Jean Marais, and away he went upon the search, leaving the door of the room open behind him.

A small piece of sealing-wax was soon found, but he had more difficulty in getting a light, for the fire had gone out in the kitchen, and it was long ere he could discover where the flint and steel were kept. At length, however, he discovered them, and struck a light; but while he was doing so, he thought he heard a somewhat strange and unpleasant noise proceeding from the room in which he had left his cousin's wife; and, finishing his task as fast as possible, he hurried back, saying, "*Parbleu*, it sounds as if she was choking."

When he re-entered the room he found that she had fallen back on the pillow, and, with her eyes closed, was gasping long and heavily. He spoke to her, but she did not answer; he spoke again louder than before, but the sense of hearing seemed gone, for she took no notice.

"She is dying," thought Jean Marais, "or has, perhaps, fainted from over-excitement;" and, taking some water, he sprinkled it in her face, but it produced no effect; and he stood gazing upon her with no light degree of grief and compassion.

It was not one of those calm and quiet deathbeds which we so often see depicted in novel and in tract, and which sometimes are actually witnessed; but it was a last, long, terrible struggle between life and death, where the immortal spirit seemed to have fled, and consciousness was certainly at an end nearly a quarter of an hour before mere animal life was extinct. Jean Marais did all that he could think of to allay the poor woman's sufferings, or to rouse her back to thought and feeling, but it was in vain; and at the end of the time I speak of the breathing suddenly stopped altogether, and the eyes opened, but sense and expression were gone from them, and Marguerite Latouches was dead!

Jean Marais had not been prepared for such a scene, and he was struck and affected. He could have certainly witnessed a dozen men die in battle, ay, and would have felt very different and less sensible emotions if he had seen them give their necks to the axe or to the cord; but now he was touched, he knew not well how, and kneeling down, partly mechanically, from habits acquired in youth, and partly from that feeling of reverence towards Him who gives and takes the soul, which the sight of death is sure to produce, he uttered a short prayer, ay, reader, and rose a better man than he was before; for he said to himself, "I will be more careful of my doings for the future;" and such thoughts are the beginnings of amendment.

He next took up the letter which had dropped from the poor woman's hand upon the bed, and looking at it for a moment, he said, "I may as well read it. That fellow Martin is every bit

as bad as his brother, only the sleeker villain of the two. I'll read it!" and opening the sheet, he began, and perused with some difficulty the trembling lines which poor Marguerite Latouches' hand had traced, exclaiming, from time to time, as he did so, "Ah! Coquin! I thought so—he's cunning enough—forced the poor woman to commit such a cheat—I'll have a copy of this, at all events;" and, with the same pen and ink which poor Marguerite had used, he hastily transcribed the letter, and then sealed the original.

"I don't think I ought to give the scoundrel this," continued Jean Marais, standing and gazing on the corpse; "he'll only burn it; and yet I promised thee, poor thing, and I'll begin by keeping my word; but I had better get away before any one comes in;" and putting away the candle, and flint, and steel, where he had found them, he locked the door upon the dead body and issued out of the house.

The door of the farm puzzled him a little, for he wished to leave as few traces of his visit behind as possible; but driving in the staple again, which he had forced out, he pushed back the bolt into the lock, and fastened the door with the latch. Then mounting his horse, he rode off, and took his way to the nearest town.

It may seem strange to the reader that a great and important cause should be going on in Paris, one of the principal witnesses in which was supposed, by the principal parties concerned, to be dead eight or nine months before, and that yet not even the good curé of the parish, who had seen her and ministered to her, should take the trouble of making it known that she had partially recovered from the first violent attack, which seemed likely to kill her in a few hours, and was dragging on a sickly life, shut up in her own house. Reader, in that day there were not three of such things as newspapers in France. The word *journaux* was scarcely known, and the principal paper, the Gazette de France, was confined in its circulation almost entirely to the capital, and a few great towns, and a few great houses. Reader, there was not a person within twenty miles of the *Ferme Godard* who had heard one word of the famous cause of De Langy; and this will not seem extraordinary to you, when I vouch for it, on my word of honour, that an excellent friend of mine, a country curé, in France, very well versed in the Commentaries of Cæsar, and who could have pointed out every station in the Appian or Flaminian Way, once asked me, first, who were the nations that fought at Waterloo, and whether he could not come to see me in England by land. I answered him, as may be supposed, that the English and French had the principal share in the battle, and that though there had been a good deal of *rapproachement* between England and France since that time, the sea still rolled between the two countries, I was much afraid.

To return, however, to Jean Marais: when he reached his resting-place, he felt himself shaken in his resolution of keeping his promise; but he would not suffer himself to be tempted, so that the next morning, about eleven o'clock, found him at the door of Monsieur Martin Latouches, the intendant of the Marquis de Langy. He found him at home, and delivered the letter into his own hands. But our good friend's purpose did not stop there, for he was fully impressed with the idea that his worthy cousin, Martin Latouches, would destroy the letter, and make not the best possible use of the contents. He therefore sat down, drank a glass of wine which his cousin offered him, and began to chat with an easy and unconcerned air, although, to say the truth, he did not feel himself at all in a state of safety in the house of Monsieur Martin Latouches. That worthy gentleman, in the mean time, begged Jean Marais's pardon with the utmost politeness; and after examining the seal of the letter, as if to see it had not been broken, he opened it and read the contents.

"Ha," he said, "ha, did you write this for her, Jean?"

"Oh no," replied Jean Marais, in an indifferent tone, "she can write very well herself, I fancy. At all events, it was written and ready when I called at Godard. I hadn't time to stay a minute with her, poor thing, though she seemed very ill—dying, I think. What is it about? Complaining of Gerard, I dare say. He always was a brute, and used to thrash her amazingly. But she said you had been good and kind to her, and would see right done."

"I never meddle between man and wife," said Martin Latouches, and there dropped the subject; nor could Jean Marais, with all his skill, induce him to say anything which might afford an indication of his purposes in regard to the letter.

At length, however, our friend Jean arose, saying, "Well, Martin, if the poor woman dies from Gerard's bad treatment, she has given you a fine hold upon him, which he won't particularly like, but which I dare say you will."

"Why, why?" demanded Martin: "I don't see how she has given me any hold upon him."

"Why, if you were to show that letter to Monsieur de Langy," replied Jean Marais, "he would turn him out of the farm; and I know that you and Gerard had some transactions together regarding the fields at the back of Godard, which may make you very glad of a little power over him."

"Oh dear, no," replied Martin: "I dare say Gerard will do all that is quite right."

"It will be the first time in his life, then," said Jean Marais, "for his principle has always been to get a friend's help, and then kick him down stairs. But, good-day, I must go," and, shaking hands with his dearly-beloved cousin, he left him and trotted away.

"He's quite right, he's quite right," cried Martin Latouches, rubbing his hands as soon as Jean Marais was gone: "Master Gerard has shown me the cloven foot already; but now I have him, now I have him. This little piece of paper puts him in my power;" and taking out a large pocket-book, in which he kept his most valuable papers always about him, he laid the letter safely among the rest, and put it into his pocket.

A new fit of consideration then came over him, and scratching his head with his fore-finger, he said in a deliberate tone, "Thou art a sweet youth, Jean, but methinks it would be better for all parties if thou wert restored to the galleys. Ha, ha, ha! he fancies I know nothing about it, I suppose; but the sea air will do him good, and regular exercise is no bad thing. Water, diet, and exercise," said the great

doctor—"these are the grand medicines, and Jean will have them all at L'Orient. I will go and give notice to the maréchaussée. I dare say he will go straight to St. Medard," and taking down his hat, he walked out.

In the mean while, our good friend Jean Marais, as his worthy cousin had thought, proceeded straight upon his way towards the Chateau de St. Medard. But that chateau was at some distance, and Jean Marais knew that without knocking up his pony he could not reach it that night. He therefore proposed to ride some five leagues farther, and then to take up his abode at an inn upon the road. But Jean Marais was a wary person, as the reader already knows, and one who made use of his eyes upon every occasion. At the top of every hill, therefore, that he reached, Jean made a point of pausing to look around him, and ere long he saw some signs of coming events, which he did not at all approve. From a spot where he caught a distinct view of the road for several miles, he perceived three or four horsemen coming along at a very rapid rate, and there was something in their air which had so strong a touch of the maréchaussée in it, that Jean Marais resolved, without more ado, to trust to the fields and woods rather than the open highway. Every rood of the ground, however, was known to him, and manœuvring skilfully, he was soon involved in paths with which no one but those whose early youth had been passed among them could be as well acquainted as himself. Another precaution also he took, judging at once that, if he were the object of pursuit, intelligence of his being in that neighbourhood must have been given by his worthy cousin; and perceiving, with his usual acuteness, the whole train of Martin Latouches's thoughts, he said to himself, "I must keep away from St. Medard, for he will send them to seek me there. I'll turn to the left towards Beaumont, and come round to the chateau the day after to-morrow from the other side. I must lodge in the woods to-night, I fear. However, it is fine warm weather, so that is no great hardship."

With such ruminations Jean proceeded, avoiding all towns and even villages, and only stopping for a minute or two at a hamlet or a farmhouse to get some food for himself or for his horse. The trees were now in full leaf; and, as the pony began to show symptoms of weariness towards five o'clock, the fugitive chose the first convenient wood that he met with, and, leading his horse into the heart of the dingle, he fastened him by tying his two fore legs together, and prepared to make himself as comfortable a bed as circumstances permitted, in a spot where the grass was short and dry.

He was now at the distance of about eight miles from St. Medard, and the spot which he had selected for his temporary abode was removed some fifty yards from a little green woodpath, marked only by the ruts of timber-carts and prints from the horses' feet that drew them. Scarcely, however, were Jean Marais's preparations completed, when he heard the quick sounds of horsemen riding, and, lying quite still, he distinguished a rustle among the leaves not far off, as if some large animal were making its way slowly and cautiously towards the very spot where he himself was concealed.

"Boar, stag, or man," said Jean Marais to himself, "I wish they would keep away, for I am too tired for company to-night;" but, raising his head a little, so as to look over some of the brushwood near, and, moving it from side to side for the purpose of seeing in different directions between the boles of the trees, he at length perceived, between himself and the lane we have mentioned, the figure of a man at the distance of about twenty yards from him, evidently attempting to conceal himself from some one passing along the road, by keeping close to a large neighbouring tree which covered his person entirely on that side. Jean Marais watched him attentively for several minutes, till the sound of horses' feet died entirely away, and all was silent. The man still continued in the same position, however, and still Jean Marais kept his eyes fixed upon him with a look of great interest; till at length his pony, having satisfied himself with the grass near him, made a sort of hopping movement in advance, which instantly caused the man to turn round with a glance of apprehension.

"Shut, shut!" cried Jean Marais, in a tone calculated for the man to hear, but not to carry the sound any farther. "Antoine, Antoine! here is a friend."

The stranger bent his head, and gazed for a moment in the direction from which the voice proceeded, and then cautiously and slowly advanced, till, seeing Jean Marais fully, and recognising his face, he advanced and grasped him eagerly by the hand.

"Well met, well met!" they said mutually, but in a low voice; and rapid questions and answers succeeded as to each other's situation.

"Why, I have just been up to your place," said the last comer, "but I found nobody; and, as I was going along back to Beaumont, a party of the maréchaussée chased me; I don't know what for, but I always keep out of their way whenever I see them; and just now, as I want immediate speech of your young master, it would be especially unpleasant to be lodged in prison."

"What do you call my place?" said Jean Marais.

"Why, the Chateau de St. Medard, to be sure," replied the other.

"Oh no! you are mistaken," said Jean Marais. "My last place was the galleys at L'Orient. But what do you want at St. Medard?"

The man started at the intelligence which his companion gave him, and mutual explanations then took place, which ended in an agreement to pass the night where they were. Jean Marais dividing the provisions which he had brought with him with as hospitable and courteous an air as if he had been receiving a guest in the servants' hall of St. Medard.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

In a melancholy house near the gate of the prison the sad party, which we have lately seen at St. Medard, were collected about ten days after their departure for Auvergne. The count had arrived during the preceding day, and the first act of the Countess de Langy and her daughter was to apply at the gates for permis-

sion to see him. That permission, however, was sternly refused, and they were informed that he was *écroué au secret*, as the technical term was, and that he could be permitted to converse with no one. Grieved and disappointed, they returned to consult what was next to be done, in order to obtain at least the means of seeing and communicating with him for whom they were so deeply anxious. Advocates and persons learned in the law were sent for; but, as we have before seen, wherever arbitrary power exists, a part of it falls into the hands of all its subordinate agents; and in matters of criminal jurisdiction, the comfort of a prisoner, ay, and even his safety, were very much at the pleasure of the officers of the crown. They had the power to shut him out from all means of anything but a nominal defence; they could withhold from him those communications which might be absolutely necessary to establish his innocence, and he had no safeguard, in fact, but a faint and lingering respect for public opinion, and a fear of abusing the authority intrusted to them, lest they should be punished by the only power above them. Such painful facts with regard to the situation of a husband and a father were now learned with grief and terror by Madame d'Artonne and Julie. The advocates said they could do nothing; the law was utterly powerless to open the prison gates, even for themselves, whose advice and assistance might be considered absolutely necessary to the prisoner; and everything depended upon the will of the king, and of those to whom his authority was delegated in the provinces. The provincial parliaments themselves, though duly established as courts of law, could not interfere in any shape; and the only assurance which could be given was, that the count could not be executed without trial.

To the new intendant of the province the first appeal of the count's wife and daughter was made; but he turned a deaf ear to their application, merely replying that, in regard to visits from the prisoner's family, no violation of the ordinary course could take place. The count, he added, would have full opportunity of obtaining the assistance of lawyers before his trial, after his private interrogatories were concluded; but, so long as it was found necessary to keep him *au secret*, no one could be admitted. All, then, that remained was to wait in patience; but, of course, it could not be without grief, without anxiety, without the wearying, daily, hourly, continual sense of impending danger and sorrow. They looked up to the dark and heavy walls of the prison; they could see from the upper story of the house the small-barred windows of those chambers, in one of which they knew him to be confined; and anxiously did mother and daughter watch those windows, sometimes fancying, as they saw a figure pass across, that it must be him they loved. Thus passed four days; they wrote to the count, and the concièrge or jailer of the prison promised to give the letter. But they received no reply. Yet it was a consolation to have written; for all that they could hope to do was to give the prisoner some comfort, to win his thoughts a little from himself; and they were right sure that nothing could produce that effect so well as the knowledge that they were near him. At length arrived a note addressed to the Countess d'Artonne, and written in a neat, regular, and precise hand, informing her that Monsieur de L——, the former intendant of that generality, had arrived from Paris in order to settle some affairs of his own, which the hurry of his departure had forced him to leave in disorder, and that he would have the honour of waiting upon her at an hour he named on the following day. Julie and Madame d'Artonne both looked rejoiced as the countess read the note aloud; for they were both in hopes of obtaining, through his means, some mitigation of the severity with which the count was treated. But Francis de Langy heard it with a frowning brow and a burning heart—ay, and even with some impatience at the signs of pleasure which he perceived.

"Your enemy has come," he said, bitterly, "to see his work properly executed."

But the moment that the words had passed his lips, a consciousness of some of the feelings from which they sprung made the blood come up into his cheeks.

Julie, too, with that clear perception as to the feelings of love which is perhaps given only to woman, and that when she loves herself, saw more clearly into the heart of Francis de Langy than his own eyes did, and going over to the place where he sat, said, in a mournful and almost reproachful tone, but so low that nobody could hear the words but himself, "Do you doubt me, Francis? am I not yours?"

"No, no, dear Julie, I do not doubt you," replied Francis de Langy, "but I grieve to think that you are indulging expectations which must be disappointed. This man has his own objects; he seeks but those he cares for; he thinks of naught else but how they may be gained. To them he will sacrifice everything else that stands in his way—the hopes, the feelings, the life itself of others, not vehemently, not eagerly, but calmly, coldly, deliberately, as you see men set their foot unconcernedly upon an anthill in their path, without considering for one moment how many of the insects they crush to death. Dear Julie, I cannot make up my mind to meet this man here; the very sight of him is odious to me, and I fear I might forget myself. I will go away for a few hours before he comes, and you shall tell me the result. Whatever it is will be softened by coming from your lips."

"Perhaps it would be better," replied Julie, "for I fear you are too hasty, Francis."

As he proposed so he acted, and half an hour before the arrival of the intendant he rode out into the country, thinking the sights that at every step present themselves to the eye in that part of France, might soothe, or, at least, occupy his mind. But Francis de Langy was mistaken; it needs a double sunshine to make the face of nature look beautiful to man's eyes—the sunshine of the heart as well as the sunshine of the sky.

In the mean while, as the clock struck the hour he had appointed, Monsieur de L——, with his calm, deliberate step, and smooth, grave air, entered the house which had been taken by Madame d'Artonne, and was introduced into the room where she and Julie sat alone. After the first words, of course, were spoken, and a slight pause had taken place, he said, address-

ing the countess, "I grieve, my dear madam, inexpressibly, that you should be subjected to so much anxiety and grief; and, indeed, I take a personal interest in that which presses upon you at present, for I very much fear that some words which I accidentally spoke to Mademoiselle d'Artonne may have had a share in bringing back Monsieur d'Artonne to France, while events, over which I have had no control, have prevented those words from being verified."

"It was, indeed, those words, sir," said the countess, gravely, "which induced my husband to return, and we have been deeply surprised and mortified to find ourselves so much deceived."

"I should be as much or more," said Monsieur de L——, "if I had had any share in this sad affair; and I can assure you I laboured most assiduously to change the determination of the crown, and to obtain permission for the count to remain at liberty. It appears, however, that some additional evidence has been obtained in regard to this business, and all I could say was unavailable. Nevertheless, I still think the count has done the very best thing that he could in returning to France, and I trust my presence may be of some avail in mitigating the measures against him."

"Much do they need mitigation, indeed," said the countess, "for I cannot but feel that they have been unnecessarily severe."

"I trust not, I trust not," repeated Monsieur de L——, with an appearance of grief. "What has been done, my dear madam, to make you judge so? The gentleman who succeeded me does, indeed, bear the reputation of being somewhat strict, but he always acts according to law, and would not go, I am sure, beyond the exact line of duty. What has been done? pray, what has been done?"

"Simply, sir," replied the countess, "that my husband, notwithstanding the previous examination by yourself, is placed, I understand, in solitary confinement, and all his family are denied admission to him; nor can even his advocates, or people of the law, obtain leave to speak with him."

"He is, in fact, *au secret*, my dear madam," replied Monsieur de L——, in a calm, businesslike tone. "This is what happens to every prisoner accused of a serious crime; but after a time, when the case has been fully entered into, Monsieur d'Artonne will be permitted to see his lawyers, and, probably, his family. A wife, indeed, is sometimes allowed, under such circumstances as exist, to see her husband for a few minutes in the presence of one of the jailers, but, of course, she must be alone. No two persons, and, indeed, none but a wife, can expect such an indulgence."

"Indeed!" cried Madame d'Artonne, eagerly. "Do you think that there is any chance of my being admitted, if I go alone?"

"I think I can assure that for you," said Monsieur de L——. "If you will do me the honour of accepting my arm to the house of the intendant, I will do my best to obtain an order for your admission."

"Instantly, instantly!" cried the countess, starting up: "I will be with you in a moment;" and she ran to prepare for going out.

Monsieur de L—— remained almost in silence, merely saying a few words to Julie expressive of kind feeling for her father's situation, and hope that he would be able to establish his innocence. The countess returned after an absence of scarcely two minutes, and Monsieur de L—— conducted her to the house of the intendant, where he left her in a small anteroom for about a quarter of an hour, while he proceeded to "use his utmost eloquence," he said, in order to procure her the indulgence she desired. She could hear, as she sat waiting anxiously for the result, the soft and mellifluous voice of Monsieur de L——, and the somewhat rude and abrupt tones of his successor in office. At length the latter was heard to burst into a laugh, which wrung the heart of poor Madame d'Artonne, who said to herself, "He mocks me and my anxiety." But the moment after Monsieur de L—— returned with a paper in his hand, and a look of satisfaction on his countenance.

"Here is the order," he said, "and I will accompany you to the gates of the prison, to see that there be no obstruction."

Madame d'Artonne thanked him a thousand times, and as they walked onward he continued, "Pray assure the count of my great anxiety to serve him. Should I be here when his close confinement is at an end, before his trial, I will see him and consult with him on what is to be done. But, in the mean time, ask him if he can point out any way in which I can be of service to him; and remember, though I have no longer any official power in this province, my influence is still not inconsiderable. I will go and stay with Mademoiselle d'Artonne till you return. They will not allow you to remain long, and you can then tell me what the count says."

Madame d'Artonne made no objection, for at that moment her whole thoughts were occupied with her husband; and the moment Monsieur de L—— had left her at the gates of the prison, he hurried back to spend the intervening time with Julie—an object but for which it is probable no order for Madame d'Artonne's admission would have been obtained.

Julie d'Artonne was much surprised to see him re-enter the room in which she sat, and a feeling of anxious alarm, at she knew not what, came over her; but Monsieur de L—— explained to her calmly what he was pleased to call the object of his return, and the real object he proceeded to execute.

"Pray, Mademoiselle d'Artonne," he said, after a few words on other subjects, "may I ask if you have informed your mother of the conversation which took place between yourself and me in the park of St. Medard?"

"I did, sir," replied Julie; "I always tell my mother everything I think important."

"Indeed!" said her companion, musing. "I had almost fancied not," he added, after a few minutes.

"Why so?" demanded Julie. "I am not aware, sir, that I have done anything that should make you doubt my sincerity towards my mother, or my confidence in her."

"Not at all, my dear young lady, not at all," replied Monsieur de L——; "but I thought you might not have told her on this occasion, simply from the fact of her saying nothing to me of

ipal subject of our conversation. I
y conceive a young lady," he contin-
ssessed with a romantic passion, and
herself bound in honour to follow a
course, resolving to adhere to her
however little they may be really
ınd to sacrifice even her father's life
ın break them. But I can hardly un-
a mother neglecting to urge her strong-
ıe subject, and not representing to her
y and a just view of her obligations
ıuce her to do."
ad remained silent in astonishment,
he paused, she exclaimed, "Sacrifice
r's life, did you say, sir? Surely you
old me that he was likely, most likely,
ıitted by his judges."
facts have since transpired," said
de L——, thoughtfully, "and I scarce-
ıcourage such hopes at present. I fear
is an unfortunate one."
ıo, no!" cried Julie: "they can never
him. Did I not see, did I not know—"
ed abruptly, the colour came into her
d she covered her eyes with her hands,
fter a moment or two, "They will not
my father, I am sure."
ıe not," replied the intendant, "but it
your while to consider that, if they do,
ın be too late. As sure as he is con-
he count dies. I know the king's reso-
ın such subjects; once the case pro-
the punishment is inevitable. Your de-
ıst be made, Mademoiselle d'Artonne,
ur father's trial."
sir!" replied Julie, "my decision is
have bound myself by vows that can-
oken."
will this cruel young man," said Mon-
L——, "compel your observance of
ch may cost your father's life?"
ıever might be his feelings, sir," re-
ə, "those vows were sanctioned, nay,
ed, by my father. His very last in-
to me before he made his escape
bserve them under any circumstances,
risks. He seems absolutely to have
what has happened; and he himself
promise of me, upon no consideration
er to give my hand to any but Francis
"
atouches," said Monsieur de L——;
proceeded, in the same unmoved tone,
Pray, Mademoiselle d'Artonne, did
our father's return, communicate to
I told you? Did you explain to him
ər I received from the king on my
ı for an order to suspend proceed-

not time," said Julie; "he arrived in
ıg—he was arrested before I saw him
ıorning."
ry flush passed across Monsieur de
ow, and he muttered to himself, "Too
ə replied, however, the next moment,
Your father will, of course, set you
such engagements immediately, and

k not, sir," replied Julie; "my belief
y father did foresee something like
ı has occurred, and that he made up
ə the result. At all events, there is
no use in inquiring what I might do, till my father has himself seen and told me his own wishes. You assure me that I shall have the opportunity of seeing him before his trial?"

"I hope and trust so," replied the minister; "but, at all events, he can write. I will take care that he has the means of writing to you."

"That will not be sufficient," said Julie d'Artonne. "I must see him and speak with him; I must hear him, from his lips, revoke all that he had said."

"And then," exclaimed Monsieur de L——, "then, if he do revoke his injunctions, and tell you to consider such vows as air, then do you promise?"

"No," said Julie, "no! I promise nothing, for I have no power to promise anything till I am wholly and voluntarily set free. I should look upon my vow as half broken already, if I were to make any engagement founded upon the prospect of its being dissolved."

She could see the minister's right hand clasped tight upon the arm of the chair in which he was sitting, but not the slightest emotion was visible upon his countenance; and, ere he could reply, Madame d'Artonne entered.

"They have given me but five minutes," said the countess: "poor five minutes; and yet it is a great consolation."

"It must be, indeed, madam," said the minister, in an unembarrassed tone; "and I trust, ere many days be over, to be able to procure the same satisfaction for Mademoiselle d'Artonne; as I think it absolutely necessary, for her future repose of mind and for her father's safety, that she should be permitted to see him. For the present, I will bid you adieu!" and, thus saying, he retired.

The countess turned, as soon as he was gone, to ask her daughter what his last words meant, but Julie had fled to her chamber to weep.

CHAPTER XLIX.

For nearly three weeks after the period of Monsieur de L——'s visit, the family of the Count d'Artonne were refused permission to see him. The minister was absent in another part of Auvergne, and the count was still kept in solitary confinement. During that period, however, the grief and anxiety of Julie d'Artonne, great as it was on her father's account at first, had been increased a thousand-fold by the terrible alternative that Monsieur de L—— had put before her. No language can describe what she underwent, as, day by day, and night after night, the same fearful idea presented itself to her mind, that upon her might depend her father's life; that she might be called upon either to see him die by a death of public shame, or to break her most solemn engagements to a man whom she deeply and truly loved, and give her hand to one whom she shrunk from with dislike and dread. She felt that it was not right to conceal from Francis de Langy what had taken place between herself and the intendant; but still she shrunk from telling him from day to day, ever hoping that something might occur to remove the painful difficulty under which she laboured, and still resolving to perform the

task before she was permitted to see her father. Nor was the heart of her lover much more at ease; for Julie had told him, on his return, that she had much to say to him, but could not tell it then; and each day that passed he saw her cheek growing paler, her eye more anxious, while the struggle in her mind wore away her youthful beauty, "like a moth fretting a garment."

Nor did Julie tell her mother, though the countess inquired what had been her conversation with Monsieur de L—— during her absence. "Forgive me if I do not tell you, my dear mother," she said, anxious to escape any aggravation of feelings already too bitter; "you shall hear all after I have seen my father." But it seemed as if that hour was never to come; and, day after day, they applied for admission, which was always refused.

At length, on their return one day, they found that Monsieur de L—— had called during their absence, and to him the countess determined to apply. Her application was not in vain; for the very next day the prohibition was removed, and it was notified to the count that within certain hours he might see his family and friends, and consult with his advocates at all times. Julie now felt that she could no longer delay communicating to Francis de Langy all that had been weighing upon her heart for the last three weeks, and she told him the whole with many a tear, and many an assurance of unabated affection and tenderness.

Francis heard her in silence, grieved, agitated, but indignant. "Is it possible, Julie," he said, when she had done, "is it possible that you do not see the plan of this villain? Do you not perceive how he first induced you to aid in persuading your father to return, in order that he might get him and you into his power; that by the father's danger he might work upon the daughter? Do you not see how he broke his word with you, and had your father instantly arrested, in order that he might make the daughter's hand the price of the father's life? And even now, Julie—even now, perhaps, he is still deceiving you. Perhaps the very sacrifice itself, could Julie d'Artonne make up her mind to wed such a monster as this—perhaps the very sacrifice itself, I say, would not attain the object that you seek; and that your peace of mind would be destroyed forever without even securing your father's life. But can you, Julie, can you dream of violating your promises to me, and uniting yourself to a man whom, even while you promise to love and honour him, you must hate and despise? I will never believe that your father can wish, or even permit, such a sacrifice. Ask him, Julie—ask the count himself, now that the doors of his prison are open to you, and by his decision will I abide. But tell him, dear Julie, tell him all you feel—tell him that you see and know that this man has betrayed him—has lured him back again with false hopes; and, moreover, tell him also that I have doubts—many, many doubts of the promise which he says the king has made him. I do not believe—I think it another falsehood springing from his own black heart."

"But the letter, Francis, the letter which he showed me," said Julie.

"That letter," replied Francis de Langy, "might mean many things. If you have told me the contents correctly, dear Julie, a letter precisely similar—I believe, word for word the same—was sent to my father. It, too, said that the king would not interfere except under the circumstances before mentioned. But what were those circumstances? As my father explained the letter to me, they were, that your father should be able to prove that he killed his adversary only in his own defence. I do not believe this man's tale, Julie; it seems to me absurd and incredible. But, as I have said, let the count judge for himself. I will not accompany you to him; tell him all, Julie, and I will see him afterward."

"You blame me, Francis," said Julie, looking sadly in his face; "you think I do not love you; but, oh! you do not know what a terrible thing it is for a daughter to be told that she must either sacrifice him she loves best on earth, or cast away her father's last hope of life."

"Nay, Julie," cried Francis de Langy, pressing her to his bosom, "I do not blame you, I do not doubt your love, but I see that you have still some trust in this man, and I have none, none in the world. I believe him to be a villain to the very core; I think he is even now deceiving you, and that you will repent having trusted him, even in the smallest degree, most bitterly, though, perhaps, too late. But go to your father, dear Julie; I hear the countess calling for you. Remember that this is not his only chance of life, for as yet we cannot judge whether he will be condemned; and if acquitted, how much more honourable, how much more satisfactory must it be to himself than to owe his life to favour, purchased by the sacrifice of his child?"

As he spoke Madame d'Artonne called again, and Julie hastened down to accompany her to the prison. Francis de Langy betook himself to the room of the Abbé Arnoux, and waited for nearly two hours in a state of anxious suspense indescribable. At length the countess and her daughter returned, and a quick foot was instantly heard upon the stairs. Julie came up rapidly towards the abbé's room, and Francis de Langy's heart beat high, for he was sure that Julie would not bring tidings calculated to crush all his hopes and affections with so quick a step as that. He opened the door just as she was knocking, and the moment he did so she cast herself into his arms. "He has decided, Francis," she said, "he has decided. Thank you, dear Francis, for leaving him the choice. He will stand his trial, he says, whatever comes of it, and I am now yours forever."

Julie wept, but her tears were calmer and gentler than they had been before, and the good abbé, taking her by the hand, led her to a chair, saying, "Sit down, my dear child, and tell us how this matter has gone, for Francis, here, has been relating to me the painful circumstances in which Monsieur de L—— has placed you. It was not right of him at all; it is grossly immoral and wicked to make that which should be decided simply by the principles of justice and equity depend in any way upon favour. I am sure the count thinks so too; but tell us how it all went."

"On going to the prison with my mother,"

said Julie, "I found they would admit us to my father's cell only one at a time, so I had to wait till she came out. As soon as I saw him I told him all, and for a time he seemed much moved, and doubtful. However, I concealed nothing from him, as I had promised you, Francis. I told him all my own feelings, all yours, all you had said, all you suspected, and he, like you, doubted the sincerity of Monsieur de L——. He said that it was evident he had been entrapped for the minister's own purposes, and he doubted much whether he would and could keep faith in regard to the immediate pardon. He said the tale was improbable, and scarcely to be believed. But at the same time he seemed to derive hope, in regard to the issue of his trial, from the very eagerness with which Monsieur de L—— pressed his suit. 'It is the estates of Artonne that he seeks,' my father said, 'and those he could not possess if I were destined to die by the hands of the executioner, for then those estates would be forfeited.' After a little time, however," continued Julie, "he thought he would make a trial of Monsieur de L——, and for that purpose sent me to him. My mother went with me, though I was to speak to him alone; and when I saw him, I asked him in my father's name if he would put a pledge in writing to obtain an order for the supersedure of all proceedings against my father if I gave him my hand. He would not consent, however; he said it might be used against him; that it might ruin him forever with the king; but he told me that he would pledge his word, that he would take his oath, and that was surely all that Monsieur d'Artonne could desire. He added a great many soft words and kind assurances; but I only replied that I would tell my father what he said, and left him. When I did tell my father, he said it was very evident the man was trying to deceive us; but that even before I came back he had made up his mind. 'I will never hear of this matter again, Julie,' he said; 'it is too hard for me and for you. I will stand my trial, whatever come of it; and, let the result be what it may, you are the wife of Francis de Langy.' He turned away his head as he spoke," she added, "and gazed out of the window as if he saw something in the sky, and then he said, slowly but firmly, 'No, Julie, no! I am fixed and determined. If I were told by the tongue of an angel that death would be the end of the trial which is now approaching, I would not consent to avoid that result by marrying you to a man who could play such a juggle between a father and a child. Give your hand where your heart is given, my love, and where you are bound by vows you shall not break for me.' Francis," she went on, putting her hand in his as he stood beside her, "you will forgive me when I tell you, that I then knelt down before my father and told him that you had said you would abide by his decision; that I was sure you would not reproach me; that if he, in his heart, thought his life could be saved by any sacrifice of mine, I was ready to make it; that it would be but a short endurance; for that, tied to a being whom I hated, the struggle would not long endure, and Julie d'Artonne would soon be but a thing that had been. I told him I knew he would not consent to sacrifice my life merely to save his own, but that there was more to be obtained if I could save him from the ignominy and shame of a condemnation and a death for crime. But he would not hear of it, Francis; he kissed me tenderly and often, and thanked me very much, but he said, 'No, Julie, no! I have learned to look better on these things than was once the case. The good Abbé Arnoux, in a long conversation that once we had, showed me how far to estimate the opinions of men. If your own conscience goes with them, approving their censure or their praises, men's judgment of your actions may be valuable in your eyes, as the voice of a world in which we live. But where our own conscience exculpates or blames in opposition to their decree, its decision must be paramount as the voice of a world to which we go. Nevertheless,' he added, 'I do not feel afraid, Julie; something tells me I shall not be condemned. My own conscience acquits me, and I do trust and believe that God, even in this world, will defend the right. Send Francis de Langy to me, my dear child,' he said, and 'remember that you keep unbroken your vows to him by your duty towards me.'"

"I will go to him at once," said Francis de Langy. "I believe, Julie, that he has judged wisely, both for his own sake and for our happiness."

After a few words such as a lover may be supposed to speak from the heart's fulness under such circumstances, and her he loves to hear with pleasure and with pride, Francis de Langy left Julie with the good Abbé Arnoux, reasoning to her from those abstract principles which, framed in the closet, seldom fit the heart of any creatures of this busy world, and, speeding on to the prison, he was without difficulty admitted to the Count d'Artonne.

He found him in an upper story, and in one of those small chambers called *cabanons*, where persons confined upon serious charges were detained, without being suffered to mingle with the great herd of common culprits in the yard. Monsieur d'Artonne was looking more cheerful than his young friend had expected to find him, and very much less depressed than when he had visited him in confinement in the Chateau d'Artonne. Custom does wonders in these respects; and, indeed, the permission which had been given him to see his family and friends, after three weeks of solitude, had raised his spirits and inspired him with new hopes.

"Ah, Francis!" he exclaimed, grasping his hand as soon as he saw him, "welcome, welcome, my dear young gentleman. I have been strangely tempted since I saw you, Francis, but I have not yielded to the temptation. We have been deceived, my good youth, by this Monsieur de L——. He has lured me back to my destruction, hoping to wring from me my consent to Julie's marriage with him, but he has not succeeded."

"Do you think, my dear sir," said Francis de Langy, seating himself on the edge of the small bed which stood in a corner, for there was but one chair in the room, "do you think that the letter which I so unfortunately sent you, and which, I fear, had some share in bringing you back to France, do you think it also is of his manufacture?"

"No," said the count, "no; and on that let-

ter a great part of the hope which I almost unreasonably entertain of a happy issue to my trial is founded. Tell me, Francis, where is the man that sent it to be met with? I trust you have not lost the clew."

"He was to come to St. Medard," said Francis de Langy, "but I had seen nothing of him up to the time of our departure."

"Good God!" cried the count, "that is unfortunate. He may come there and not know where to find you."

"No, no," said Francis de Langy, "that is impossible; for before I came away I left word with every one of the servants down to the very gamekeepers to tell him, if be came, that I was in Auvergne; that you were arrested and in danger; and, lest he should write, I left orders for all letters to be opened by my uncle's old butler, and any one which could by any means refer to this business, to be sent on by a special messenger post haste. I left money for the expenses, that there might be no delay."

"Like yourself, my dear Francis," said the count, "and yet you have heard of nothing?"

"Nothing," replied Francis de Langy. "I have had various letters of business by the post, referring to the cause between me and this impostor, which is advancing slowly and unfavourably to me, it would seem, but not a word concerning your affairs."

"Unfortunate, unfortunate!" said the count. "Would to God we knew where to find this man! and yet you will think it strange when I tell you, I do not even know his name, or what he is. Of one thing, however, I am sure: he is a sincere friend. He guided and aided me for several days in the mountains; discovered the proceedings of my pursuers, and taught me how to baffle them; and, although I cannot conceive how he acquired his knowledge, he dropped hints regarding things which I thought no eye but my own had seen, which alarmed and agitated me at the time, but which give me hope even now."

"Good Heavens!" cried Francis de Langy, "would it not be worth while for me to go to Paris, and see if I can discover him by means of the people at whose house he lodged?"

The count shook his head. "Some common cabaret," he said: "the time, too, is short; the trial, they say, will come on in a fortnight from this day. I might put it off, the advocates tell me, for three or four days more, but I am impatient of this durance, and wish it to be brought to an end as soon as possible. Uncertainty is worse than death, Francis—far, far. Death I have faced a thousand times when I was young, and a soldier, and I fear it not now. No, though it take the most terrible form that death can take to an honourable man. But one thing I do fear, Francis," he added, in a low and tremulous voice; "I fear the terrible consequences of such a death to my poor wife and child. Remember, that the condemned criminal here in France, according to our terrible and iniquitous laws, carries the shame and the punishment also to his innocent family. That, if I fall in this affair, Julie will be pointed at and marked as the child of a murderer—her rank, her name, her station, will be gone. She will have nothing, Francis, nothing but her beauty, her innocence, her excellence, to bring you. Will you still love her, Francis? Will you never, even with a thought, contemn her?"

"I will love her, cherish her, console her, worship her, to my dying day," said Francis de Langy.

"Well, then," said the count, "I shall not fear death. What is it?" he continued, turning to one of the jailers, who entered the cell at that moment. "I thought I was to be permitted to see my friends without interruption till five o'clock?"

"It is only this letter, sir," said the jailer, "which has come post haste from the north, for Monsieur de Langy here. Madame d'Artonne has sent it up, as it came by a special messenger from St. Medard, she says; and as I thought it might be important—"

"Thank you, thank you, my friend," cried the count, eagerly. "What is it, Francis?"

"But a few words," said Francis de Langy, with a glad smile; "but they will take me to Paris immediately. This must be from our friend. Hear what he says: 'If Monsieur le Count de Langy will come up to his father's house any time after four days from the receipt of this, he will meet some one whom he will be glad to see, and receive intelligence which will make him very happy.'" "Adieu, Monsieur d'Artonne, adieu," continued Francis, holding out his hand to him. "Within an hour I will be upon a horse's back posting away to Paris."

A difficulty which Francis de Langy had not foreseen, for he had never yet been exposed to any of the painful privations of poverty, had wellnigh delayed his journey. The money which he had brought with him, and which he calculated would last till he received new remittances from Paris, was now nearly exhausted. He knew that the pittance which was allowed to Madame d'Artonne was not more than sufficient for the daily wants before her; and, as he turned his steps homeward meditating on what was to be done, he felt that chilling sensation which almost all men must have known, from kings and statesmen down to the lowest grade, when they find great and important purposes frustrated by the want of the earthly means of carrying them into execution.

"What can be done?" thought Francis de Langy. "I must not consult with Madame d'Artonne, for she would only stint herself, and, perhaps, fall into serious discomfort. I must speak with the Abbé Arnoux."

The abbé was accordingly spoken with, but the good man could give little or no aid; for, satisfied with the annuity which was charged upon the estates of St. Medard, almost everything that he received was given away in charity. After a moment's thought, however, he exclaimed, "Stay, stay, my dear Francis, I will get you the money;" and opening a little cabinet, he took out a gold bonbonnière of considerable size, gazed at it for a moment, and then walking to the door, exclaimed, "Louise! Louise Pelet!"

Louise came trotting down the stairs in a moment, and he whispered a few words to her.

"What are you going to sell that for?" cried Louise, in her abrupt way. "Nonsense, Monsieur Arnoux, I have heard you say that was your mother's."

"Hush, hush!" said Monsieur Arnoux, point-

ing to Francis de Langy, "it is for him. He wants to go to Paris directly, and there is not money."

"Now, good Heaven," cried Louise, "that is too bad! If you want money, Monsieur Francois, why don't you come to me? I am as rich as Croesus;" and away she ran without waiting for a reply, bringing down a small rouleau of Louis d'ors, amounting to about forty.

"I shall not want all these, my good Louise," said Francis de Langy.

"Take them, take them," cried Louise, "you can never have too much upon a journey;" and away she ran, which was, indeed, her usual way of bringing a conversation to an end.

Horses were immediately sent for; a farewell taken of Madame d'Artonne and Julie; and, with fresh hopes in his own bosom, and leaving fresh hopes behind him, Francis de Langy was soon galloping, as hard as he could go, towards Paris, the postillion by his side.

CHAPTER L.

During three days and three nights Francis de Langy never reposed for more than three hours at a time, and during part of his long and anxious ride to Paris he had to encounter storms of wind and rain, which added greatly to his fatigue. The sun had set about an hour before he passed the gates of the capital, and the *porte-cochère* of his father's gate was closed when he arrived. As soon, however, as the Swiss appeared to open it for him, Francis inquired if any body had been lately there asking for him; but to his surprise the man replied, "Nobody, sir, at all, but the young Count de Nesle."

Dismounting from his horse in the courtyard, he paid the postillion who was with him, while the servants who had come out, ran in to announce his arrival, and another held a lamp to light him up to the countess's saloon. Stiff and weary, and fearing that he had been brought from Auvergne for no purpose, Francis mounted the stairs with a slow and heavy step, intending to retire to rest after a very brief interview with his father and mother. As he approached the door, however, which a servant held open, he perceived that they were not alone; but as he entered he paused suddenly, struck and overwhelmed with equal joy and astonishment, as, rising from a seat between the marquis and marchioness, his first, kind, best of friends, Monsieur de St. Medard, held out his arms towards him. The young man sprang into them with emotions which for several minutes took away all power of speech, and the care, attention, and kindness, which the viscount had bestowed upon his youth were all well repaid at that moment by the heartfelt, inexpressible joy which he beheld in his adopted son.

"Then the letter was from you! the letter was from you!" cried Francis de Langy, as soon as he could speak.

"It was from me, though not written by myself, Francis," said the viscount, holding up his right arm, which appeared dismembered of the hand. "I have had a little loss since I saw you, my poor boy, and I have not learned to write with my left yet."

"But the shipwreck, the shipwreck!" cried Francis de Langy.

"It is all very true," replied the viscount; "the poor Thetis went down, and I am one of nineteen who were saved. Many a gallant fellow there found his grave, and I should have been lost too, but they put me into the smaller boat with the captain, and the last who left the vessel, for by that time I could not help myself, my hand being already crushed when the mainmast fell; and for three days and three nights we were upon the stormy sea, with nothing but that frail, thin plank between us and destruction. At length we were picked up by an English frigate; but I will tell you all the rest hereafter, Francis. Let me hear something of the Count d'Artonne. But you are fatigued, my dear boy; you seem exhausted."

"I am indeed," said Francis de Langy, "for I quitted Clermont only on Tuesday last, and have ridden post hither with little or no sleep; and yet, my dear uncle, I must lose no time in speaking to you about Monsieur d'Artonne. Indeed, you must do your best to save him."

"I will, I will," said the viscount, earnestly. "But come, Francis, one word to your parents, and then to bed, for you look perfectly exhausted. I will talk with you while you are undressing."

"His clothes, too, are dripping," cried the marchioness.

"He had better take some warm wine," said the marquis, "before he goes to bed;" and, glad of an opportunity of showing kindness and attention where their hearts told them that their conduct lately had been somewhat different, Monsieur and Madame de Langy showered all sorts of little cares upon their son, while Monsieur de St. Medard stood gravely by, feeling more deep affection, though making less display of it.

"I will go to bed, my dear uncle," said Francis, as soon as they were alone, "because I believe that to lie down will be the best thing for me; but I know I shall not be able to sleep till I have told you all which has occurred since you went, and ask your help and counsel."

"You shall do as you like, my dear boy," replied Monsieur de St. Medard," for I know that nothing is so oppressive to the body as an overloaded mind. I will stay beside you till you are inclined to sleep. I know that you have suffered much in many ways, and have borne it well; and I will do my best, Francis, to remove such difficulties and distresses from your future path."

Casting off his clothes and lying down, then, Francis de Langy related to his uncle all that had taken place from the time of his departure for Pondicherry, about eleven months before. He touched but lightly, indeed, upon the long and tedious suit that was still going on regarding the inheritance of De Langy, and still more lightly upon the difficulties to which he had been exposed, and those with which he had been threatened in consequence of some of Monsieur de St. Medard's arrangements having been left incomplete. Of the conduct of the Marquis and Marchioness de Langy, of the favour which they had shown a stranger who claimed their inheritance, of the encouragement which they had given to his demands, Francis said nothing at all; but on the history of Monsieur d'Artonne,

on his escape from prison, his flight to England, his recapture, and his situation at the time, he spoke much and eagerly. He dwelt, too, at large on all that had occurred to Julie d'Artonne, and especially on the conduct of Monsieur de L——, all the particulars of which he detailed truly and accurately, though his own comments might, perhaps, be tinged by prejudice and passion; and he ended by beseeching the viscount to intercede for the Count d'Artonne with the king, and also, if possible, to obtain the pardon of poor Jean Marais.

Monsieur de St. Medard heard him to an end calmly and almost in silence, merely stopping him from time to time to ask a question, and then suffering him to go on without comment. At length, when he ended, Monsieur shook his head gravely, saying, "I fear, my dear Francis, my intercession will be in vain. I have certainly served the king successfully. In the space of one fortnight, which I spent at Pondicherry, I have regulated the affairs for which I was sent, quieted the dissensions which existed among the officers of the crown in that place, and by a little firmness, perhaps a little severity, have taught them that they are there for the service of the state, not for their own aggrandizement. Any reward for myself I had long ago determined neither to seek nor to accept, but I will zealously plead the cause of the Count d'Artonne. Nevertheless, I fear the king will remain firm; he is not easily to be shaken upon such subjects, and all that I can hope is, that something will appear at the count's trial either to prove him perfectly innocent, or to make a favourable impression on his judges. As for this Monsieur de L——, however, though it is dangerous in this country to attack a minister high in favour and power, I will certainly give the clearest account of his conduct to his majesty; for taking your representations, as I do, to be perfectly accurate, nothing can be more scandalous, more unjust, I might almost say more treasonable, than the use he has made of the king's name, and his conduct altogether. There are few who will venture to break through ordinary rules and etiquettes in order to bring truth to the ear of the sovereign, but I believe he who does so serves him better than the soldier in the field or the statesman in the cabinet. I may well plead for the count, too, for he is an old and a dear friend, between whom and myself not even rivalry in love could make a breach. I will see the king to-morrow morning without fail, and as soon as I have offered my petition and received my reply, I will return with you to Auvergne, and be present at this trial. Friends are too apt to fall away from us at such moments, Francis, and countenance and support to a man at such a moment is worth all the rest we can do for him through life. Now I will leave you to sleep: good-by for the present;" and after pausing for a moment, as if half inclined to say something more, the viscount once more bade him good-night and left him.

"I will tell him to-morrow," said the viscount to himself when he had closed the door. "He was wrong, certainly very wrong, to take such a part in D'Artonne's flight. The laws of our country are the first things we should consider." He paused, looked upward with a placid smile, and added, bowing his head, "Except the laws of God!"

When Francis de Langy rose on the following morning, still somewhat stiff and weary with his journey, he found that his uncle had already departed for Versailles, whence he did not return till four or five o'clock. In the mean while, the young gentleman visited the small inn, where, as the reader may remember, he had held a conversation with a stranger regarding the Count d'Artonne; but, notwithstanding every effort, he could not discover who that stranger was, or where he was to be found. The people of the house seemed to have no notion to whom he alluded; the landlord thought it was one person, the landlady another, the waiter a third; and Francis de Langy returned disappointed. Anxious, however, to convict Monsieur de L—— of some of the artifices which he suspected him of having committed, he asked the Marquis de Langy if he still possessed the letter which he received from the king in answer to his application respecting the Count d'Artonne. The marquis had luckily preserved it, and at his request gave it to him; and Francis de Langy, on reading it over, found that the words were precisely those of the epistle which had been shown to Julie.

On the return of Monsieur de St. Medard, he met his adopted son with a grave countenance, and taking a paper from a number which he held in his hand, he gave it to Francis, saying, "There, my dear boy, I have obtained that for your friend, Jean Marais; but I have promised the king, at the same time, to speak to you most seriously on the impropriety of aiding a prisoner in his escape, under any circumstances. The laws of our country are imperative upon us all as citizens; and if individuals were to think themselves justified in breaking those laws, either when they do not exactly approve of the manner of their execution, or even feel them to be hard in a particular case, the only framework of society would soon be dissolved. Pray do not reply, Francis, for, depend upon it, you have done wrong, although your participation in Monsieur d'Artonne's escape cannot be proved so as to subject you to punishment. The king, however, is perfectly aware of the fact; and he showed his clemency and sense of justice remarkably when he signed Jean Marais's pardon, saying, 'I do this, Monsieur de St. Medard, because I believe the man acted under the influence of his master.'

"'And I beg that your majesty will pardon the master also,' I replied, 'for he acted under the influence of love, who was his master for the moment.'

"You must keep the pardon, however," he continued, "till our good friend Jean can be found; for it seems he has made his escape from L'Orient, and no one knows where he now is."

"But, Monsieur d'Artonne!" exclaimed Francis; "what did the king say of Monsieur d'Artonne?"

The viscount shook his head, and replied, "All that the king could be induced to say was, 'that nothing would induce him to pervert the course of justice. Monsieur d'Artonne must abide his trial,' he said. 'If he be declared guilty, his sentence will not be executed till I have had read all the papers: his case will then have the most favourable consideration; and the high testimony which some of my best and most

faithful subjects have borne to his honour, his kindness of heart, and his benevolence, will, of course, be taken into account in his favour. But I warn you, Monsieur de St. Medard, that I have solemnly pledged myself never to pass over any more of these duels which have so frequently taken place under the name of chance encounters. I therefore trust that, if Monsieur d'Artonne did really and truly kill this unfortunate young man, he will be able to prove that it was in his own defence, otherwise it will go hard with him; for I will not interfere.'

"As you may easily conceive, Francis," continued the viscount, "I could say no more; and all that can now be done is for us to go down, as soon as you are able for the journey, in order to watch the progress of events in Auvergne."

"Oh, I am ready now!" exclaimed Francis de Langy; "let us not wait a moment on my account, my dear uncle."

"Nay, nay, Francis," replied the viscount, "there is no need of such haste, if, as you tell me, the trial will not come on for a fortnight; besides, I have papers to sign to-morrow. I will not quit Paris again without putting your succession to the estates of St. Medard beyond all doubt or question."

With all the eager impatience of youth, Francis de Langy would fain have besought his uncle to postpone all such arrangements till the more important business, in his eyes, of the count's trial was over. But Monsieur de St. Medard would not give way; and it was not till after a day's interval that the viscount and his nephew were once more upon the road to Auvergne. We will not pause to give even a summary of the conversation which took place day by day between the old and young traveller, as they rolled on upon the road which they had first travelled together some fifteen months before. It may easily be conceived that there was still much to be told on both sides, still much to be discussed between them; and the first day passed almost entirely in conversation, with very few intervals of meditation. Both were grave, for the object of their journey was of too painful a nature to admit of anything approaching even to cheerfulness to enter into the mood of either. But as they came near Auvergne, the viscount seemed to find great delight in the beauty of the scenery, and to point out to his young companion the richness of some parts, and the picturesque splendour of others. The weather had now become fine, and though there was a shade of autumn in the fields and on the trees, the fair land through which they went never, perhaps, looked fairer. But Francis could take no pleasure in the scenery: the cloud of anxiety that overshadowed his mind hid its beauty from his eyes; and he replied to Monsieur de St. Medard, when he was pointing out to him some object of interest, "Alas! my dear uncle, I feel sadly changed since first I passed through this very country. I can no longer look upon it with the same eyes; I can no longer feel in it the same delight."

"I, too, am changed, my dear Francis," replied his uncle; "and much as I ever admired the beauties of nature, I now find in them new enjoyment which I never found before. Do you know the cause of this alteration in you and me, Francis? With you it is that you have taken a step forward, and the breath of manhood's cares and manhood's anxieties have dimmed the glass with which you see the world. I, too, have taken a step forward; but in so doing I have had a veil torn from my eyes, and in all the works of Nature I see the hand of God. Thus it is that these scenes appear to me with as much freshness as they did to you in the spring of last year. Do not let your anxiety weary you, however, my dear boy; in six or seven hours we shall be at Riom. But what have we here? Oh! a wagon-load of convicts. Thus it is that man mars God's beautiful landscape. Man's doings, man's doings, they are the great blot in the wonderful creation!"

As he spoke they passed a long open cart, with two ranges of convicts back to back, united by a chain down the middle, and with their legs hanging over the side. Some of the agents of police were mounted in the front, and five or six Ardouins, or guards, were trudging along by the wagon, while one of the officers, after turning back his head to say something to one of the prisoners, sprang across the bench on which he was seated, and struck him brutally and repeatedly over the head with a stick. Almost at the same instant Francis leaned forward, and, putting his head out of the window, called loudly to the postillions to stop.

"What is the matter, Francis? what is the matter? You must not interfere."

"It is our own poor friend, Jean Marais himself!" exclaimed Francis, jumping out of the carriage: "I saw his face distinctly as we passed."

"Oh! then we must set him free," exclaimed Monsieur de St. Medard; and, waiting till the wagon came slowly up, he also got out of the carriage, and called to the captain of the chain to stop.

A volley of abuse, folly, blasphemy, and ribaldry was instantly poured upon the two gentlemen from the tenants of the wagon; and poor Jean Marais himself, though he saw who were the persons speaking to the officer, did not venture even to appear to recognise them, from a dread of his ferocious companions.

Not a few difficulties were made by the captain of the chain before he would set Jean Marais at liberty, although the terms of the pardon were precise. He said that he was bound to take the prisoner to the Bagne, and that the pardon must be directed to the captain of the galleys. Monsieur de St. Medard showed him that the pardon distinctly ordered all the king's officers to set the person named Jean Marais at liberty wherever he was found, and not to detain or molest him upon any pretence, the monarch supposing at the time that he had not been recaptured. Still there was some opposition, and one would have supposed, from the obstinacy with which the man held out, that he took a real pleasure in the detention of each of his unfortunate gang. A severe menace, however, on the part of the viscount, accompanied by the announcement of his name and station, at length produced the consent of the captain of the chain. But it was necessary to proceed to the next village before poor Jean Marais could be freed from his fetters. He did not go thither, indeed, without risk; for his worthy companions, though willing on all occasions to aid a fellow-convict

in making his escape from justice by any stroke of art or cunning device, loved not to be separated from him in a legitimate manner, and felt some inclination to dash his brains out rather than suffer him to take advantage of his pardon. At length, however, the village was reached, the carriage of the viscount proceeding slowly after the wagon; the chain was knocked off the neck of the unfortunate prisoner, and, starting away free, his first impulse was to turn towards the lieutenant of the chain, and to shake his clinched fist at him, exclaiming, "If ever I meet thee, man to man, I'll not leave an inch of white skin about thee." A loud shout of approval burst from the convicts, and the wagon rolled on, the lieutenant replying with a mocking laugh, and telling him to take care of his *sorbonne*, meaning thereby his head.

Jean Marais next gave way to his joy and to his gratitude, displaying both with a liveliness and eagerness which none but a Frenchman could exhibit. He was evidently very weak, however, from bad treatment and want of proper food, and, giving him a couple of Louis, the viscount told him to take a night's repose and refreshment at St. Pourzain, and then to follow on to Clermont as fast as possible.

"See what it is to be lucky," cried Jean Marais, who, with true French ingenuity, extracted all that was favourable out of any situation in which he might be placed. "See what it is to be lucky: if I had not been taken back to Bicêtre just as the chain was going off for Toulon, I should have been sent to L'Orient, and been, perhaps, half a year at the Bagne before I was liberated!"

"But how came they to bring you by this road!" asked the viscount; "they ought to have kept to the east of Moulins."

"Because they are all Auvergnats," answered Jean Marais, "and they always take a turn through Limagne. I shan't be long after you, Monsieur le Vicomte," he continued, as the gentlemen got into their carriage again; "but pray, when you get to St. Pourzain, tell the mayor to give me a certificate of my pardon, otherwise I shall soon be trapped again, as that fellow has carried the paper off."

The viscount promised that he would do as he desired while they were changing horses, and, notwithstanding the ragged appearance of poor Jean Marais, would very willingly have taken him along the road with him, had there been any room in the carriage. Such, however, was not the case, and as St. Pourzain was but two miles in advance, the fatigue of walking thither could not be very great. On reaching that village, he sent at once for the mayor, explained briefly the situation of Jean Marais, and, having made the good man promise to furnish Jean immediately with the papers necessary for his safety, he proceeded on his way with Francis de Langy, desiring the postillions to go as quickly as possible, in order to make up for lost time.

CHAPTER LI.

The writing of a romance is like taking a walk with a friend with whom we intend to go on talking of this thing or that which we have laid out before us, discussing some friendly difference of opinion, giving a long account of what has happened since last we met, or in any other stated manner employing our time, without considering the rest of the world in the least degree. Scarcely have we gone a hundred yards, however, when we meet some troublesome fellow who takes us by the button. A little farther on a stranger saunters up and asks us his way. Beyond that, again, another friend meets us with some important news, and, perhaps, a third friend turns round with us and walks to the end of the journey. So that—without taking into consideration all the occasions on which we ourselves stop to gather a flower, or admire a prospect, or to knock down some acorns from the oaks above our heads—we are sure to be interrupted some fifty times in pursuing the original subject of our discourse, and may think ourselves very well off if we get to the end of our story at all.

We have now got Jean Marais upon our hands, dear reader, and, however anxious we may be to go on to Clermont, we must stop with him for a little while, not at all to inquire into the past, but to see what became of him at present. About a quarter of an hour after the carriage of Monsieur de St. Medard had driven away from the door of the inn at St. Pourçain, Jean Marais trudged up, with spirit unbroken, though with somewhat faint and weary limbs. He found the postmaster with his hands behind his back, standing in the attitude of most postmasters, and gazing up and down the road. The recommendation he had received from the viscount procured him a civil reception, notwithstanding his very convict-like appearance; and the mayor, who was sitting in the kitchen, sipping a small measure of the excellent wine of the place, furnished our friend with the necessary papers to enable him to pursue his journey in safety, upon the payment of a small fee. Jean then sat down and spent an hour in eating and drinking, more heartily at his ease than he had done for some months; after which, finding himself not a little refreshed, and with all the renewed vigour of freedom about him, he rose, paid for his food, and declared he would walk on to Le Mayet.

"Why, it is four leagues," said the Auberge postmaster; "if you wait a little, there's a cart going to Gaunat, which will take you for a crown, and that's two leagues farther."

"How long will it be?" said Jean Marais: "I want to get on the road."

"Oh, not above half an hour," replied the master of the inn. "It gets into Gaunat at five o'clock every evening."

This was too tempting an opportunity to be neglected, and Jean Marais very willingly waited for the vehicle, calculating that he should easily find some conveyance of the same kind from Gaunat to Clermont on the following day. The cart was one of the light machines of the country, which in those days supplied the place of a diligence from town to town, and, though poor Jean Marais went somewhat faster than he had done in the wagon with his fellow-convicts, his bones paid for the rapidity of his progress. Gaunat was, however, reached at the end of about three hours and a half, and, stopping at a

small, poor inn, the traveller paid his money to the driver, and prepared to make himself comfortable for the night. In this expectation, as in most of the expectations of mortal man, Jean Marais was destined to be disappointed; for seating himself at a long table where several other travellers had just began their supper, he listened for a while to their conversation, which soon put him into a state of considerable agitation.

The personages who were speaking together had looked upon poor Jean, on taking his place at the table, with a somewhat supercilious air, and had drawn away from him, lowering their tone at the same time, so that the first part of their conversation passed unheard. Very soon, however, the tones rose, and the one said, somewhat vehemently, shaking three of his fingers across the table in the other's face, to give emphasis to what he was saying, "I tell you he will, as sure as I am alive, and serve him right, too; he was always meddling where he had no business. Why did he bring those heretic Bures among us?"

"He did not bring them," replied the other: "they came without his asking."

"Then he should have sent them back again to the Cevennes," rejoined the first. "In former days we should have had them burned or hanged; but we are mighty squeamish about those things now; and then when we had got hold of the son, and could have sent him to the galleys for poaching and stealing game, he must needs interfere and let him off free. But he will pay for it now; I'm sure his condemnation is as certain as that I am sitting here."

"What time does it come on?" asked the other.

"At twelve," said the first. "Can you be there?"

"I shall try," answered his companion. "Will you?"

"Oh yes," said the first: "Monsieur le Baron, I wouldn't be away for a thousand livres."

"I heard a gentleman from Clermont declare," said the landlord, who had been changing some dishes upon the table, "that he was sure to be condemned, for that one of the judges who had interrogated him had been heard to acknowledge that there was no doubt of his guilt. I am very sorry for it, for he was a kind-hearted man."

"You are a fool," said one of the gentlemen at the table, who was one of the small nobility of the province, little better, indeed, than a mere peasant in knowledge or intelligence, but with pride and malevolence enough to make up for all other deficiencies.

"A pretty specimen of a judge!" said Jean Marais, rising from the table. "When does the trial come on, landlord?"

"To-morrow at twelve," replied the landlord, withdrawing a little from the guest who had given him so unpleasant a rebuff; "but what matters it to you, young man? You seem alarmed and moved."

"I am, I am," replied Jean Marais. "Come hither, come hither! Where can I get a horse, my good friend?" he continued: "I must contrive to get beyond Riom to-night."

"I have got no horse," replied the landlord, looking at him from head to foot, and seeing his coat deprived of its collar, his hair cut short on one side and left long on the other, all of which were signs of the place from whence he came.

"I must have a horse for any money," said Jean Marais. "The count's life, my good friend," he added, in a lower tone, "may depend upon my getting to Riom to-night. At noon to-morrow, does it come on? Good God! then there is scarcely time even now."

"Then you must go to the post," said the landlord: "that's the only place where you'll get a horse at this time of day, and then you must have a postillion with you. Stay, stay; not so fast," he continued, seeing Jean turning towards the door: "three livres, if you please—you must pay for what you've had."

"Why, I have scarcely tasted anything," said Jean Marais.

"You might if you had liked," said the landlord; "you sat down to supper, and drank some wine; so that's the price, and no more to be said."

Jean Marais would not stay to dispute the point, but paid the money and proceeded at once to the posthouse, where, on application for a horse to go on to Aigueperse, the first reply was a burst of laughter; he insisted, however, and on paying beforehand, succeeded in obtaining what he wanted. It was seven o'clock before he reached the little town from which he had again to make his way forward; but here the postmaster turned away from him with a look of contempt, replying, "that he had no horses for such people;" and on Jean's remonstrating somewhat angrily, turned him out of the yard, saying, with a sneer, "that all his cattle were out," and adding to the postillion who had brought him thither, "This is a fine time of day, indeed, when rogues ride post."

Poor Jean Marais was now wellnigh in despair: he applied at two small inns without being able to hear of any means of conveyance; and the sum which was now left in his purse, somewhat less than a Louis, did not furnish him with the means of holding out any great temptation to those who might possess the sort of animal that he wanted. Walking up the long street of which the town of Aigueperse consists, he looked up to the sky, which was clear and bright, and promised another hour of daylight.

"I will do it on foot," he cried, "I will do it on foot, if I drop down dead at the end; it is but five leagues, and the count's life depends upon it."

Just as he was so thinking, however, some one grasped his shoulder, and, turning round, he saw an archer of the maréchaussée.

"Ha, ha, mon cher!" cried the man, with a knowing look: "you seem to me very like an escaped convict."

"No," replied Jean Marais, "I am a liberated one. Here are my papers, you can read them yourself."

"No, I can't," replied the man, with a grin: "that's an art I don't possess; but my lieutenant can, and he'll tell us more about it to-morrow. In the mean time, you must come with me."

"Stop me at your peril!" said Jean Marais, looking at him furiously; but the archer drew his sword, exclaiming, "Ho, ho! do you resist the police!" and one of his comrades coming up at

the moment, Jean was obliged to submit, and go back with them into the town.

CHAPTER LII.

In a large hall of the Palais de Justice, the judges were assembled for the trial of the Count d'Artonne. The president sat in the middle, with three or four other magistrates on either hand, having the intendant of the province on his right, with a small table, or rather writing-desk, between them. At a board below were ranged a number of clerks and different officers of the court, and on the left were a number of advocates; while, placed almost in front of the judges, was a high stool upon a small platform which ran along to the right, raised by a step or two about three feet from the ground. As soon as the judges had taken their seats the doors were thrown open, for the trial was to be a public one, which was by no means always the case in those times, and a considerable number of spectators instantly rushed in, and nearly filled those parts of the hall which were not separated from the actual court by a strong wooden railing.

Some bustle and confusion naturally took place, and a good deal of noise; but order having been re-established, the president spoke a few words to a person below him, who went out, and in a moment after, a door behind the platform we have mentioned, but level with it, which was guarded on the right and left by two archers, opened suddenly, and the Count d'Artonne himself appeared. As was common in the cases of men of rank and station, the count did not appear alone, but was accompanied by a number of persons, some of them in reality friends, some of them assuming that title from motives of vanity, curiosity, or any other of the follies or passions which lead men to put themselves into prominent situations in which they have no business to appear. Close by the count, on his right hand, was the Viscount de St. Medard and Francis de Langy; and on his left appeared Monsieur de L——, and no less a personage than the Bishop of Clermont, the sight of whom excited not a little surprise among the persons who filled the court, not alone because it was considered indecorous for ecclesiastics to be present, when they could avoid it, at criminal trials, but also because his sister, Madame de Bausse, had shown herself most virulent and eager in attempting to fix guilt upon Monsieur d'Artonne; and the bishop was supposed to have countenanced her most violent proceedings against their cousin.

The mode of proceeding in a French court of law has always been much more irregular, even in the best of times, than in England. It is so still, and probably ever will be so; for the French contend, that truth being the great object to be obtained, it may be sought for by any means the most likely to reach it; while in England it is contended that the surest means of arriving at truth, and shutting out falsehood, is by keeping within certain limits, which the wisdom and experience of many centuries have devised. The trial of the count, therefore, was conducted in as different a manner as possible from a similar proceeding in this country; and yet it was much more consistent with our ideas of right and justice than many others which could be named.

Immediately on entering the court, the count was directed to take his place on the elevated seat we have mentioned, called the *sellette*, and one of the clerks at the table, by the direction of the president, read over the charge made against the prisoner. The count was pale, but calm, and firm in the expression of his countenance, and his whole aspect and demeanour betrayed not the slightest symptom of agitation or apprehension. The same could not be said of Francis de Langy, who listened with a look of deep anxiety to the words of the clerk, which went to charge the count with having wilfully, maliciously, and with premeditation slain Henri Marquis de Bausse, on a day, hour, and place, which he mentioned. At the terms maliciously and with premeditation, the count exclaimed, in a loud tone, "No, no: that is false, that is very false!"

"Let the witnesses be called, then," said the president; and, after a little movement in the court, one of the servants of Madame de Bausse was brought forward, who swore that twice during the month which preceded his young master's death he had heard high and angry words passing between his young master and the Count d'Artonne. What they were, he could not exactly say; but it was evident the count was very much enraged, and used high tones and fierce gestures.

"Do you acknowledge these facts, Monsieur d'Artonne?" asked the president, looking sternly upon the prisoner; "and if so, what was the nature of this dispute?"

"The man has spoken the truth," replied the Count d'Artonne, calmly; "only he might have said that some half dozen times, during that month, such disputes took place. Sometimes the cause was one thing, sometimes another. Complaints were daily brought to me of his violence and of his vices: these were frequent subjects of angry words between us. Then, again, twice in that month he asked my daughter's hand, and I told him that I would sooner give her to an honest peasant than to such a man as himself. He replied, on one occasion, that he would have her, whether I would or not; and you may well suppose that angry words were spoken on that occasion also."

"In short," said the advocate of Madame de Bausse, who had examined the witness, "in short, there was enmity between you, colour it in what way you will."

Another witness was then called, who proved that the count had, three days before, forbidden Monsieur de Bausse to come any more to the Chateau d'Artonne, or to show himself in its neighbourhood.

"What was the cause of this, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the president, with his cold, severe glance.

"He had ill used the daughter of one of my peasants," said the count, "brutally ill used her. Had I known that this would be brought against me, the girl herself should have been sent for."

"Thus," said the advocate of Madame de Bousse, in a calm and sneering tone, "step by step, we trace the enmity and malevolence of

Monsieur d'Artonne towards his unfortunate victim. Here is one more evidence upon this head, where a distinct menace is conveyed: this letter, in the count's own hand, tells the same tale still more distinctly. I require that it be read;" and he handed it to one of the clerks, who read it in a loud voice. It was addressed to the Marquis de Bausse, and ran as follows:

"Monsieur mon Cousin,

"Once more I tell you that my daughter shall never be yours. After all you have done, you ought never to expect such a thing. Not a day passes but some new act of criminality is committed by you; and, as your relation, I warn you to change such a course of life; for, be assured, if man does not punish you, God will."

"Now," continued the advocate, before the president of the court, or any of the judges, following the somewhat extraordinary practice of questioning the prisoner in regard to the evidence brought against him, could interrogate him respecting the letter—"now we have the malice clearly proved; we have only farther to show the facts of the murder. The witnesses first to be called are merely those of form, to show when and which way the unfortunate Marquis de Bausse proceeded to the spot where he met his death."

A number of persons were now examined, who proved the hour at which the marquis had gone out, the way which he had taken, and the places where he had stopped by the road. His entrance into the little wood where he was found was shown by a man who had been passing at the time, and who declared that, soon afterward, he heard the sound of a shot proceeding from the same direction.

"Did you hear no other sound?" exclaimed the count suddenly, bending a stern look upon the man as he concluded.

"Yes," replied the witness: "I heard what seemed to be a scream."

"Was it before or after the shot?" asked the count, while the deep silence of anxious attention fell upon the court.

"It was about a minute before," the witness answered.

"Then why did you not state that first?" inquired the count, sternly.

The man hesitated.

"Answer!" said the president, sharply.

"Because," replied the man, "Monsieur de L—— told me to say nothing that I was not asked."

The count turned slowly round upon the sellette, and bowed his head to Monsieur de L—— with a bitter smile.

"Call the next witness," said the advocate; and the moment after Peter Neri appeared before the court.

His dark Italian countenance was very pale, making his close-shaved beard look more blue and marked than ever; and his eye, wandering round the hall, seeking to catch everything that was taking place without encountering the glance of any other person, was not calculated to impress the mind with an idea of his honesty. When questioned, however, he spoke boldly, and in a firm, strong voice.

"The count," he said, "had gone out on the morning of Monsieur de Bausse's death, in his usual shooting-dress, but with no dogs with him, and no gamekeeper. He was certain that there were no spots of blood upon his coat or gloves when he went out. At the end of about an hour and a half, or perhaps two hours, he returned, put down his gun in his dressing-room, and changed his coat. The coat was then bloody in several places, the gun had been discharged; but he brought no game home with him. He, Peter Neri himself, had washed out the stains of blood, but not by the count's direction. He suspected the fact," he said, "of his master having killed Monsieur de Bausse, as soon as he heard that the latter had disappeared; because he had often heard the count speak very angrily of his young cousin, and remembered his saying, more than once, that he ought to be shot. He had not, however, mentioned the circumstances till after the body of the marquis had been found, and he then did so simply out of love of justice."

"If you had stopped before those last words, villain," said the count, "you would but have told the truth; but as the lie is of no importance, let it pass."

Some more witnesses were then called, who proved that the count had entered the wood in question about the same time as Monsieur de Bausse, but from a different side; and others followed, giving a description of the finding of the body, and all the particulars concerning that fact, with which the reader is already acquainted.

"Nothing is now wanting to my case," said the advocate of Madame de Bausse, "but the *procès verbal* of the count's own interrogatory, and I require it to be read."

"It is unnecessary," replied the Count d'Artonne. "I am ready to repeat what I have already said, publicly and straightforwardly, honestly and truly. Monsieur de Bausse *did* fall by my hand, and even if I had killed him intentionally, which is not the case, I should have been fully justified in so doing; but, as his death did actually occur, it was accidental. I had gone out in the morning, as has been related to you, with my gun in my hand, loaded with ball, for the purpose, if I met it, of killing a wolf which I had seen that morning in the wood myself, and I did so at that particular hour because I knew that my daughter must be coming along the path just about that time. I had not gone ten steps in the wood when I started the animal from the thicket, in which I had before seen it take refuge. I fired and wounded it, but it got away, and I stopped to reload my gun. I had just done so when I heard a scream from the path above. I knew my child's voice, and thinking that the wounded wolf had attacked *her*, I rushed up as fast as possible. I found that she had met with a more detestable brute, her own cousin, Henri de Bausse, who was holding her firmly in his arms, while she screamed, and struggled to free herself. Throwing down my gun at the foot of a tree, I darted upon him and struck him in the face. He instantly turned upon me, and set free my daughter, who ran away to seek help, I believe to part us. We both drew our swords, but I disarmed him in a moment; upon which he snatched up the gun and aimed a blow with it at my head. I parried the stroke, but received it upon my arm, and then, catching the gun, struggled with him for it. As

I did so it went off. I declare, by my hopes of salvation, that I never touched the trigger; but immediately after the report he staggered back and fell. I saw he was wounded, and knelt down beside him; but he made no reply when I spoke, and I hurried away as fast as possible to seek for some assistance. I took the lower paths through the wood, till I came to the high road, and walked on foot towards Riom. A carriage passed me as I went, and I called to the postillion to stop; but he did not hear me, and drove on. I next met a decrepit old woman, who used to beg at the entrance of Riom, and asked her to go back to the town and send up Monsieur Marcey, the surgeon, as fast as possible, while I went back myself to give what help I could. It was not the wisest course I could pursue, but I was agitated and bewildered, foolishly so; but I remembered at that moment all the disputes I had had with Monsieur de Bausse, and I doubted not, if he died without speaking, such an accusation as this would be brought against me. I returned, then, quickly to the spot, and—"

"And buried the body," said the president.

"No!" said Monsieur d'Artonne, firmly: "as I said before, so I now repeat, the body was no longer there, and I never saw it after till it was exhumed."

"I demand," said the advocate of Madame de Bausse, "that Madamoiselle d'Artonne be examined. When her testimony is given, I will then show you how palpably false is the prisoner's account of himself."

"False!" cried the Count d'Artonne, turning upon him fiercely; but his face became calm a moment after, and he added, "I forgot; you are hired to say such things. I could have wished my child had been spared this; but if it must be, it must."

"Mademoiselle d'Artonne is not far off," said one of the gentlemen who had accompanied the count into court; "she was with her mother without not a minute ago."

Monsieur de St. Medard said nothing, but quitted the hall, and in a minute returned, supporting Julie upon his arm, and followed by an officer of the court. She was pale and agitated, and gazed round her somewhat wildly, running her eyes over all the array of judges and lawyers, and the crowded hall, with its sea of eager faces. She then gave one look towards the count, and murmuring, with a sad shake of the head, "O my father!" she burst into tears.

The president and the rest of the judges seemed moved with some compassion; but the advocate of Madame de Bausse exclaimed, as soon as she had taken her seat, "Now, Mademoiselle d'Artonne, answer upon your oath, and say—"

"Speak more gently, speak more gently," said the president. "Tell us, young lady, candidly and truly, what took place after you entered the wood in which, as you know, the body of Monsieur de Bausse was found, on the day when his death was supposed to have taken place."

Julie wiped her eyes and raised her head, and, gazing straight in the face of the president, she replied, "I was coming from the village of Artonne, along the path which leads direct to the chateau, when, a little past the fountain, I met my cousin, Monsieur de Bausse; and, wishing him good-morning, was passing on."

"Why were you passing on?" asked the advocate.

"Because my father," replied Julie, "was not friends with him. He then stopped me," she proceeded, the colour coming into her cheek, "and would not let me pass."

Here, however, the advocate of Madame de Bausse interfered, having produced all the effect upon the court that he desired.

"I fear," he said, "we have committed a mistake. A daughter cannot give evidence in the case of her father."

"At least let me have the advantage thereof," cried the Count d'Artonne, starting up vehemently. "Speak Julie, speak!"

Julie did speak, rapidly, eagerly, clearly, before she could be stopped, as if she saw the lawyer's cunning, and was resolved to frustrate it. "He would not let me pass," she said; "he threw his arms round, and tried to draw me from the path—I screamed aloud—my father rushed up and struck him, dropping the gun he had in his hand. They drew their swords, and I ran to call some one to stop them. But ere I had gone far, I heard a shot—I was sure some one was killed—and then I grew faint and giddy, and fell upon the ground."

"Monsieur d'Artonne," said the president, "can you bring any evidence to show that the gun went off in the struggle between you and Monsieur de Bausse?"

"How can I bring evidence," said the count, "when there was no one present?"

"How can he," cried the advocate, "when it is evidently false? Malice and hatred are proved against him; he does not deny the fact. His going out armed without his usual attendants, with no dogs, with no servants, his taking his way to a wood through which Monsieur de Bausse was accustomed to walk on his road to Riom, all prove premeditation; and his burial of the body afterward shows that he was conscious of his crime."

The judges looked down thoughtfully, and there was something in the tone and manner of the president, as he turned to the count and asked,

"Have you any defence to make, Monsieur d'Artonne? or will you speak by your advocate?" which created an impression in all who heard him that the minds of the judges were made up as to the guilt of the count.

His advocate then approached and spoke a few words to him in a low tone, but just at that moment one of the doors of the hall opened, some people forced their way in among the crowd, and several voices exclaimed, "Here is a witness! here is a witness, who has not been examined!"

The eyes of the judges and the bar were bent in that direction. The count and his advocate started and turned round, and Julie, who had not yet retired from the court, clasped her hands and murmured, "Jean Marais!"

But Jean was only the forerunner of a more important person clearing the way through the crowd before him, and the moment after an old white-headed, but still powerful man, came into the front, and looking round at the judges, said, "I want to tell what I know."

"Speak," said the president. "First, what is your name?"

"My name is Antoine Bure," replied the man; "I am well known in the country, and never wronged any man."

"And what have you to say?" demanded the president. "Speak boldly, for we seek for truth."

"You shall have nothing else from me," replied Antoine Bure, "for I have always loved it myself. It is the poor man's riches, and the rich man's best jewel. On the 24th of May, last year, at ten oclock in the morning, I went out from my house, and took my way down towards the bank of the Ambene. The distance is about three leagues, and I went by the quietest ways."

"What was the object of your going?" said the president; and every time there was a pause in the old man's testimony the crowd of auditors turned their eyes from his face to that of the count, the expression of which was that of wonder and inquiry, or to the fair countenance of Julie d'Artonne, which was full of joy and hope, though ever and anon her eyes ran over with tears.

"The object of my going, monseigneur," replied the peasant, "was this: I have a son who has sometimes given me trouble. In the country where we came from, some years ago, the game of the field was free to any one, and he had there acquired a habit which is here called poaching, and punishable by law. He had killed some game upon the estates of the Count d'Artonne; he was detected, the officers of justice pursued him, and he took refuge in the wood and mountains. On that day I had intimation that he was to be found in the low wood by the bank of the Ambene, and I went down to him with a basket of food, and some money, but more for the purpose of counselling him to cast himself upon the mercy of the Count d'Artonne, to avow his error, and promise not to commit it again, than even for the purpose of supplying his bodily necessities. I found him, and had a long conversation with him, but he feared to do as I proposed; and after sitting together for some time on the bank of the river, we parted, and I took my way back through the wood. Before I quitted it I heard a gun discharged, and the moment after a wounded wolf ran by me; and I, thinking that the gamekeepers of the count were in the wood, and that if they saw me they would conclude my son was there and seek him, hid myself behind the stonework of the fountain. In a minute after, Mademoiselle d'Artonne passed by, and I saw the young Marquis de Bausse meet her and speak to her. What he said I know not, but the next moment he threw his arms round her, and she struggled to get away, uttering a scream. I thought to myself, if you do not free her, young man, I will break your head with my staff, be you the noblest in the land; and I took a step forward; but just then down came the Count d'Artonne, as hard as he could run. He had a gun in his hand, but he cast it down on the ground, and struck Monsieur de Bausse with his clinched fist. Both the gentlemen drew their swords, and mademoiselle ran away calling for help. In a moment the sword of Monsieur de Bausse flew out of his hand, and the count might have killed him, but he did not. The marquis then, however, caught up the gun from the foot of the tree, and holding it by the barrel struck, at the head of Monsieur d'Artonne. The count caught the stock, and struggled with him for the gun. As they did so it went off, and Monsieur de Bausse fell back upon the ground. The count knelt down by him, and spoke to him, then started up, and cried, 'Good Heaven! where shall I get a surgeon?' After which he ran away towards Riom as hard as he could go, before I could well recover my own thoughts, which were all astray. When he was gone I went up to the body and looked at it, but the young man was quite dead. I have seen many a dead man in my time, and I knew the signs right well. His eyes were open, his teeth were clinched; the ball must have gone through his heart. Just then I heard people talking at a distance coming along the path. They were talking gayly, so that I knew it could not be the Count d'Artonne, and I drew away the body from off the path, that I might have time to think what would be best to do. I then went down and found my son. We came up, we consulted together, and we did very wrong. I acknowledge it; I regret it; and if there is to be punishment, I am ready to be punished. We hid the body under the bushes, and then came and buried it that night, thinking, God help us, that if the count persecuted us, as many others had done, we should have a hold upon him. The next morning, when we met again, we were ashamed and grieved, and wept over the unworthy thoughts that had been in our mind; and my son swore an oath that, even if he were arrested for taking the count's game, he would never say one word of the death of the Marquis de Bausse, or hold out one threat to Monsieur d'Artonne on that account. He kept that oath, for he was arrested and imprisoned for full three weeks, and he never uttered one word to any one."

The old man ceased; and there was a murmur of satisfaction through the court, which seemed to overawe even the advocate of Madame de Bausse.

"How long is it since you saw the count?" demanded the president.

"Nearly a year," replied the old man; "and that was but for a moment. It was also the only time I have seen him since the death of the Count de Bausse."

"Did anything pass between you and him regarding that event?" demanded the president.

"Not one word," replied the old man. "Mademoiselle d'Artonne there, and the young gentleman who stands next but one to the count, were present, and heard all."

There was a low murmur of consultation among the judges, and the advocate of Madame de Bausse came forward as if to speak; but the president, turning towards him, bowed his head emphatically, saying, "You may speak, sir, if you think fit; but the court has made up its mind, and nothing that can be said after the evidence we have heard will alter our decision."

The advocate bowed with a look of mortification, and retired a step. The president then rose, and, turning to the Count d'Artonne, he said, "The judgment of the court, Monsieur

d'Artonne, will be formally given to you in writing; but, in the mean time, it may be satisfactory to you to know that you are acquitted of the crime with which you stood charged."

The count bowed his head, and stepped down from the sellette, opening his arms. Julie sprang into them, and wept upon his bosom.

There was a deep silence.

CHAPTER LIII.

Pass over six weeks, dear reader, and accompany me, if you please, to the chamber of Francis de Langy, in the Hôtel de Langy in Paris. Let the time be about nine o'clock on a fine morning, somewhat autumnal in its hues, as bright as summer, but clearer than the season when the warm sunshine makes the air misty with profuse light. Let us say, too, that some days before the Count and Countess d'Artonne, and Julie, as well as the Viscount de St. Medard, had taken up their abode in the Hôtel de Langy. The succession of Francis to the estates of St. Medard had been secured beyond all possibility of contestation, and that the count and countess had come up to the capital for the purpose of making final arrangements for his union with her he loved best on earth.

What, then, can be the cause of that shade of gloom which now hangs upon his countenance? Is it that yesterday a step was taken in the courts of law which argued unfavourably for his part in the important cause there pending? No: Francis de Langy had long made up his mind to lose the honours, and estates, and name, which at one time had appeared to be assuredly his. His spirit had accustomed itself to the expectation, and he thought not of it even for a moment. But it was that, on the day before, six of the nearest relations of the Count d'Artonne, persons who had abandoned him in the time of danger and distress, had given formal intimation, in the most courteous terms, of their determination of their opposition to the marriage of Julie d'Artonne with a person whose nobility of birth was very doubtful. Such opposition, to the ears of an English person, may seem frivolous and absurd, where the consent of parents was fully given. But in France such was not the case; and relations even more remote than those who were now arrayed against the marriage had the power, if not of stopping it altogether, at least of delaying it for years. This, then, was the cause of the gloom on Francis de Langy's countenance, and he felt more particularly anxious and discomposed that morning, because what was called in France a Family Council was immediately to be held at the Hôtel de Langy, for the farther discussion of the whole affair. He and his reputed father and mother were also to be present, and he well knew that much painful matter must meet his ears, although the whole party would undoubtedly demean themselves with courtesy and propriety towards him.

By his side, as he stood dressing, was our friend Jean Marais, once more restored to his old situation about Francis de Langy, and decked out with all the smartness of a Parisian valet of those times. He remarked, not without some concern, the gloom that was upon his master's face, but, nevertheless, he was most scrupulously particular in dressing him with neatness and elegance that morning.

"Now give me my coat, Jean," said Francis de Langy.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Jean, approaching with a basin of clean water and a towel, "but just now I saw a black spot upon your right arm which you did not wash off; if you will permit me, I will do it."

"Where?" asked Francis de Langy, in some surprise, baring his finely-formed arm up to the shoulder.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," said Jean Marais, "I must have made a mistake;" and he concluded the dressing of his master.

Francis then opened the door to go down into the saloon, when a servant met him, telling him that the party expected had arrived. On his entering the room where they were assembled, he found them seated around, Monsieur de Langy and the marchioness doing the honours of the house, the viscount talking with Julie, Monsieur d'Artonne conversing with forced indifference of aspect with two of his cousins, and Madame d'Artonne discussing some subject eagerly, but in a low voice, with two of the ladies present. Jean Marais had followed him down and opened the door for him, although one of the servants of the house was standing ready to perform that office, and Francis de Langy heard his own valet say to the other, in a low tone, "Don't show the people I mentioned in here. Keep them in the little parlour." He added something more, which his master, passing on, did not hear, and Francis advanced to the Marquis de Langy, who embraced him with signs of much tenderness and affection, and smiled, as if the meeting were altogether a more pleasant one than Francis felt it to be. In a minute or two afterward, while the young gentleman was being introduced to the persons whom he did not know in the room, a servant brought in a large silver salver with cups, and Jean Marais followed with a bright pot of chocolate, which might have somewhat surprised Francis de Langy, had his thoughts not been otherwise occupied, as the Marquis had certainly servants enough to perform the office which his valet took upon himself. He did observe, however—indeed, it was scarcely possible to help it—that Jean seemed in such ecstacies of delight with his new occupation as to be unable to restrain the expression thereof, smirking, smiling, and walking on tiptoe, as if he were the most exquisite chocolate bearer that the Parisian world had ever seen. The young gentleman felt a little annoyed, but took no notice, as the painful discussion about to take place was to come on immediately after the preliminaries of the chocolate were over.

Before that was the case, however, a servant entered in some haste, saying to the Marquis de Langy, "Your intendant, sir, whom you sent for."

"Oh, take him hence into that room," said the marquis, pointing to a door behind the circle in which the company were arranged.

The man retired, and the moment after came in again by the door to which the marquis had

pointed, saying, "He is there, sir;" upon which the marquis immediately retired, while Jean Marais continued to hand the chocolate with a somewhat agitated air.

When he had gone round the circle he retired behind it, set down the silver chocolate pot on one of the marble tables, and got as close as possible to the door already mentioned, which had been drawn to, but was not exactly closed.

For the last few minutes the eye of Monsieur de St. Medard had been upon his proceedings with some surprise and disapprobation, and, after a moment's pause, the viscount turned sharply round on his chair and detected Jean Marais in the very act of putting his ear to the chink of the door.

"Jean, come hither," he cried in a stern tone.

"Wait an instant, sir," replied Jean, boldly, and at the same moment he threw open the door, darted in, caught Martin Latouches by the throat with one hand, and seized with the other a large old pocket-book from which he was just taking some accounts.

All the company started up in surprise and gazed into the other room, while Jean wrenched the pocket-book from the intendant's grasp and gave it to Monsieur de Langy, saying, "There, sir; if the letter I told you of is not in there, I am a fool; but even if it be not, I have witnesses to prove all the facts."

The intendant had at first turned upon him furiously, but now he paused, wavered, became deadly pale, and, as the marquis looked over the papers in the pocket-book, one by one, he cast himself suddenly at his feet, exclaiming, "Oh, sir, forgive me, and I will tell you all."

"What, villain!" exclaimed the marquis; "when all is discovered! Witness, gentlemen and ladies all, witness what he says! There is no going back now. Your only chance of forgiveness is a fair confession; by it, at least, you shall escape punishment. How came you to conceal this letter! How came you to withhold from me the facts that it contains!"

"Because—because," replied the steward, hesitating, "because I knew what my brother had told you, and I feared to get him into trouble. I could not tell which was the true son. He swore that the one was, and his wife swore that the other was. She was as likely to seek for the promotion of her own son by a lie as he was. I thought the courts had better settle it," he continued, gaining courage as he went on, "without my meddling."

"But did you not know," asked Jean Marais, "that your brother had taken his oath that his wife was dead, when she was living!"

The man was silent, and the marquis continued, turning to Monsieur de St. Medard, "This good fellow has exposed to me a scheme of fraud such as I never heard before. He has told me by what brutal means the man Gerard Latouches extorted from his wife a false confession regarding the change of my son for their own."

"I saw and heard more than they thought for," said Jean Marais.

"The man fancied," continued the marquis, "that the poor creature could not survive the night, and boldly gave out that she was dead. But she lingered for nearly twelve months, and, before she died, wrote this letter to my intendant, her brother-in-law," and the marquis read: "I beseech you, Martin," she says, "as soon as you get this, to go to Monsieur de Langy, and, as you hope for salvation, tell him that your brother Gerard forced me to sign a paper which was false, for the purpose of putting our son Gerard in the place of the young Count de Langy. Tell him it is false, Martin; as I am a poor, sinful, dying woman, it is false. I did not tell the good marchioness a lie; the boy I gave her back was her own son. These are the last words I shall assert in this world."

"It is signed with her name," continued the count, "but this man has concealed it for several months."

"You had better send for the police," said Monsieur de St. Medard; "at all events, he ought to have given the letter to you."

"It may be false after all," said Martin Latouches. "Why should I think my brother would tell a lie! and who shall say between me two which is the real heir after all!"

"That will I," replied Jean Marais. "Till I got that letter, I fancied that the tale was true, that the children had been changed, and that I was, in fact, the servant of my own cousin. But there is a very easy way of ascertaining the fact. The son of Gerard Latouches fell into the fire while he was a child, and burned his arm; no time will take out those marks, I am sure."

"I remember it well," said Monsieur de St. Medard. "I was there when it happened. It was his right arm; bare your arm, my dear boy, bare your arm!"

"Ah, my good friend!" said Francis de Langy, holding out his hand to Jean Marais, "now I understand you."

But the man, instead of taking his hand, laid his own upon the sleeve of his master's coat, and gently drew it off, saying to Monsieur de St. Medard, "That no proof may be wanting, sir, with the permission of the marquis, I have sent for the curé of Godard, and for an old woman who used to help Marguerite Latouches to nurse the children, in order to prove that it was absolutely and undeniably the son of Gerard and Marguerite Latouches which did fall into the fire in its infancy. Young Gerard and his father are in the house, too; let the right arm of each be examined, and let the curé and the old woman speak. Call in old Mi[illegible]ot and the priest, Henri!" he continued, addressing the other servant, "and bring in young Gerard Latouches; but do not say a word to his father, or any one else, of what is going on. I beg your pardon, sir," he added, turning to Monsieur de Langy, "but as I have got up the play, I must be stage-manager."

"I will confess, I will confess!" cried Martin Latouches.

"Be quick, then," said the marquis, "or it will be too late."

But, before the man could commence his tale of iniquity, the door of the great saloon opened, and the young claimant to the succession of De Langy entered with a self-confident and easy air, as if he expected to be received and welcomed as the heir of the house. As soon, however, as he saw the number of persons assembled, and Martin Latouches standing before

the marquis with downcast eyes and trembling limbs, he faltered and paused; but Monsieur de Langy raised his voice, saying, "Come hither, young man; be so good as to bare your right arm."

As he spoke, an old man in a priest's habit, and a peasant woman, were introduced by the other door, upon seeing whom the countenance of the youth fell, and his limbs shook visibly.

"Bare your arm, I say!" said the marquis, sternly; and, advancing to the priest, he took him by the hand, welcomed him courteously to Paris, and then led him forward, saying, "Examine those two young men well, and tell me, before God, which is my son!"

The priest smiled, as if the question were almost a mockery, but still advanced, looked in the faces of the two young men, took them by the hand, examined the right arm of each, and then, laying his finger upon the breast of Francis de Langy, he turned to the marquis, saying, in a solemn tone, "Before God and man, this is your son!"

It was now the turn of Francis de Langy to hold out his extended arms to Julie d'Artonne, nor was he disappointed; there was the pause of a single instant, the blood rushed up into her cheek, but she gave way to the emotions of her heart, and the next moment she was clasped to his bosom.

THE END.

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HEIDELBERG.

CHAPTER I.

The realities of the world are few and small; the illusions many and vast. Not a sense that we possess, and hardly a faculty of the mind, but serves to deceive us; wholly in some cases, and partially in all. Yet, strip nature and life of these deceits, and what would earth become!—what our existence here? See a small fly stepping over the irregularities of a looking-glass and thinking the polished surface but a rough and rugged plain, and we have some idea of what the world would be, if we saw it as perhaps it is.

Amongst the sweetest and most friendly delusions, of all the many, is the landscape-painting of imagination. Love, himself, I believe, does not cheat us more, or more pleasantly. Let any traveller ask himself, when he sets eyes upon a scene which he pronounces, at once, most beautiful, how much of the loveliness is added by fancy. It may be a grand, an expansive view, over a wide and varied country; but what is the mind doing while the eye is contemplating it? Peopling it with villages—laying it out in cornfields and vineyards—filling it with busy life and gay enjoyment; not distinctly, not tangibly; but still the associations rise up in a golden mist, and spread a lustre over all. It may be, on the contrary, a narrower scene: a cottage in a deep glen, with old oaks overshadowing, and the thin blue smoke rising up amongst the green leaves. There too, is imagination busy, with the thoughts of calm retirement from a troublous world, and still, quiet contemplation—the labourer's repose after his labor—the sweet domestic home—the tender joy of tongues and faces loving and beloved.

There is but one great magician left on earth, and that is Imagination.

Reader, I very often draw from my own heart and its experience—more often than the world knows; and even now I can conceive the sensations of those two horsemen as they come at a foot pace over the edge of the hill, where the splendid valley of the Neckar, with its castled town and ancient woods, and giant mountains, first breaks upon the eye. See how the sunshine of the summer evening, softened by the light smoke of the city, pours through the long tall streets and over the high walls and towers of massive stone: see how it catches on each rocky point or prominent crag, as rounding the granite mass of the King's Seat, in its decline towards the west, it covers the brows of all his mountain peers with coronets of gold; and lo! where high raised above the town, upon its platform of stone, stands out the lordly castle in bright light and shade. The green, green Neckar, flowing along in the midst, winds on through the long waving valley, showing ripples of gold wherever, in the sunshine, the winds stir it or the rocks obstruct, and, at each calmer spot serves as a mirror to the loveliness around; giving back the bright tints of hills and woods, and town and bridge, with a lustrous clearness no other stream can match. Even that boat, with its many coloured crew of peasantry, shines out upon the face of the river in red and blue, and white and brown, as if the very hues acquired a finer dye from the water that but reflects them; and the fishing eagle, swooping down upon its finny prey, strikes at it the more fiercely when he sees the image of himself rushing to seize it also from below.

On a fine summer evening then, in the year 1619, two horsemen, coming along the Bergstrasse, or mountain road, suddenly drew in their horses as they reached the top of that little spur of the mountain called the Heiligenberg, on which stands the village of Neunheim, and there paused, gazing, as if in wonder and admiration, at the scene presented to their eyes. For a moment or two neither spoke, for the height of every emotion is silent; and ere a word was uttered, a small party, which had followed, came up and took place behind them.

In those days great men drew their importance from the number of their attendants. 'Tis the same even now, but the display is made upon a different stage.

The horsemen who came first, however, were but accompanied by two ordinary servants, two grooms or horseboys, each leading a baggage horse heavily laden, and a page; small equipage for a man of station at that period. Nevertheless there was that about the appearance of each, which made the peasantry who passed them in numerous bodies, and in their holiday clothes, take off their broad-brimmed hats and give the strangers two looks ere they walked on. The reason why they did this was not very apparent; for the persons who thus attracted the attention of the good boors had nothing to excite admiration in their dress. It is true, indeed, gentlemen were not at that time, any more than at present, to be distinguished by their galligaskins; but still the apparel of the two was rather plain than otherwise, consisting of a common riding suit of dark cloth, with a small line of gold, and boots and breeches of untanned leather. Their horses, indeed, were fine, powerful, spirited beasts as ever were mounted; and though the dust, that dimmed

their glossy coats, showed that they had journeyed far on a hot day, yet not a sign of fatigue was visible, and the outstretched leg, ready to start again, the high raised head, and expanded nostril, as they snuffed the air of the river, proved that they had no expectation of their day's journey being yet near an end.

There might be, indeed, some reason assigned why the country girls took a second look before they went on, for the two travellers were both young and handsome men; the one very dark, and three or four years older than the other, who might perhaps be one-and-twenty, or thereabouts, and whose face, though bronzed by exposure to sun and weather, appeared to have been originally fair, if one might judge by the clear, deep-blue eye and the rich brown hair, and moustache of that peculiar hue which shows a golden gleam when the sun shines upon it. He was tall and well formed, long in the arms, broad in the chest, and spare in the waist and flank. The head and face were small, and the features delicate, though not effeminate; the chin somewhat projecting, and the eyes large and full, with a thick and strongly marked eyebrow. When at rest the whole countenance had an expression of gravity and decision beyond his apparent years, and there was something in his air as he sat his horse, a look of command and free thoughtful power, which seemed to bespeak one who, notwithstanding his youth, had been long accustomed to regulate his own conduct and act upon his own views.

The other was very different, yet still a handsome man, much darker in complexion, not quite so tall, with a keen sharp black eye, under a wide and somewhat projecting brow, marked gracefully by a dark, arching, and somewhat raised line of eyebrow. The lips were thin, and the line from the wing of the nose to the corner of the mouth strongly marked, so as to give the ordinary expression of the countenance a slight, a very slight touch of sarcasm; and yet there was a sort of sparkling joyousness about it whenever he spoke, which we may as well notice once for all, as it was the predominant look and was exceedingly winning, although the cast of the mere features was stern and determined.

As they paused and gazed, the face of the younger and fairer of the two was full of admiration, pure, simple, and high; too deeply felt to admit even of a smile. The other gazed over the landscape too, but then for a moment turned his eyes with a half laughing glance, withdrawn as soon as given, to his companion's face, as if he and his feelings afforded as much matter for thought and examination as the beautiful scene which had just presented itself.

At length, after a pause, of about two minutes, the younger exclaimed,—

"How beautiful! how enchanting! and bursting upon us thus, it seems like magic."

"Very lovely, indeed," replied his companion, with a smile; "and I doubt not we shall find still lovelier things within those old grey walls —at least let us fancy it; for fancy is the goddess that embellishes all things, and is, even now, doing wonders in your mind, Algernon, for the fair city of Heidelberg."

"I know not what fancy has to do with it," replied the other gravely; "methinks never was there a congregation of more beautiful objects presented to the eye of man. Nature does everything here, William, we have no need of fancy. Look at that town, that castle, those lordly mountains, those green waving woods, the river gliding——"

"Like a golden lizard, you would say, among the stones," rejoined his companion, interrupting him. "In pity let us have some figure of speech to show that your admiration has not at least benumbed imagination. A simile, a trope, a metaphor, even a hyperbole will do. Can you not call them godlike towers! or figure me the mountains as giant Titans, with a bushy beard of oaks and beeches! What has become of all your flowers of rhetoric! You will never be able to keep pace with the doctors and poets of the university, if you go on in this dull style. Or is it that you have expended all the riches of your poesy upon the fair dames you left behind in Italy, and have not got a beggarly tester of fine words for the fair town of Heidelberg! or, again, are you afraid of the exchequer running low, and are hoarding your smart speeches with miserly avarice, to let love, like the miser's son, squander them by-and-by upon the lovely dames of the Electoral court!"

"Good faith!" replied the other, "I doubt much, my friend, whether I shall see anything in any court so lovely to my eyes as that fair range of mountains, out there upon the right, looking like sapphires on a sky of gold."

"Improved! improved!" cried his companion, dropping his rein and clapping his hands; "those sapphires and that gold come out most splendidly. The poor Haardt, with her stony rocks, would be grateful to you, doubtless, for thus enriching her; but let us on, I am for living loveliness. Of all the landscapes I ever saw, the most beautiful has been a rosy cheek and alabaster throat; the brightest waters in the world for me, lie in the deep well of a dark blue eye; and in all the sunrises or sunsets that ever covered the sky with crimson, there is nothing like the warm blush, upon a young face, or the dawning smile upon a rosy lip Let us on, let us on, I say; pleasure is the pursuit of life; let grave thoughts follow us, they will catch us soon enough if we do not make haste and get before them."

"'Twere a good philosophy, could it but last," answered his companion, with a smile, touching his horse gently with the spur, and in a moment more they were winding on by the side of the Neckar toward the old bridge, which, like many another building there, was not destined to see the present day.

Perhaps the younger of the two travellers felt that his companion was right in what he had said regarding the ornamental powers of fancy, when they passed the gates of Heidelberg and entered the town itself. The sunshiny splendour of the valley was lost in the narrow streets and tall dark houses; but still the shade was pleasant, for the evening was hot: and there was something in the long lines of the quaint, many-storied buildings, with their ornamented gables to the streets and every here and there a gleam of sunshine breaking across through an aperture—something in the gay crowds of people, in the ringing laugh and cheerful buzz, even in the baskets of fruits and

flowers that obstructed every turning, which did much with a young and enthusiastic mind, to compensate for the picturesque beauty of the valley which they no longer beheld; and still, at the end of many of the streets, the towers and walls of the castle were seen looking down from its proud rock, with the green branches and ragged crags of the mountain, towering up beyond.

"In the name of all that's sweet and savoury, let us get to our inn as fast as we can," said the elder of the young men. "My ears are cracked with the hoarse merriment of these overjoyous German throats; and my nose feels feverish with all the vapours of garlic and sauerkraut which it has imbibed since we passed the gates. What is the name of the inn, Tony?" he continued, turning his head to one of the servants behind, a merry-looking fellow, with a good deal of shrewd humour in his countenance.

"The Golden something, Sir William," replied the man; "but, by my faith, I forget what. We have passed through so many golden and silver vessels within the last month, that I am quite confounded by them. We rode upon a golden goose last night; the day before it was a silver moon; then we have had the cock of gold, the golden pitcher, the golden crown, the silver cross, the silver staff, and the silver star. We have had all sorts of fishes that ever swam in the sea, and all the beasts that ever went into the ark, besides a number of monsters."

"Hush, sir, hush; give me a reasonable answer, and a short one," replied the gentleman; "and remember what your master told you about forgetting our names till you are permitted to remember them. What was the name of the inn, I say?"

"It was the Golden something, sir," replied the man, undismayed; "and, if I must give it a name when I don't recollect the right one, I'll give it the name of the Stag, by way of a change. We have not been at a Stag for a week at least."

The other gentleman smiled; for he recollected, as soon as it was named, that the hostelry to which they had been directed was really the Stag; and he somewhat doubted that his servant had ever forgotten it. "Now, then, William, to find it," he said; "for this town seems full of signs. But here comes a man on horseback,—by his dusty boots a traveller like ourselves,—German too, by the cut of his cloak and the feather on the left side of his hat. We will ask him;" and, spurring his horse forward a little, he met, at the corner of the street, a well-dressed man about thirty years of age, who was riding fast at the moment, but who checked his horse, when the other saluted him courteously and, in very tolerable German, asked the way to the Golden Stag.

"Follow me," replied the stranger, "and I will show you; I am going thither myself:" and riding on, without waiting to see whether the strangers accompanied him or not, he took his way round the great church, and sprang to the ground at the steps of a large wide rambling house, which bore, in bas relief, upon a panel in the second story, the grotesque figure of a gouty stag, gilt, and ornamented with a collar and chain. In the centre of the house there was a large archway with steps on each side, which were also brought round the angle and all along the front on either side of the arch, forming a sort of base to the whole building. A small door—that at which the traveller halted—entered from the top of the steps, and this was thrown open as soon as his approach was perceived from one of the windows on the ground floor. At least half a score of drawers and horseboys rushed out from the various holes and corners about the building. His horse was taken with every sign of respect; and the low-bowing landlord, with night-cap in hand, the officious readiness of all the domestics of the establishment, and the reverend greeting of two men, whose badges and liveries showed them to be the liveried attendants of some high family, convinced the travellers who followed closely, that their guide to the Golden Stag was a personage of some importance in the town of Heidelberg.

The one turned round to the other and smiled, somewhat superciliously, perhaps; for the haughty contempt of other people's customs, and the national pride, which undervalues the distinctions and ranks of foreign countries to exalt those of his own, were as much characteristic of the native of a certain island in those days as at present. That supercilious smile spoke the Englishman at once. Though it would be very difficult to analyze philosophically the sensations from which it sprang, perhaps it simply arose out of contempt for the deference shown to a man, who would venture to wear a feather in a different part of his hat from that in which the English generally placed it. I do not mean to aver that it was so; but, from what I know of my fellow-countrymen, I think it very probable. Strange to say too, the countenance on which this smile appeared, was that of the elder, and to all appearance, the more experienced and worldly of the two. The other smiled not, but, checking his horse to a walk, as soon as he was sure of the position of the Golden Stag, rode slowly up to the house and dismounted, with a calm and deliberate air.

By this time the stranger had disappeared, as well as the landlord and most of the attendants; but, nevertheless, the bustle of a new arrival soon recommenced; and, in five or ten minutes more, the two travellers were lodged in large, comfortable, but somewhat gloomy rooms, and had the most positive assurance of the landlord that an excellent repast was ready to be set before them the moment they thought fit to descend to the common room and partake of it.

The servants and the page busied themselves in opening portmantles and saddlebags. Ruffs, collars, velvet cloaks, and laced doublets were spread out upon the large old comfortable beds. An abundance of cold water, together with the assistance of Italian essences and perfumery removed all traces of travel from their persons; and when, at the end of about half an hour, the younger of the two, with the page to show him the way, descended to the hall, it would have been difficult, perhaps, to find a more distinguished looking man within the limits of Europe. He was evidently very young,—youth could be traced in every gently flowing line, in

the soft and rounded cheek, in the even, unfurrowed brow; but there was an air of stately dignity in his carriage; a calm, almost cold, firmness in the expression of his face, which showed that, from some cause—either an early initiation into life and the sad experiences of the world, or from a precocious appreciation of the realities of things—the mind was older than the man. This happens not unfrequently, and is somewhat strange in its effects; but still more strange is the result, when a triple combination takes place, as was in some degree the case with him; and when the heart, too, remains young, after the judgment has become mature, so that its passions, aided by the energies of the corporeal frame, are placed in frequent antagonism, with a powerful and overruling intellect.

The page threw open the door of a large room below, which looked somewhat dark and gloomy; for the windows were small, the pannelling was of black oak, and the sun was on the other side of the house. It was not solitary, however; for there, seated in one stiff tall-backed chair, and his feet, divested of all travelling incumbrances, on another, was the gentleman whom they had met in the streets of the town, and who had served as their guide thither. His hat was cast upon a small table, his sword lay beside it, his riding-boots had been drawn off, and some time had been bestowed upon his toilet, too; for his doublet and cloak had been changed; but yet the difference of appearance produced did not seem very remarkable to an eye accustomed to the most splendid courts in Europe.

To say truth, the young Englishman had not been very much prepossessed in the stranger's favour. The brief bluff answer he had given when addressed, the manner in which he had ridden on, with hardly a look to see that they followed, seemed to him to betoken a want of courtesy, with which, indeed, he was not inclined to quarrel, but which he did not greatly admire. The other did not move when he entered either, though certainly not unconscious of his presence; for the large, clear, grey eyes were raised and fixed upon the new-comer, with a firm, inquiring, almost insolent stare. It was unpleasant to the young Englishman; but he did not come there to seek disputes; and, turning to the page who waited at the door, as if for orders, he bade him tell the landlord to serve the supper as quickly as might be, and then he walked to the window, and gazed out at the varied scene which the streets presented.

In two minutes he was lost in a reverie, forgetting altogether that there was any other being in the room but himself; and, though the other guest rose, moved his hat and sword, and walked up and down with a heavy step, the sound these evolutions produced fell upon an unconscious ear which had no power to carry them to a mind far away, busied with other things.

In about five minutes the door again opened, a quick step was heard, and the other English traveller, entering, advanced to his friend, laid his hand upon his shoulder and exclaimed, in a gay tone, "What! in the depth again, Algernon! On my life, nature must have intended you for an oyster. Leave you but a moment, and you sink down into an ocean of meditation, fix yourself firmly to the bottom, and would remain there, I believe, for ever, with your shell half open, waiting for what Providence would send to fill your mouth withal. But, on my faith, I have no such patience; I am like the patriarch Isaac, and have a longing for savoury meats—likewise, for some amusement. This seems a wild boar of the forest. We must force him from his lair; and he will show sport, depend upon it."

Hitherto he had spoken in English; but now, turning to the stranger, with a low and somewhat extravagant bow, and yet with an air of courtly ease, he said, in French: "We have to thank you, Monsieur, for guiding us to this inn. I trust that the host will speedily give us farther occasion for gratitude, by setting before us an excellent supper. I see he has laid three covers, from which I argue, that the enjoyment of the repast is to be heightened to us by your participating in it."

"It is my intention to sup before I go," replied the stranger, in very tolerable French, though with a haughty tone; but the other was not to be rebuffed; and, proceeding with great apparent good humour, but that sort of exaggeration of courtesy which is rarely without a touch of sarcasm in it, he soon engaged his German companion in more familiar conversation and broke through the husk of reserve, in which he had at first encased himself. His replies, when they became more frank and free, showed a mind not uncultivated, an intellect of some extent, and views in general just and powerful, though there was an alloy of haughty presumption and somewhat irritable self-esteem, which became ever more apparent, if not more offensive, as his reserve wore away.

In the midst of their conversation, the landlord and his satellites entered with the supper. Two of the travellers' servants came in to wait upon their masters; one of the attendants in livery, who had met their German companion at the door, took a place behind his chair, fluttering with ribbons and tags; and the three gentlemen applied themselves to the satisfying of an importunate appetite. After a few minutes the younger of the two Englishmen seemed to cast off his thoughtful mood, gave himself up to the gay leading of his friend, and laughed and jested likewise. The wine that was placed upon the table did not seem at all to his taste, and pushing it from him with a shudder, after the first drops had passed his lips, he pronounced it vinegar disguised.

"Come, come, mine-host," he said, looking over his shoulder to the master of the inn, who had remained in the room, perhaps with a due calculation of the excellence of the beverage he had served, in its relation to the quality of his guests—for innkeepers, even then, were not unaccustomed to make their wine the measure, or aristometre, of those they entertained; "come, come, mine host, this is doubtless good wine in its way, for those whom it suits; but we have ridden far and want some more generous juice to refresh us. Let us have something super-excellent, the very *bride* of your cellar, as I think you call it here in Germany;

and mind that it be at least a hundred and fifty times better than this or else it will not do."

"You speak good German, too," said the stranger, "and seem to know our customs well, even to the tricks of our landlords. Were you ever here before?"

"Not in this good town of Heidelberg," replied the young gentleman; "but some three years ago, I passed through other parts of Germany on my way to the south. The reason why I speak French to you is, that my friend here does not understand the tongue of the country."

"Tis a pity," replied the other, "the language is a fine one, and so, methinks, strangers must find the country. I have travelled too, myself, but never saw aught finer than this our valley of the Neckar."

"Most beautiful, indeed," rejoined the young Englishman; "so much so, that I judge one might while away a day or two here very well."

"Methinks one may, or pass a life here either," rejoined their companion, with a somewhat haughty and offended air. "The court of the Elector Palatine is, I believe, second to few in Europe."

"What is that, Algernon, what is that?" cried the other Englishman, who seemed to have comprehended part of what was said; "it is treason to friendship to talk a language in my presence which is unintelligible to my poor ears."

The other gentleman explained in French; and with a smile, slightly sarcastic, his friend turned to their companion, exclaiming, "Is this court so magnificent, then, indeed? We are ignorant of this part of Europe, sir, having been long in the far south, sporting amongst princes and lazaroni at Naples, jesting with priests, cardinals, and popes at Rome, discussing pictures, statues, and points of religion with painters, philosophers, and atheists at Florence, and masking and making music with fair dames and reverend seniors in the City of the waves. We have brought over a stock of vices and small talk, I trust, that would decorate any court in Christendom; and, faith, if yours is such as you describe it, and fond of magnificence and merriment, velvet and volubility, we must go up and visit it; and, doubtless, shall be made much of, as our merits deserve."

"The access is not so easy as you may suppose, sir," answered the other, sternly; "it requires something else than a man's own account of himself to gain entrance and esteem there."

"Ha! here comes our host with a very sagacious looking bottle," cried the younger traveller, who thought, perhaps, his friend was pushing his jests somewhat too far. "If those cobwebs have been spun round the neck by thinner legs than your fingers, landlord, the wine would be as sour as cider, or of an immortal quality."

"I will warrant you, sir," answered the host, putting down long-stalked glasses, "if ever you tasted better in your days, say my name is not Rheinhardt;" and he filled up to the brim for the younger traveller and his companion.

Before the former tasted it, however, he pressed their fellow-guest to join them and give his opinion of the wine; and, on his showing some reluctance, added: "Nay, nay, if you refuse, I shall think that you are offended with the light talk of my jesting friend there. You must bear with him, you must bear with him, sir, for it is an inveterate habit he has; and he could sooner go without his dinner than his joke, at whosoever's expense it is indulged. It is the custom of the country we come from last; for there it is so dangerous to speak seriously on any subject, that men take refuge in a jest as in a redoubt."

The stranger seemed satisfied with this explanation, joined in their wine, pronounced it excellent, forgot his haughty air; and, returning to the subject which they had left, began to expatiate once more upon the beauty, splendour, gallantry, and wit of the court of the Elector, Frederic V., when suddenly a loud explosion, which seemed to shake the solid walls of the old building, and was echoed for several seconds by the rocks and mountains round, interrupted his declamation, and made the two Englishmen gaze in each other's face.

Ere they could inquire farther, another roar, and then another, was heard; and, turning to their German companion, the elder exclaimed: "In the name of our fair lady Fortune! what is the meaning of this? Is the castle besieging the town, or the town the castle? Or have you imported Mount Vesuvius to warm you here from time to time with an eruption, and preserve the antiquities of the place in ashes, pumice-stone, and sulphur?"

"Neither, my good sir," answered their fellow-traveller, who had remained totally unmoved; "it is but the guns of the castle firing in honour of the Elector's birth-day, the nineteenth of August; for on this day and hour, now three-and-twenty years ago, our noble prince was born in the good town of Amberg. There is a grand banquet at the castle to-day; but, ride hard as I would, I was too late for it, and so must content myself with going to the reception in the evening, which, they say, will be one of unusual magnificence."

"Faith, then, I think we will go there too," said the elder of the two Englishmen; "doubtless we shall see collected all the beauty of the Court Palatine."

"If you get admission," rejoined the other, drily.

"Oh, that is beyond all doubt," was the bantering reply: "your prince can never be such a barbarian as to refuse the pleasures of his court to two such proper young men as ourselves, especially as we have the honour and advantage of your acquaintance."

"I fancy you will find him sufficiently civilized to do so," said the other sharply; "and my acquaintance, sir, can only be beneficial to those of whose name and station I am informed. I may as well at once give you to understand, knowing this court, and being connected with it, that you will not be admitted unless you be properly introduced."

There was a degree of arrogance in his tone, more than in his words, that at once amused and offended the younger of the two gentlemen; and, after his companion had exclaimed, "Then must we die without benefit of clergy!"

he turned towards the other gentleman, saying, with a grave smile,

"We have a bad habit, sir, in England, of proving the strength of our own convictions by laying wagers on any subject of dispute. If such were the custom here, I would ask you what you will bet that I and my friend here will not go up to the castle this very night, and, without any introduction whatsoever, without naming our names, stating our rank, or disclosing our pursuits, receive kind hospitality from the elector, and pass the evening with his court."

The personage whom he addressed replied first with a laugh, and then said: "Perhaps you may find your way in, for the attendants are not likely to drive back a well dressed man; but if the elector's eye falls upon you, that of his chamberlain, or any of his high officers, you will soon be expelled, depend upon it, unless you divulge your names."

"Not so," replied the other; "I will go straight to the elector; I will refuse to divulge my name, and yet I will pass the evening there; on all which I will stake a hundred crowns. You yourself shall be the witness, as you say you are going; but, of course, it is understood that you do and say nothing to impede my proceedings."

"Done!" cried the other, striking his hand on the table; "I take your wager. Methinks I should know this court better than you can."

"I have known many courts," answered the young man, with a good-humoured laugh, "and never yet found one in which impudence and a cool face could not make its way. So now let us be friends and shake hands upon our wagers, which shall be decided as soon as you are ready."

The stranger took his hand, not very cordially, and replied: "We must wait a little; the banquet will be scarcely over yet. I would fain know, too," he added, "who are to be my companions in entering the elector's court."

"Oh! make yourself perfectly easy," replied the elder of the two young men: "you shall seem to know nothing of us from the moment you pass the gate; nay, with this sweet world's simple versatility, shall turn the shoulder coldly to those with whom you have climbed the hill the moment you have reached the top. The truth is, honourable sir, my friend and myself have resolved not to reveal our real names while travelling in these foreign lands. As a matter of course, we have each packed up with our saddle-bags and portmantles, a fresh and well-conditioned name for the nonce. He is called Algernon Grey: I have been known for some months past as William Lovet. We do not ask you to believe that our godfathers and our godmothers, at our baptisms, were at all familiar with these appellations, either nomen or prenomen; nevertheless, it is a whim we have, and we request our excellent friends to humour us therein. Those who would do us reverence, tack esquire to the end of each name, to designate the lowest rank of gentlemen in England qualified to bear arms; but we are not particular, and even when that title is omitted, the bare name does very well without."

"So be it then," said their companion gravely. "You will have to ride, Master Lovet, as perhaps you know, for it is somewhat difficult to find carriages here that would drag you up that hill! But you make your boots large," he continued, playing upon an expression commonly used in Germany at that time, to express a man who stood upon little ceremony—"But you make your boots large, and therefore your hose will escape soiling, I go to get mine on;" and rising, he left the room.

The younger traveller, whom we shall henceforth call by the name he thought fit to assume, was inclined to fall into a fit of musing again; but the other leaned over the table, saying: "Ask the fellow's name, Algernon. He seems a sullen and discourteous dog, unwilling, or unable, to understand a jest."

"Good faith! you began like a young haggard, William," replied his companion, "dashing straight at your game, without waiting to see its flight. All men are not ready to jest with every stranger. He may have good qualities, though he seems haughty enough;" and turning to one of the attendants of the inn, he asked, in German, the name of the gentleman who had just left the room.

"That sir, is the Baron Oberntraut," replied the man, with a low reverence; "he is the only son of the master of the horse to the elector, and a captain of cuirassiers."

"What! the same who distinguished himself so much in the campaign of Juliers?" cried the young gentleman.

"The same, sir," answered the man. "He was very young then; but he did great things, I have heard."

"By my honour! he has some reason to be proud," observed Algernon Grey; "but come, William, let us get ready too. Order the horses round, Tony. I suppose they are not tired with our short march."

"Tired, sir!" replied the man. "Lord bless you! with the oats they have got into them since they came, they'd take the castle up there as if it were a five-barred gate. I heard Hob say that Barbary had eaten a peck and a half, while you were changing your cloak!"

"If that were the first lie he ever told it might be worth repeating," said William Lovet; "but let us go, Algernon. I am all on fire for the beauties of the fair Elizabeth's court; and if I can find out which is this Oberntraut's mistress, on my soul I will plague him."

CHAPTER II.

"Who is that, who is that?" cried the small shrill voice of a little deformed boy, who stood as near to the gate of the castle as the soldiers would let him—and, to say the truth, they had suffered him to approach somewhat nearer than their orders warranted, in respect for a tall, beautiful, well formed girl, his sister, who held him by the hand.

"Which do you mean, Hans?" asked his fair companion. "That one, in the black and gold doublet, and the cloak lined with crimson? That is the young Baron of Oberntraut, the

Great Captain, who defeated the Austrians on the other side of the Rhine."

"He does not look to me like a great captain," said the small sharp voice, proceeding from the narrow and protuberant chest. "I thought he would have been all in armour, as the soldiers were once, when I saw them ride through the streets."

"Is that a Frenchman?" asked one of the lower order of students, who was leaning in studied, not to say affected negligence, with his arm round the neck of one of his fellows. "Do you see how he wears his hat? and in what a jaunty way he has thrown his cloak all upon his left shoulder, as if he wished to keep the hilt of his sword warm?"

"Oh, he may keep it warm enough in Heidelberg, if he like," rejoined the other student to whom he spoke; "we'll give it work, if it want it; but which do you mean, Frederic? for there are two of them—the black cock or the white one?"

'The fair one," replied the former speaker; "the one in the philimot and gold; he is a proper man, Carl, and, I should think, ready enough to use his rapier, if one may judge by his look."

"Oh, looks are nothing," replied the other; "but I should think he is no Frenchman. More likely an Englishman, come, like the rest of them, to flutter at our court."

"Come away, wife, come away," said a jolly, fat citizen, with an ace-of-clubs nose and a beard tolerably sprinkled with grey, to a pretty woman, some twenty years younger, who stood beside him, holding the hand of a little boy about four or five years old—"It is full time for us to be getting home; don't you see the sun is nearly down—one half behind the hills there? and it will be dark before we reach the door. There, come along; you are a great admirer of fair men, I know: but, methinks you should have had enough of them tonight; so let us homeward, if you would not have yon gallant kiss his hand to you as a reward for your staring."

While this conversation and much of a similar kind had been going on amongst the numerous groups, which had assembled round the outward Burgthor, or castle-gate, of the fine old palace of the Electors Palatine, the party of three gentlemen and seven servants, which had slowly wound up the long and steep ascent from the town to the castle, had reached the flat at the top, and were passing over the drawbridge, which then existed at the Burgthor, into that wide extent of ground, which was inclosed by the great wall of the fortress. Whether it was that the presence of Oberntraut, who was well known to the soldiery, procured them free admission, or that the guards had only orders to keep out the ordinary citizens of the place, the whole party were suffered to proceed without opposition, and rode on to the bridge-house, while fine strains of martial music, wafted by the wind from the great court of the castle, and the sound of many a gay and musical voice from the gardens round told that the revelry of the Elector's birth-night was still going on with undiminished spirit.

Under the arch of the bridge-house, two of the guards crossed their partizans before the horses, and Oberntraut, anxious to show that he kept his word, in not throwing any impediment in the way of the two Englishmen, turned his head, saying in German, "You must dismount here, being visitors; I ride into the court, as one of the Elector's household."

The soldiers instantly raised their halberts to let him pass with the two servants, who had accompanied him from the inn. At the same moment, one of Algernon Grey's attendants sprang to his stirrup, to aid him in dismounting; and, giving his sword to his page to carry, the young gentleman and his friend disencumbered themselves of the large riding boots of the day—which, be it remarked, easily covered shoes and all—and passing between the guards, with a confident air, as if there could be no earthly doubt of their admission, walked on, under the archway of the great square tower, into the wide court-yard.

The scene was a very brilliant one, which was now presented to their eyes. Crowds of attendants, belonging either to the household of the Elector Palatine himself, or to those of the great nobles of his court, were scattered thickly over the wide space before them—sometimes standing in groups of eight or nine together—sometimes moving hither and thither, with quick or sauntering pace; and every colour of the rainbow, in its very brightest tints, was to be seen displayed in the gorgeous costume of the day. Neither was there any lack of lace and embroidery, plumes, sword-knots and fluttering scarfs; and, around this gay flower-bed, rose up, in the faint evening light, innumerable and irregular masses of building, of every period and of every style, the remains of which can still be traced, slowly mouldering away under the hand of time, and presenting to the thoughtful eye a sad picture of the end of all great designs; a bitter lesson to man's presumptuous hopes, a dark but chastening admonition to joy, prosperity, and power.

On the right hand, under a wide arcade supported by graceful columns, was a large and skilful band of musicians, making the air ring with the sounds of their instruments. Upon the left, in darkness, such as time casts upon all man's doings, was a pile of architecture, the light and graceful lines of which betokened a very early period of construction. Nearly in the centre of the court rose up a fountain; the sparkling jets of which caught and reflected the rosy light which had spread over the sky above. Farther on, to the right, appeared a vast mass in the Italian taste, covered with rich and splendid ornaments—statues, arabesques, and pilasters—and pierced with innumerable windows, from which bright lights were shining, showing that the sun's decline was felt within. In more than one other place, too, on both sides and in front, a taper, or a lamp might be seen passing slowly on from room to room across the various casements, affording a sort of mysterious interest to a fanciful mind, as the eye of the young Englishman rested on the dark piles to the west, from which the sunshine had for several hours departed.

Grouped together near the fountain, and held by grooms and stable boys, were a number of horses, richly caparisoned; and near them was seen the form of the Baron of Oberntraut, slowly

dismounting and speaking to his two servants, as if waiting to give time for his late companions to come up.

"That is civil and honourable of him," said Algernon Grey, as they advanced toward him.

"A good deal of self-confidence in it," answered the other; "he feels so sure of winning his bet, that he wishes to prove to us that it is done by no unfair advantage."

"Still the worst side of everything!" rejoined his friend, with a grave smile, and moved on. But as soon as Oberntraut perceived them within a few yards, he himself advanced toward a flight of steps before one of the principal buildings, where an open door and a blaze of light, displayed a low arched hall, crowded with attendants. His step was slow and stately, but though, before he had reached the top of the steps, the two Englishmen were close to him, he took not the slightest notice of them, and passed on.

Several other persons were, at the moment, advancing in the same direction; and Lovet whispered to his companion; "Follow the stream, follow the stream." Algernon Grey did so, and found himself guided by the rest to what seemed the great staircase of the castle. It was not indeed so magnificent, either in its proportions or its decorations, as the splendour of the exterior might have led a traveller to expect; but what it wanted in architectural beauty was supplied by extrinsic decoration of great taste, consisting of flowers and shrubs and branches disposed in such manner as to mingle the harsh lines of the grey stone pleasantly and symmetrically with the graceful bends of the green foliage. An object had been sought and attained very much neglected in those times, namely, the perfect lighting of the staircase; for, although the day had hardly closed, the lamps were already gleaming along the balustrades, not with a harsh and overpowering glare, but with a tempered brightness, which showed all that could please and captivate the eye and yet left a dim indistinctness, not disagreeable, over the rest. Five or six persons preceded the young Englishmen in their ascent, some speaking together, some silent and lonely; but all turned to the left on reaching the top, and passed through a guarded door, round which a number of attendants were standing, into a small anti-chamber, where a single officer appeared leaning his hand upon a table.

No questions were asked of any of those who went before Algernon Grey and his friend; and he with calm and grave deliberation followed, neither looking to the right nor the left, nor taking the slightest notice of a whispered inquiry, which he heard running amongst the servants, as to who and what he was. William Lovet, in his ignorance of the language, was also ignorant of all such perils to their enterprise; and, with a gay and well assured look, followed close upon his companion's steps, adjusting the glittering tie of his sword-knot and thrusting his rapier a little further back.

The moment they entered the anti-room, Algernon Grey marked that the Baron of Oberntraut paused for an instant at the opposite door, as if to see whether the officer on duty would stop them, or require their names. The latter immediately advanced a step or two; but then, to the surprise of all present, he gave the two gentlemen a lowly salutation, and drew back to the table again.

A slight smile curled Algernon's handsome lip; and, with a tone of dignity, he said aloud, addressing the officer: "Will you be pleased, sir, to inform the Elector Palatine personally, if you can have his ear for a moment, that two English gentlemen of befitting rank, who for reasons of their own decline to give their names, crave his gracious permission to witness the splendours of his court this night; and to tread a measure in his hall with the fair dames of our own fair princess. We ask it with loyal hearts and true, well aware of what we do, and not venturing to request aught unbecoming of him to grant, or us to receive."

The officer bowed, and, turning towards those without, said: "Keep the door!" and then, advancing towards the inner chamber, seemed to answer quickly a question of Oberntraut, who had lingered near the entrance, and then passed on.

"Now are your hundred crowns in peril, Algernon," said William Lovet; "a fair new saddle-cloth embroidered in gold, a silver bit and gilt stirrups, together with an ear-ring of nineteen carats and a ruby, to say nothing of a new kerchief to Madge, Marianne, or Margery, all hang upon the chance of the fair delivery of a simple message by an anti-chamber officer of an Elector Palatine. Heaven save the mark! if the pretty maid with the brown eyes, who was likely in the course of time and by the concatenation of circumstances, to have that kerchief at your hands, now knew upon what a rash cast you have risked it, would she not fret and scold at the probable result of the bet at the Golden Stag?"

"She would be silly so to do," replied Algernon Grey. "I have no fears of money going out of my purse to-night; the good man will deliver his message aptly enough, I am sure; and the message, of which you understand not a word, was just the bait to catch the young Elector with his notions of chivalrous gallantry. Hark, what a buzz comes through the doorway. Methinks half the palatinate must be here; and see how the figures glide about across and across—now in blue and silver—now in green and gold—now in black and pearls, like painted shadows in a showman's box. But here comes our messenger, and with him a very grave and reverend personage with a beard of an ell long. Let us advance to meet him, as if we knew his inward dignity at once by his outward shape."

With the same stately carriage which he had lately assumed, Algernon Grey took a few slow steps forward, to meet a somewhat corpulent gentleman, whose hair and coloring seemed to bespeak a hasty and choleric temperament, and then made him a low bow. The officer, who had been in waiting in the anti-chamber, pointed with his hand to the two Englishmen, saying: "These are the two gentlemen;" and the other, who followed, returned their salutation, scanning them for a moment with his eye ere he spoke.

"It is the Elector's pleasure, sirs," he said at length, "that I introduce you to his presence;" and once more he gazed at them from head to

foot, in a somewhat haughty and supercilious manner.

But Algernon Grey was not to be provoked out of his caution; and, with a very slight inclination of the head, he replied: "The Elector is gracious; we are at your command."

There was nothing more to be said; and therefore the Electoral officer wheeled his large person round, and, with a somewhat more civil gesture than he had hitherto used, led the way into the chamber beyond. It was filled with numerous persons of both sexes, dressed in the gorgeous costume of the day; and certainly the court of the mightiest monarch in Europe could not have displayed greater splendor of apparel, or greater beauty of person, than appeared at that of the Count Palatine. People of all nations and all languages were there; and amongst the busy crowds which moved hither and thither, every hue of hair, every shade of complexion was to be seen; from the fair-haired, blue-eyed children of the north, to the dark Transylvanian, and the swarthy Moor. Through all the throng the chamberlain of the Elector cleared a way for himself and the two who followed: the rotundity of his person acting as a sort of human wedge, which left a vacancy behind it; and many a head was turned to gaze upon the young strangers; it being remarked that they looked neither to the right nor the left, as if they did not wish to recognise or be recognised by any one, should there, by chance, be found an acquaintance amongst the varied multitude.

Although the immense masses of the castle, as they had seen it from the outside, had impressed them with a strong idea of its vastness, yet, from some cause or another, Algernon Grey had expected to find the Elector and his fair wife in the room beyond the anti-chamber. Indeed its extent was so great, its decorations so sumptuous, and the groups it contained so numerous, that it might well have been supposed the audience-hall of a great prince. But everything in the castle of Heidelberg, at that period, was upon so magnificent a scale, that no acquaintance with other palaces enabled a visitor to judge of what was to be his reception here. It contained, in those days, a suite of ten splendid saloons, one opening into the other, and each covered with lavish ornament. Through the whole of these, till at length they reached what is called the silver chamber, the two young Englishmen were led, before they found the object of their search.

Two pages, one stationed on each side of the wide door way, held up the curtains of white velvet and silver, which hung from huge rings above; and as Algernon entered, a more quiet scene than those he had just passed, but still a very striking one, presented itself to his eyes. At the farther side of the room, perhaps at a distance of forty or fifty feet, standing a little in advance of two chairs of state, were seen Frederic and the Electress, both in the pride of youth and beauty. The features of neither were perfectly regular, but the face of each had its own peculiar charm of expression, the one beaming with graceful kindness and dignified good humour, the other sparkling with wit, imagination, and soul. Strikingly, though not regularly handsome, certainly they were; and seeing them standing there, clothed in similar colors, of the same age, slightly contrasted complexion, with only that difference in height which might well exist between the husband and the wife, one might have been tempted to think that no two people had ever been more fitly matched, had but the countenance of Frederic possessed more energy and determination of character. Elizabeth stood on her husband's right hand; and on his left were seen first a page, holding his sword, and then a group of the glittering nobles of his court; but on the right of the Electress, were assembled twelve or thirteen of the fairest flowers of Christendom, all robed nearly alike in white and silver; their marble brows and glossy hair bound with garlands, as it were, of diamonds and pearls. In other parts of the room—near the windows—near the doors—under the arches on either side, were several other groups conversing in a low tone; but the middle was vacant, at least when Algernon Grey entered; and he was advancing after his guide, towards the young sovereign before him, when suddenly, from a group on his right, a glittering courtier of about his own age started forward, and held out his hand.

The visitor, however, placed his finger on his lip, saying in a low tone, "Not a word, Craven,* we are to be as strangers here."

The other instantly drew back again, with a smile; but William Lovet nodded to him gaily, and then followed his friend.

This little interlude had not caught the Elector's eye, for at that moment the Baron of Oberntraut passed before him, and bowing low, took his place amongst the gentlemen on the left.

Elizabeth, however, saw it, and smiled, and then whispered a word in her husband's ear. Frederic's eyes were immediately turned upon the young Englishmen, who were now within a few paces; and a look of pleasure came over his countenance, while he replied in a low tone to what his wife had said.

The next moment the chamberlain interposed with a low and formal bow, saying, "These are the gentlemen, your Highness; I know not how else to introduce them to you, as they do not think fit to grace me with their names; but your pleasure being that they should have admittance, I have obeyed you in bringing them to your presence." This said in a grave and formal tone, he drew back upon the prince's left.

"You are welcome, gentlemen," said Frederic. "Though you deny your name—and we will let that pass unquestioned—we must, as sovereign of this land, inquire what brings you hither: having due regard for the safety of our subjects, to the fairer part of whom, methinks, you might prove dangerous."

While he spoke, a playful and good-humoured smile curled his lip; and Algernon Grey answered in a respectful but yet gay tone; "I must reply to your Highness with one of our English players,—

'A roving disposition, good my lord.'

* By some authors it is stated that Craven was not at this time at the electoral court; but of course the chronicle which we copy is the better authority.

Such was the evil cause that brought us to the fair Palatinate. Being there, we heard that this day your Highness held a high revel, and, longing to see the wonders of this court, we ventured hither, craving leave to tread a measure with any fair dame who will so honour us."

"I fear me much," said Frederic, in the same tone of courteous jesting, "that you are two perilous young men."

"He, my lord, is perilous young," replied Lovet, pointing to his companion; "God send that I may have a good title to the same character for the next twenty years; but, I doubt me much, it is passing away from me."

"We are all upon a road where there are no inns," answered the Elector, somewhat more gravely; "but what I fear is, that you bring danger with you, and I doubt much that I must order you into confinement, unless you can find bail and surety."

"Nay, my good lord, I will be their bail," cried Elizabeth of England gaily; "and to make all sure, I will put them in gentle ward, so that they commit no offence while in your dominions. — Here, Agnes," she continued, "and you, my fair Countess of Laussitz, you shall be their warders, and remember, that, throughout this whole night, whether in the dance or at the table, in the halls or in the gardens, you lose not sight of your several prisoners for a moment. Stay," she continued, "although my good lord is inclined to treat them thus severely, I will be more gentle, as becomes a lady, and let each choose into whose captivity he will fall. What say you, sir?"

"By your Highness's gracious permission," replied Algernon Grey, to whom her words were addressed, "as there can be no want of gallantry in a choice where I know neither, I will surrender myself to the lady you first mentioned."

"That is you, Agnes," said the Electress; "come forward and take possession of your prisoner."

As the princess spoke, a young lady, who stood a little behind, advanced with a light step, but with some slight timidity of manner, and a cheek more flushed than it was the moment before. The timidity, however, appeared but to add new grace to that which, even before, seemed perfect; and Algernon Grey gazed upon her in evident surprise and admiration, feeling himself right happy in his choice.

It is very difficult to convey in language any just idea of those various distinctions and shades of beauty, which the eye seizes in a moment, but which escapes from words; and it would be almost doing injustice to the fair girl, who now approached the princess's side, to attempt a detailed description. To give some idea, however, of her person, as the portraits, still existing, represent her, it may be enough to say, that she was certainly not above the middle height, but with every limb so exquisitely formed, that she looked taller than she really was. Her rich brown hair, with chestnut gleams upon it, fell in profuse abundance down her neck, in the fashion of the day. Her eyes were neither blue, nor brown, nor grey, but of that soft and soul-speaking hazel, so rarely seen and yet so exquisitely beautiful; while the long dark eyelash and arched brow lent themselves to every shade of expression, from deep and pensive thought to light and sparkling gaiety. The features were all small and delicate, the skin pure as alabaster, with a sunset glow upon her cheek. And the slightly parted lips, showing the pearly teeth beneath, seemed tempting love and promising return. The small, fine hand, the beautifully formed foot and ankle, the graceful neck and swelling bosom, the very turn of the head, all seemed like the dream of a sculptor in some moment of inspiration. And to crown all, was that breathing of the soul through every feature and through every part, which invests each movement with some new charm.

Algernon Grey gazed upon her, I have said, with a look of admiration and surprise; and the keener and shrewder eye of William Lovet, too, ran over her face and figure, but with a very different expression. It lasted but for a moment, and then he turned his gaze upon his friend, marking well the gleam of surprise that sparkled on his countenance. A slight smile curled his lips; but when Algernon Grey advanced and took her hand, at the Princess's command, those lips moved; and, had any one been near, he might have heard him say, in a low tone, "This will do, methinks."

Another eye, too, marked the whole proceeding; but, in this instance, the brow became clouded, the moment the young Englishman's hand touched that of his fair companion; and, setting his teeth hard in his lower lip, the Baron of Oberntraut turned away his head, as if not to expose the discontent which was too plainly written on his face.

"I am ready, may it please your Highness," said William Lovet, advancing as soon as Algernon and his partner had drawn back, "to submit myself entirely to your high commands; but I do beseech you to lighten my chains by making them of roses, and bidding my fair gaoler issue her orders in French, English, or Italian, as I fear my purse is very empty of German coin; and if she have none other, the exchange would be much against me."

"Fear not," replied the Princess; "we all speak French here. Come, fair Countess, take your prisoner, treat him well, but watch him carefully; and, to amuse his sad hours of captivity, show him all that is worth seeing in our humble court."

The lady to whom she spoke was in the first rank of those on her right; and William Lovet had no cause for dissatisfaction with his fate for the evening. The lady was tall and fair, but sparkling with beauty and youth; and a merry mouth, a sleepy and love-languid eye presented to his imagination all those qualities best suited to his taste. He was speedily in full career of jest and gallantry with his fair companion, and seemed at first to make more progress with her than Algernon Grey could boast with his partner for the night.

After a pause of a few moments, the Elector turned to the Marshal of his household, and asked if any more guests were arriving or expected. The reply was "None;" and waving his hand, the Prince said in a gay tone; "Then, let us break off our state, and, for an hour or

two, enjoy ourselves with the rest. Lords and ladies, to your several pastimes; and, according to a proverb, which I learned in England, let us all be merry and wise."

Thus saying, he drew the arm of the Electress through his own, and moved towards the doors of the hall. His departure was a signal for the dispersion of the court; the ceremonial part of the evening's occupations was at an end; and—ranging through the long suite of rooms which had been thrown open, going forth into the gardens and terraces—in general brightly illuminated by painted lanterns—some seeking the dance, some conversation—each endeavoured to amuse himself as best he might upon that night of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER III.

The fate that hangs over the death-doomed race of man appals us not. We wander where generations have grown up and bloomed, borne fruit, and passed away, without a homily in our hearts; we tread upon the very graves of a thousand races, we walk over the huge burial place of the world, and give not a thought to the fellow dust that sleeps below. Strange and marvellous insensibility! whence does it spring? Is it from mere levity that we thus rise above the deep thoughts of our inevitable doom? Or is it from a high sense of loftier destinies, an intimate conviction of the imperishable elevation of one part of our mixed nature? Or is it indeed—more likely than either—that while we see the spring of life still gushing forth and pouring out stream after stream as each river is dried up, a consciousness steals over us that we are but the parts of one beautiful whole undergoing everlasting change to the glory of Him who made it all? We behold creation full of life: the herb, the flower, the beating heart, the pliant fin, the soaring wing, the thought-stored brain, all speak of that strange mysterious fire which warms the universe, bursting out wherever eye can reach or fancy penetrate, unextinguished, unextinguishable but by the will that called it into being. We see, and know it; and, instinct with the divine essence, rejoice in the light that is granted, for the time that it can be enjoyed, while the promise of its permanence and the hope of its increase shade over *the one dark moment* with a veil of gold.

Amidst buildings, that are now ruins, through scenes that are in a great part desolate, over terraces and amongst parterres, now no longer to be seen, was kept up, throughout that night, revel and merriment and joy, without a thought given to the ages passed away, or to those who had been denizens of earth and partakers of all earth's pleasures, upon that same spot for unnumbered centuries before. The present hour, the present hour! the joy of the existing short-lived moment! the taste of the ripe fruit, without the cloud of the past or the sun of the future! were then, are still, and may be for ever hereafter, the sole occupation of the gay and happy spirits, such as the guests there assembled.

It was too much so indeed; for, in those young days of bright domestic happiness, Elizabeth of England and her joyous, lighthearted husband drained to the dregs the joy-cup of prosperity and power; and, educated in the ideas of, though differing in views from the queen of James the First, the Electress was strongly tinged with those notions of freedom bordering upon levity, which were entertained by Ann of Denmark. Not that I mean for one moment to cast a stain upon a name, with which history has dealt justly, I believe, in dealing tenderly; but it is undoubted, that the Electress, if sufficiently reserved in her own manners, and perfectly pure in her own conduct, gave great encouragement, in the court of her husband, to that abandonment of ordinary and conventional restraints, which can only be safe amongst the highminded and the chivalrous, and not always even then. She held with Ann of Denmark, that women had as much right, and might be as safely trusted with the entire and unwatched direction of their own actions, as men; that those harsh restrictions and suspicious guardianships, which have grown out of a complicated and artificial state of society, might well and wisely be dispensed with; and that the sole cause of there being any danger to woman herself, or to the world in general, from allowing her the same freedom, which man monopolizes, was the early restraint, which denied experience as the guide of reason and the demonstration of principle.

Thus a degree of freedom—I will not call it license, for that is a harsh term, and implies, according to modern acceptation, much more than I mean—reigned in the electoral court; and, although more than seven hundred guests were there assembled on the night I speak of, in addition to the noble part of a household numbering constantly more than a thousand members, no one, unless from some private and peculiar reason, thought it in the least necessary to watch the proceedings of others, whether male or female. Doubtless the Elestress was right in many of the views she maintained, abstractedly speaking; but unfortunately it happens, that to every theory, however just in itself, certain small practical circumstances oppose themselves, affecting its application most momentously. I will illustrate, in some degree, what I mean. Formerly, in the silver mines of Spain, as at present in the soil of Illyria, I believe, a certain mineral was to be found very much resembling silver in colour—weighty, bright, and fluid. Taken in its native state, it is innocuous and very inefficient; but add a few drops of a certain nearly colorless acid to it, and it becomes a valuable medicine; add a few drops of another acid, and it becomes the most virulent of poisons. Now the small circumstances, for which no allowance is ever made, are the few drops of acid, which in the furnace of the world render the most innocent theory possible, either highly beneficial, or terribly pernicious. I speak not, of course, of principles, for they are fixed; but merely of theories at first sight indifferent.

However, such as I have stated, was the Court of the Elector Palatine in the year one thousand six hundred and nineteen, and in the month of August in that year; a period pregnant with great events, when the fate of the Palatinate—nay, the fate of Europe—nay, immeasurably more, the progress of society and

the march of the human mind throughout the whole world, hung trembling in the balance; and yet there they were, the gay, the light-hearted, the enthusiastic, the moveable, all, apparently, creatures of impulse alike, enjoying with less restraint, than the world had often seen before, the happiness of the present hour. Music and the dance, gay conversation, light jest and playful wit had excited heads and hearts alike. The heat of the saloons had become oppressive; the glare of the lamps and tapers had dazzled and fatigued the eyes; the moving objects, the brilliant dresses, the beaming jewels, the straining race after pleasure, had become fatiguing to many; and some forty or fifty pairs, hand in hand, or arm in arm, had wandered out to seek the refreshing coolness of the gardens, to repose the mind, and invigorate the body in the fresh night air of August, or else to tell the tale of love and seek its return, under the broad green foliage of the trees, or the twinkling eyes of the deep blue sky of night.

Algernon Grey and his fair companion stood side by side in one of the deep windows of the hall where they had trod one dance, and he marked the disappearance of many, who had been for some time in the same chamber, by doors which led he knew not whither. Had the lady remained as timidly distant as when first they met, perhaps he might have asked no questions in regard to a subject which only excited a slight and passing curiosity; but a change had come over them both.

It was seldom that Algernon Grey felt embarrassment or hesitation in addressing the brightest or the fairest in the world. From a period, generally reckoned within the round of boyhood, he had acted for himself, except in some matters of deep moment; and, in regard to those, the arrangements which had been made for him by his friends, had, by fixing his fate, in several of its most important features, irrevocably placed him beyond the circle of many events most fraught with emotion for the heart of youth. But yet, there is something very impressive in great beauty, especially in its first early dawn. With the mature woman, there are a thousand avenues opened by her own experience, to approach her fearlessly, if honestly. But the mind of a very young girl, like the first bud of a rose, is hedged in by thorns, through which we must force our way. In one of the German editions of a fairy tale, called the "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," the knight, who is destined to deliver the lady, has first to cut his path through the forest before he can even approach the castle in which she lies slumbering; and he never would have succeeded, had it not been for an enchanted sword given him by a kind friend. I cannot help thinking, that in the allegory, the Sleeping Beauty meant the confidence of a young and inexperienced heart; and the sword which none of the trees could resist, a high and noble spirit, possessed by one who sought to approach it. With such a sword Algernon Grey was armed; and, although he found some difficulty in choosing his path, fortune befriended him at length. After two vain efforts which produced nothing in reply, but those common-places, which showed that the lady was accustomed, more than her years would have induced him to expect, to courts and the world, he hit upon a happier theme, which obtained a longer answer and touched deeper feelings. He had spoken of the Electoral court, he had spoken of the fair Palatinate, he had spoken of the Elector and Electress. Her replies were courtly, but from the surface. He then spoke of England, of his own land, of the qualities of the people, their truthfulness, their energy of character; and she warmed in an instant. She often longed to see it, she said. She told him that it was the cherished vision of her lonely moments, the hope of her heart, the only eager and anxious desire she had; and when he expressed his surprise that the distant island from which he came, could have awakened such interest, she asked with a smile:—

"Do you not know that I am an English-woman? I have never seen England, I have never known it; but yet I am English-woman."

"Indeed," he said, instantly changing the language in which they had been speaking to his own; "of English parents, you mean? I can well conceive the land of our ancestors possesses a deep interest for any one born afar, but yet, fair lady, you must be somewhat of an enthusiast, also, to say that it is the only hope of your heart?"

"Perhaps I am," she answered with a smile, "but yet there is something more in the thought of England, than the mere clinging of the heart to the place of a long ancestry. Her very insulated situation seems to impose upon her children, as a duty, to limit, in a degree, their wishes and their feelings to the bounds of her sea-washed shores. There is an interest in her solitary grandeur amongst the waves. Then too, she has ever been the island-throne from which a long race of mighty kings has shaken the destinies of all other lands, and ruled or changed a world. History is full of England. It seems, to my eyes, as if hers were the pervading spirit of all past chronicles—as if, like an awful spectre, her image was always present amidst the festivals and feuds of other states. Calm, grand, and sublime, she treads the waters of earthly strife; and, while others are contending for petty trifles amongst themselves, losing one day, winning another, the power and glory of England marches on, if not unchecked, only the greater for each temporary reverse. Freedom is her birth-right; home joys and rural peace her ornaments; arts, arms, and poetry, the coronet on her brow. Oh! it is a glorious land, indeed, and let them call us proud, if they will! Thank God! we have something to be proud of."

Her eyes sparkled, her colour rose, her whole face beamed with animation as she spoke; and Algernon Grey gazed at her with an admiring smile. Perhaps he might fear that under the monarch then on the English throne, their country might lose, for a time, that high position in which her fancy had placed it; but, at all events, the few words then spoken broke down at once all cold barriers of reserve between them; and from that moment they went on pouring forth the thoughts of their hearts to each other, as if long years of intimacy had linked their minds together.

"Whither are all these people wending, that I see depart!" asked Algernon Grey, at length, as he marked the gradual thinning of the rooms. "I trust this bright evening is not coming to a close!"

"Oh, no," she answered, "not for hours. They are going to the gardens, I suppose, or anywhere they like. This is a free and liberal place, fair sir, where each one does as he thinks fit, and others mind him not."

"I would fain see these same gardens," said her companion, "if they be within the bounds of my imprisonment."

"Come, then," she said, "why should we not? These rooms are very warm, too; and we shall find fresher air without. Through that door, and then down the stairs, will lead us out by the library-tower, amongst the flowers and the green trees."

As she spoke, they moved towards the door, to which she pointed; and they had nearly reached it, when the Baron of Oberntraut crossed their path, and suddenly paused before them.

"I have lost my bet, sir," he said, in a somewhat sharp tone, "and will send you the amount to your inn to-morrow."

"Oh, it matters not," answered Algernon Grey; "it was a foolish wager of mine, and I can hardly call it fairly won: for I suspect, by a smile I saw on your Prince's lip, that he remembers having seen me in my own land, though I was but a mere boy then."

"I always pay my debts of all kinds, sir," replied the other; and then, turning to the lady, he asked her to tread a measure with him, when the dance began again.

"I cannot, noble sir," she replied coldly; "I have a task assigned me, which I must perform. You heard the commands I received."

"Commands right willingly obeyed," answered Oberntrant; and, turning sharply away, he left them.

"He is in an ill humour," said Algernon Grey, as, passing through two or three rooms nearly deserted, they reached the top of a small staircase, that led down towards the gardens. "He reasonably enough made me a bet, that I would not obtain admission here, without announcing my name or rank. I unreasonably proffered it, and, against probability, have won."

"He is more wounded," answered Agnes, "at his judgment having been found in fault, than at the loss of the wager, be the amount what it will. He is a liberal, free-hearted gentleman, whom success, high birth, and flattery have rendered somewhat vain; but yet, from all I hear and all I have ever seen, I should judge that at heart there are few nobler or better men now living."

Algernon Grey mused for a moment; he knew not why, but her words gave him pain; and they passed out, in silence, into the gardens, then newly laid out by the famous Salomon de Caux. Nothing that profuse expense and the taste and science of the day could effect, had been left undone to render those gardens a miracle of art. Mountains had been thrown down; valleys had been filled up; streams had been turned from their course; and terrace above terrace, parterre beyond parterre, fountains, grottos, statues, arcades, presented a scene somewhat stiff and formal, indeed, but of a gorgeous and splendid character; whilst, sweeping round, as if covering them with a green mantle, came the mountains and forests of Neckarthal. There were lamps in many places, but such artificial light was little needed; for the moon, within a few days of her full, was pouring a flood of splendour over the scene, which showed even minute objects around. So bright and beautiful was it, so white was the reflection from leaves and gravel walks, and the fresh stone-work of the garden, that, had not the warm air told the presence of summer, Algernon Grey might have fancied that snow had fallen since he entered the castle gates.

Numerous groups of persons were wandering hither and thither; and the very colours of their clothing could be seen under the beams of the bright moon. Among the very first of the gay parties, which passed the young Englishman and his companion, as they walked along the upper terrace, towards the broad flight of steps that led down into the lower garden, was his gay friend, William Lovet, walking with the lady who had been assigned as his guide through the night. Right merry they both seemed to be; and we may as well follow them for a moment or two, to show the contrast between Lovet and his fellow-traveller.

"Love and constancy," cried Lovet, with a laugh, just as they passed Algernon Grey, "two things, dear lady, perfectly incompatible. The very essence of love is in change; and you know in your heart that you feel it. It is but that you wish to bind all your slaves to you by chains of iron, while you yourself roam free."

"Chains of brass would suit such an impudent man as you better," answered the lady, in the same gay tone; "but I can tell you, I will have no lovers who will not vow eternal constancy."

"Oh! I will vow," answered Lovet, "as much as you like; I have got a stock of vows, which, like the fountain of the Nile, is inexhaustible, and ever goes on swelling in the summer; I'll overflow with vows, if that be all; I'll adjure, protest, swear, kneel, sigh, weep, and vow again, as much as any true knight in Christendom. You shall believe me as constant as the moon, the sea, or the wind, or any other fixed and steadfast thing—nay, the moon is the best image, after all; for she, like me, is constant in inconstancy. Still hovering round the planet of her love, though she changes every hour; and so will I. I will love you ever dearly, though I vary with each varying day."

"And love a dozen others every day," answered the lady, laughing.

"To be sure," he cried; "mine is a large and capacious heart; no narrow peasant's crib, which can contain but one. Fie on such penury! I would not be such a poor pitiful creature as to have room but for one fair friend in my bosom, for all the riches of Solomon, that great king of innumerable wives and wisdom super-excellent. For me, I make it an open profession; I love the whole sex, especially while they are young and pretty."

"You are laughing at me and trying to tease me," exclaimed the lady, piqued and yet pleased; "but you cannot do it, and never

shall. You may think yourself a very conquering person; but I set no value on love that, like a beggar's garment, has fitted thousands in its day, and must be patched and ragged."

"Good as new, good as new!" cried Lovet, "without break or flaw. The trials it has undergone but prove its excellence. Love is of adamant, polished but not broken by use. But you dare me, dear lady—you defy me, methinks. Now that is a bold and courageous act, and we will see the result. No fortress so strong but it has some weak point, and the castle that fires off its ordnance at the first sight of an enemy, is generally very much afraid of being taken by surprise. The little traitor is busy at your heart, even now, whispering that there is danger; for he knows right well that the best means of reducing a place is to spread a panic in the garrison."

In the mean while, the very name of love had only been mentioned once, between Agnes and Algernon. Their minds were busied, especially at first, with aught else on earth. He certainly thought her very beautiful; more beautiful, perhaps, than any one he had ever seen; but it was rather as an impression than a matter of reflection. He felt it, he could not but feel it; yet he did not pause upon the idea. For her part, neither did she think of his personal appearance. His countenance was one that pleased her; it seemed expressive of a noble heart and a fine intellect; she would have known him out of all the world, if she had met him years afterwards and had only seen him then but once. Yet, had she been asked to describe his person, she could not have told one feature of his face. When they reached the bottom of the flight of steps, they paused and looked up to the castle, as it stood upon its rock above, with the enormous masses and towers standing out dark and irregular in the moonlight sky; while the hills swept in grand variety around, and the valley opened out beyond, showing the plain of the Rhine flooded with moonlight.

"This is, indeed, magnificent and beautiful," said Algernon Grey. "I have seen many lands, and, certainly, never did I think to behold in this remote and untravelled part a scene which eclipses all that I ever beheld before."

"It is very beautiful," answered Agnes; "and although I have been a tenant of that castle now many a year, I find that the fair land in which it lies, like the society of the good and bright, only gains by long acquaintance. To me, however, it has charms it cannot have to you. There dwell those I have loved best through life, there all who have been kind to me in childhood: the protectors of my infancy, the friends of my youth. It has more to me than the scene and its beauties; and when I gaze at the castle, or let my eye run along the valley, I see through the whole the happy home, the pleasant place of repose. Faces of friends look out at me from every window and every glade, and loved voices sound on every breeze. They are not many; but they are sweet to my heart."

"And I, too," answered Algernon Grey, "though I can see none of these things that you can see, behold much more than the mere lines and tints. As I entered the court but an hour or two ago, and looked up at the various piles that crowded round, some in the freshness of a holiday youth in his best clothes sent home from school, some in the russet livery of age, and some almost crumbling to their earth again, I could not but picture to myself the many scenes which those walls have beheld; the loves, the hopes, the pleasures, the griefs, the disappointment, the despair, the troublous passions, the calm domestic joys—even the pleasant moments of dreamy idleness, and the phantasm-forming hours of twilight—all that the past has seen upon this spot seemed to rise before me in tangible forms, and sweep across in long procession with smiles and tears alternate on their cheeks; and all the while the musicians under the stone canopy appeared in their gay and spirit-stirring tones to read a curious comment on the whole."

"What might their comment be?" asked the lady, gazing up in his face with a look of interest.

"They seemed to say," he answered, "Joy thou too, young heart! All is transient, all are shadows. Taste thy morning in its prime Be thy noontide firm and strong, strew thine evening path with flowers, embrace the right, eschew the wrong, and fear not when the coming hours shall gather thee to join that train which sweeps along."

"Why, it is verse!" cried Agnes, smiling.

"Not quite," he answered, "but so fancy made their sounds, words; and the cadence of the music added a sort of measure."

"'Twas sweet counsel and good of that kind dame, Imagination," rejoined the fair girl, "and yet, though the command was to be gay, your words, fair sir, are somewhat sad."

"Let us be gay, then," he replied.

"With all my heart," she cried; "but what shall we be gay about?"

"Nay, if we have to search for a theme, better be as we are," answered the young Englishman, "nature is ever best: the mood of the moment is the only one that is worth having, because it is the only one that is true. It will change when it is time. But you are by nature gay, is it not so?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, "I am gay as a free bird. Nay, good Dr. Scultetus, the court chaplain, would persuade me often I am light—but methinks not that; for I have felt many things long and deeply."

"And amongst them, love?" asked her companion.

"Oh, yes!" replied she, in a frank yet playful tone, "I have loved deeply and truly."

Algernon Grey was silent for a moment. He would have given much to have asked, "Whom?" but he did not venture, and the next instant the beautiful girl went on in a tone that reproved him for the question he had put.

"I have loved my parents," she said, "deeply and well—though one of them I cannot remember—I have loved my friends—I do love my princess."

"It was not of such love I spoke," he answered, gazing down at her earnestly.

"Then, I know no other," she replied. "do you?"

"Oh, yes, many," he said, laughing: "there is a warmer, a more sparkling, I might almost

call it, a fiercer kind of love, which every man, who has mingled a good deal in the world, must have seen in its effects, if he have not experienced it in his person. But I am not in a confessional," continued he, "and so I shall say no more."

"And yet you would put me in one," she answered gaily; "but certainly when I go there, I will have a more reverend father-confessor; for methinks, you are given to asking questions, which I may not be inclined to answer."

Her companion paused in meditation during a moment or two; for her words raised a certain degree of doubt in his mind, as to whether she belonged to the Protestant or to the Catholic party, who, at the time I write of, lived together in the various towns of Germany, rather enduring than tolerating each other. It seemed a night of frankness, however, when questions might be easily asked, which would be impertinent at a graver and more reserved moment; and he demanded, at length, in a light tone: "Pray, tell me, before I say more, are you one of those who condemn all Protestants to fire and faggot here and in the other world, or of those who think the power of the Pope an intolerable burden, and the doctrines of that church heretical?"

"Oh, I understand you," she said, after a moment's thought; "you would ask of what religion I am, and laugh a little at both, to put your question in a form not uncivil to either. But if you needs must know, I will tell you thus much—I was born a Protestant."

"*Born* a Protestant!" Algernon Grey exclaimed; "that seems to me a new way of becoming one."

"Nay, I don't know," she answered; "I believe it is the way one-half the world receive their religion, whatever it may be."

"Right," he said, "right! You are right, and I was wrong—not only their religion, but half their views. You were born a Protestant, and so was I; but I must say, happy are those whose reason, when it becomes mature, confirms the principles they have received in their youth. So it has been with me; and, I trust, with you also."

"Nay, I do not know that my reason is mature," replied the lady, with a smile; "but everything I have thought and read leads me to think that I cannot be wrong. It seems to me that the religion, which was taught to fishermen by its Divine author, to be preached to all the world, may be well read, and studied unadorned, by the descendants of the world that then existed: it seems to me, that if priests married they were as likely to be as good priests and better men: it seems to me, that when our religion teaches to confess our faults one to another, there was no thought of setting apart a particular order of men to be the registrars of all our wickedness, but rather to correct that stubborn pride which hardens us in evil, by inducing us to deny our guilt. Moreover, I think that the habit of bowing down before pieces of stone and wood, of praying to sinners like ourselves when they are dead, and of kissing solemnly a piece of ivory on a cross, is something very like idolatry. But I know little of all these things. I read the Bible, and am convinced myself; and yet I cannot make up my mind to think that good men, with faith in a Saviour, will perish eternally because they judge differently. Now you have won from me an account of my faith; but pray do not tell any one; for half of our clergy would think I was part papish, and the other half part fool."

"You have thought of these things deeply, at all events," replied Algernon Grey, "and that is something, where so few think at all."

"Oh, one cannot help thinking of these things here, where one hears little else from morning till night; but I have thought of them, too, for other reasons," she said more gravely. "One has need of consolations in this world, at times. There is but one true source from which they flow; and before we drink at that source, it is needful to ascertain if the stream be pure. Still we are very grave," she continued: "Heaven help us! if they did but know in yon gay saloons of what we two here are talking in the gardens, they would open their eyes with wonder, and perhaps their lips with laughter."

"Well, then, we will change our tone," continued Algernon Grey; "come, let us range along those higher terraces, where I see a long line of arches, tall, and slim, and one beyond another, like the fragment of a Roman aqueduct striding across the valley."

"Gladly," she answered; "the air will be cooler there, for it is higher; and we shall have it all to ourselves; for the gay world of the court will linger down here till the trumpets sound to supper. I love the high free air and solitude. One draws a finer breath upon the mountains, and I often wish I were an eagle to soar above their jagged tops and drink the breath of heaven itself. But here comes your gay companion, and the fair lady of Laussitz."

"Who may she be?" inquired the young Englishman.

"A very pretty lady, somewhat gay," replied his companion; "but you must forgive me, my good captive, if I tell you nought of the ladies of this court. In truth, I know very little; for I hear much that I do not believe, much that I cannot be sure of; and though I see sometimes what I would not see, yet I would fain judge all charitably, and put no harsh construction on other people's acts."

As she spoke Lovet and the fair countess passed at some little distance; and certainly, to all appearance, he had made some progress to intimacy in a marvellous short space of time. She might be fatigued, it is true—it might be but an idle habit she had gained; but still, the arm that was passed through his let the fair hand drop till it met her left hand, which she had raised, and the round but taper fingers of either were intertwined together. The head, slightly inclined over the left shoulder, drooped somewhat forward, as if the eyes were cast upon the ground, while the ear was raised to catch his words. There was a languor in her figure and in her air, an ill-assured step, a certain feebleness, as if some powers of mind or body were failing. It was his voice spoke as they passed. "Nay, nonsense," he said; "these are all idle nothings, bugbears set up to make the grown children of the world good boys. Come, fair one, come—do not assume a pettish anger that you do not feel. Love

was made for such a heart as yours, and such an hour for love," and, bending down his head, he added somewhat more.

"How dare you," said the lady in a low voice, "on my life, you are too bold: I will leave you, I will, indeed."

But she did not leave him; and, for more than an hour afterwards, they might be seen wandering about those gardens, arm in arm, affecting solitary places.

It is strange how often good and evil take nearly the same forms—how that which is bright and pure seeks the same scenes with all that is most opposite, but finds a different treasure there; as the bee will draw honey from the aconite, whence others will extract the deadly poison. In the bland innocence of her heart, the bright being by Algernon Grey's side led him on to the most lonely parts of the garden, wandered with him where there was no eye to watch them; and mounting one high flight of steps after another, passed along the whole extent of that grand terrace, raised upon its stupendous arches, the encumbered remains of which may still be seen overhanging the valley of the Neckar. But there, at the verge, they paused, gazing forth on the moonlight scene around; marking the manifold gradations of the shadow and the light, as mass after mass of wood and castle, mountain and rock, city and plain, faded off into one gentle hue of grey mingled with gold. A thousand were the images called up in the minds of each, by the objects that their eyes beheld; a thousand were the associations and the allusions to which they gave birth. Wide and erratic as is ever the course of fancy, soaring into the heights of the highest heaven, and plunging into the deepest depths below, never, perhaps, had her wing seemed more untiring, more wild and eccentric, than with those two young hearts on that eventful night—eventful in every way to themselves, to those around them, to Europe, to the world, to the march of society, to the enlightenment of the human mind, to the eternal destinies of all man's race.

To what fundamental changes in everything that affects man's best interests, did not that nineteenth of August give rise!

The destiny that hung above them, without their knowing it, seemed to have some mysterious influence upon the minds and characters of both. The barrier of cold formality was broken down between them; each poured forth the thoughts of the bosom as to an old familiar friend. Agnes felt herself irresistibly impelled—carried away, she knew not how or why—to speak to her companion as she had never spoken to man before. She fancied it was, that she had, for the first time, found a spirit congenial to her own; and certain it is, that there is a magic in the first touch of sympathy, which awakens sleeping powers in the heart, develops undiscovered stores of thought and feeling, and brings to light the bright things of the soul. But surely there was something more in it than this. Upon that hour, upon that moment hung the destinies of each; though neither had one thought that such could be the case, though of all things it seemed the most improbable, though he was a wandering stranger, purposing but to stop a few days in the place; and she seemed fixed down to it and its associations for life. Yet so it was; and had aught been different between them; had she remained in the mere timidity of the young girl, or in the cold courtesy of new acquaintance; had he maintained the usual proud and lofty air which he assumed in general with women, how different would have been their fate through life! The varied scenes through which they were to pass, the distant lands which they were destined to visit, would never have beheld them together; and that night would have been but a pleasant dream, to be recollected amidst the dull realities of life.

It was otherwise, however. She was so young, so gentle, so bright, so beautiful, that her society acted as a charm, waking him from a sort of dull and heavy torpor which had been cast over his heart by an event that had taken place in his boyhood—a counter-spell, which dissipated one that had chained up the current of his youthful blood in cold and icy bonds. He gave way to all he felt, to all the pleasure of the moment. Their conversation freed itself from all ceremonious shackles; both seemed to feel that they could trust fully in each other, and spoke, as feeling dictated, with no reserve and no misunderstanding. The flight of thought became gayer, too, naturally and easily; and as Agnes gave way to the high and buoyant spirit of youth, her young fancies soared and twinkled, like the wings of a lark in the sunshine; while Algernon Grey, with a firmer and more steady flight, seemed like a spirit beside her spirit, guiding her on, higher and higher, into the world of space open to the human mind.

Suddenly, as they thus rambled on together, through the remote parts of the gardens, they heard the sounds of distant trumpets, blowing clear and loud; and Agnes, with a start, turned to her companion, saying: "That is the call to supper. Our evening is coming to an end; do not think me too strange and free, if I say that I am sorry for it."

"Nay," answered he, "why should I think you so, when I, with far more cause, feel the same most deeply. We may, perhaps, never meet again, fair lady; but I shall always remember this night as one undimmed in its brightness, without a spot to chequer it, without a shade, or a regret. I do think you free and at ease; more so, perhaps, than I expected; more so than many would have been, older in the world's ways than yourself—but not too free; and I can well conceive that the long sojourn in a court like this has removed all cold restraint from your manner."

"Oh, no," she said, "it is not that! I never mingle with the court when I can help it. The ease I have shown to-night has depended, partly on myself, partly on you."

"Let me hear more," he answered; "I do not clearly understand you."

"Well, then," she said, "I am habitually free and at ease; because I am sure of myself—because I feel that I never mean wrong; and do not know that I have any thoughts I could wish to conceal. Let those who doubt themselves fear to show their heart as it is; thanks to wise friends and careful guidance, mine has no part that may not be open. Then, as to

your share: you have treated me in a manner different from that which most men would assume to most women. I could scarcely lay my finger upon one of all that court, who, sent with me, like you, throughout this night, would not have tried to please my ear with tales of love and praises of my beauty, long, stupid, and insignificant as a cricket on the hearth. Had you done so, my manner might have been very different."

Her companion did not reply for a moment or two; but then said, with a smile: "It seems to me that there must be something both vain and insulting in supposing that a woman will willingly listen to tales of love from a man who has known her but a few hours—he must think her very light and himself very captivating."

"We poor women," she answered, "are bound to gratitude towards your sex, even for forbearance; and therefore it is I thank you for not having held me so lightly."

"I am far more than repaid," he rejoined, as she guided him down the steps into the lower garden, saying that they must hasten on, and that was the shortest way.

Passing round under the high banks formed by the casting down of a great part of the hill, called the Friesenberg, they had crossed one half of the gardens, and were walking on at a spot where the shadow of one of the great towers fell deep upon the green turf, when suddenly a tall figure seemed to rise out of the earth close beside them, passed them, and disappeared. For an instant the lady clung to her companion's arm as if in terror; but then, the moment after, she laughed gaily, saying: "This place has so many superstitious legends attached to it that they cling to one's fancy whether one will or not. If I ever see you again, I will tell you one about this very spot; but we have not time now; for in ten minutes after that trumpet-sound the Elector will be at table."

We will not go on to visit the banquet that followed, to contemplate its splendour, or criticise the ceremonies there observed. It were an easy matter to describe it, for we have many a dull relation of many a gay feast of the time; but, in this work, I have not in view to paint the mere customs and manners of the age, except incidentally, but rather to show man's heart and feelings undisguised, and exhibit their true proportions, stripped of a gaudy but disfiguring robe of ceremony.

CHAPTER IV.

How often an aching head or an aching heart is the follower of a gay night like that of the nineteenth of August, those who have much mingled with, or much watched, the world well know. In the commerce of life we are too apt to reverse the usual course of all reasonable traffic, and purchase with short present pleasure a vast amount of future grief and care. The bargain is a bad one, but made every day; and even at the table, in the ball-room, and in many another scene, this same losing trade is going on, with the bitter day of reckoning on the morrow.

How is it with Algernon Grey, as he sits there in the large gloomy chamber, with his head leaning on his hand, his eyes gazing vacantly forth through the narrow window? The servants come and go; and he notices them not. The table is laid for breakfast, but the meal remains untasted. Busy sounds rise up from without and float through the half-open casement; the gay and cheering laugh, the light song, the chattered conversation, the cry of the vender of early grapes, the grating noise of wheels, or that of horses' feet, and through the whole a lively hum, indistinct but merry to the ear. Nevertheless, he hears not a sound, buried in the deep thoughts of his own heart.

Is it that the brow is aching? or that languor and feverish heat reign in those strong and graceful limbs? Oh, no. The whole frame is free from pain; fresh, vigorous, and fit for instant action. Is there any word, spoken the night before, any deed done, that he would recall, yet cannot? Not so. He has nought to reproach himself with; conscience has no accusing voice.

What is it then? He communes with his own heart; and a dark overshadowing cloud comes between him and the sun of happiness. It is a shadow from the past; but it extends over all the present, and far and vague into the future.

The first thing that roused him, was the entrance of his gay friend, William Lovet, who came to share the meal with him. Nevertheless, Algernon did not perceive his approach, till he was close to him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying:—

"Heaven and earth, Algernon! what has made thee so moody, man? There must be something in the air of this foul city, that—with such a bright vision as that of last night to gladden your way—one stain of care should be found upon your brow."

His friend roused himself instantly, and answered gaily, though not without an effort: "I must think sometimes, William; it is a part of my nature. One little drop of thought fell into my clay when it was kneading. Thank your stars that none such entered into your composition. But let us to breakfast, my appetite tells me that the hour has somewhat passed."

"Appetite," cried Lovet, taking his seat; "tell not the bright-eyed Agnes of your having so coarse and vulgar a thing. She will think your love forsworn and all your fidelity false and fickle, if you do more than eat one slice out of that partridge breast, or drink aught but sour Rhenish throughout the day. But seriously, and upon my life, with solemn earnestness, I do declare, never was such a glorious chance as has fallen to the lot of each of us. Had we culled the whole court, I fancy, we could have found nought more charming; and we must stay here at least a month, to profit by Dame Fortune's favours."

"A very sweet companion I had," answered Algernon Grey, coldly; "but no vows did I make, no fidelity did I swear, my good friend."

"Heaven and earth!" cried Lovet, "did one ever hear of such a thing as a man travelling with another upon equal terms, and yet leaving him all the hard work to do? Swear! why I swore till my joints ached and my teeth were sadly damaged; and as to vows, two Du

barks, broad in the bow, broad in the stern, and deep enough in the hold to hide ten Dutchmen upon an elephant, would not hold one half of the cargo that I landed safely at yon lady's feet last night. Let me see, what is her name? I have it somewhere, written from her own sweet lips—Countess of Laussitz!—Matilda, too, by the mark! A good name, a marvellous good name, is not, Algernon? Musical, pretty, soft, soothing, loveable. But never go anywhere without tablets! See what service mine have been to me! Many a fair prospect is spoiled by a mistake in the name. Call Matilda Joan, or Louisa Deborah, and you are ruined forever;—Matilda, Countess of Laussitz! Charming! Sweet! Bless her soft eyes and her sweet lips; they are worth the best diamond in the Mogul's turban. And so you positively did not swear fidelity, nor vow vows? The lady must have thought you marvellously stupid."

While he had been speaking he had not failed to do justice to the good things on the table. Nor had Algernon Grey shown any lack of appetite, applying himself more stoutly to eat his breakfast than to answer his companion's light raillery. At length, however, he replied: "She did not seem to think so; or, perhaps, she was too courteous to express it; but, at all events, my evening spent with her was a very pleasant one, though neither love, nor vows, nor sighing, had any share therein."

"And yet, methinks, you went into very sighing places," answered Lovet, laughing; "you affected the groves and solitary terraces, as well as others, whom you wot of; and then linked arm in arm, with eyes cast down and sweet low voices, if something warmer than a prologue to a mystery, or a descant on the moon, did not enter into your gentle communion, methinks you must have been worse than Hecla; for, though it be all ice, they say, yet there is fire at the heart; and that girl's eyes and lips were enough to set any one's blood in a flame, even if it were naturally cold as a toad's. Come, come, Algernon, no such reserve between us; let us speak freely of our loves, and we may help each other."

"On my life! William, I have none to speak of," answered his companion, warmly. "You may make love to whom you like, for you are free; but with me it is very different."

"Nonsense," exclaimed the other; "the circumstances are the same in both cases, only the position is reversed. If I am free, she is married; did you not see her husband there? a fat, white-faced man, not so high as a musquetoon. But what is that to me? The love of a month does not trouble itself about matrimony; and my great grandmother's starched ruff is, of all things, the emblem that I hate; for she dared not even kiss her daughter for fear of its crumpling. Why should you heed, either? A little pardonable polygamy is an excellent good receipt for keeping the taste fresh by constant variety. Heaven help me! if all my wives were counted throughout the cities of civilized Europe, I fear I should have to transfer me to Turkey, and lodge next door to the Sublime Porte."

Algernon Grey smiled, whether he would or *not, at his friend's account of himself, but still* he answered seriously: "The case is this, William; whatever I may judge I have a right to do myself; there is one thing, I am sure, I have no right to do, which is, to make a young, gay, happy heart unhappy, sad, and old—ay, I say *old*; for the touch of disappointed love is as withering as the hand of Time. No, no, I have no right to do that!"

"Good faith! you are most scrupulously wrong, my noble cousin," answered Lovet, "and do injustice both to yourself and others. Man, and woman too, were born for pleasure; changing, varying, at each step we take. It is a sort of duty in my eyes to give every human being brought in contact with me whatever joy I can afford them; and I should as much think of refusing a poor fellow a good dinner, for fear he should not have one to-morrow, as fail to make love to a pretty lady who expects it; because I cannot go on loving her all my life. Every woman has a pleasure in being made love to, and I say, Out upon the niggard who will not give her a share of it when he has the opportunity. Every man to his own whim, however; for, after all, these are nought but whims, or the effects of a most pragmatical education. But follow your own course, follow your own course, and go on picking the bare bone of a very musty morality, fancying it all the while venison and capon. Perhaps, after all, you are nought but a true and devoted knight and lover; and the thought of the rare beauty you left four or five years ago in England, like a certain composition of salt and nitre in a pickling-pan, may be preserving you, uncorrupted as a neat's tongue, sound and safe, but somewhat hard and shrivelled withal. Well, she is a glorious creature, it must be confessed; and I, being your cousin and hers too, may venture to confess, without suspicion of flattery, that rarely have I seen beauty equal to hers. The bud has burst into the rose since you left it, and though there may be a thorn or two, the flower is well worth gathering."

Algernon Grey mused and answered in a thoughtful tone, as if arguing with himself. "Taste is a strange thing," he said, "marvellously strange! Who can give reason for his likings and dislikings? and yet there must be some course of reasoning below them all. Or is it instinct, William, that teaches us instantly to appreciate and seek that which is suitable to ourselves? There are several kinds of beauty—"

"True, noble cousin," answered Lovet, in a bantering tone.

"Ay, but two very distinct classes into which all minor differences perhaps may be arranged," his friend continued.

"Perhaps so," rejoined the other; "let us hear more of the two ranks."

"Why there is first," replied Algernon Grey, "that sort of beauty which dazzles and surprises—brilliant and commanding, I think men call it—the bold firm eye, the Juno frown, the look of fiery passion, sparkling as a diamond but as hard, bright as a sword but oftentimes as ready to wound. With me it alarms rather than attracts, rouses to resistance instead of subduing."

"Go on," said Lovet, in a quiet but meaning tone, "I understand."

"Then there is the other sort," his friend continued, "that which wins rather than triumphs; the gentle, the gay, more than the keen and bright; yielding to, rather than demanding love; the trusting, the confiding look, instead of the ruling and commanding; the lip where smiles seem to find their native home; the soft half-shaded eye full of veiled light, speaking at times the sportiveness of innocent thought, under which may lie, concealed against the time of need, higher and stronger powers of heart and mind."

Lovet had become graver as his companion went on; and when he ended, replied with some warmth, "Ay, indeed, such beauty as that might well win love for life, and he would be a fool who found it and let any idle obstacle prevent his purchase of so rare a jewel; but it is a dream of your fancy, Algernon. Imagination has laid on those delicate colours, and you will never see the original of the portrait. Each man has in his own heart his own image of perfection, always sought for, but rarely found. If once he meets it, let him beware how it escapes him. He will never see its like again. I am no enthusiast, as you well know—I have seen too much of life; but here—all levity as you think me—did I find once the creature that fancy early drew as the companion of my days, and had hope of winning her love, I tell you, Algernon, there is not that consideration on the earth I would not cast behind me for the great joy of making her mine for ever: no, not one—rank, station, wealth, the world's esteem, all cold and formal dogmas, devised by knaves and listened to by fools. I would bend all to that. My own habitual lightness, the sneer and jest of gay companions, the censure of the grave and reverend, the fear of outcry and invective, and all the idle babble of the world, would weigh but as a feather in the balance against the lifelong dream of happiness which such an union would call up."

When he had spoken—and he did so with fire and eagerness altogether unlike himself—he leaned his head upon his hand, and fell apparently into profound thought for several minutes. Algernon Grey, too, mused, and his meditation lasted longer than his companion's, for he was still in a deep revery when Lovet started up, exclaiming, "But it is all in vain! Come, Algernon, let us not think—it is the most irrational waste of time that can be devised. We are but Fate's monkeys. She keeps us here in this cage of earth, and throws us what crumbs she will. Happy is he who catches them quickest. What are you for to-day? I am for the castle to worship at my little shrine, unless I hear from my saint to the contrary before the clock strikes eleven."

"Some time in the day I must go up, too," replied his friend; "in courtesy we must both do so, to show our thankfulness for our kind reception; but before I go, I must away into the town to seek out worthy Dr. Henry Alting, this renowned professor, to whom my uncle, his old friend, sent me a letter by your hands."

"Then, you may as well publish your name at the market-cross, if there be one," answered Lovet; "it will be *given out* from the chair of philosophy this morning, and over the whole town ere noon."

"No, no," replied the other, with a smile; "my uncle humours my whim—he is Astrea-struck, and loves all wild exploits. In his letter, I am but called his young kinsman, Master Algernon Grey, and the good doctor will be ignorant of all the rest."

"Well, well, I care not," answered Lovet; "it is no affair of mine. I transformed myself into William Lovet to please you, and though, certainly, the plan has its conveniences for every one but the staid and most line-and-rule gentleman who devised it, yet I am ready to appear in my own feathers to-morrow, should need be."

"Perhaps, thinking you will appear to more advantage, Will," replied Algernon Grey, with an effort to be gay; "however, there is no fear. Our borrowed plumage will last as long as we may want it, if we take care not to soil our own feathers underneath."

"Now, corpo di Baccho!" cried Lovet, "I admire you again. That last morality in metaphor was worthy of a saint in orange-tawny velvet, or my fair cousin, Algernon. I have hopes of you whenever you begin to deal in tropes and figures. At least, you are not dull then, which is something. That glorious trio, wit, wisdom, and wantonness, can then claim some share in you, and there is a chance of the man who has thrown away his youth and his youth's powers in cold asceticism, trying to warm his age with the fire of profligacy. It is a common case, and will be yours, Algernon; for the man who commits not youthful follies, is sure in the end to take up with reverend vices. But do you agree to my plan; a month here—but one poor month; and if I win not my fair lady in that time, I shall be right ready to slink away like a cur that has been kicked out for attempting to steal a marrow-bone. You can attend lectures in the mean time, and learn, from the skull-cap of old bald-headed Scultetus, to carry yourself evenly on slippery places."

"Well, stay what time you like," replied Algernon Grey. "If I find cause, I can go on a stage or two and wait for you. At present, I will forth to find out this renowned professor. Should you be gone ere my return, leave tidings of your doings for my guidance."

Thus saying, he left him, and as he went, William Lovet gazed after him till the door was shut. Then a somewhat bitter smile curled his lip, and, after a moment's thought, he muttered, "Limed! limed! or I am much mistaken. Ay, ay, I know the sort of beauty that you have so tenderly described. A month! Stay but a month, and if I judge her right, and know man's heart, you are plunged in beyond recall."

CHAPTER V.

Preceded by a Knecht, as he was called, of the inn, in a close-fitting jacket, wide brown breeches, and blue stockings, Algernon Grey walked through the narrow and tortuous streets of Heidelberg towards the residence of a man

then renowned for his wit and wisdom, though we know not at the present day upon what this fame was founded. Although it was the custom in those times for gay gallants to ruffle through the streets with a long train of servants, badged, liveried, and armed, no one accompanied the young Englishman, except the man to show him the way. At that hour of the morning—it was now near eleven—few persons were to be seen abroad; for the student was busy at his book, the shopkeeper laboring in his vocation. Those who did appear were all in their particular costume, distinctive of class and station. You could have laid your finger upon any man in the whole town, and named at once his occupation from his dress. Nor was this custom, which assigned peculiar garments to each peculiar class, without many great advantages, besides the mere picturesque effect. But it is in vain to regret that these things have passed away; they were parts of the spirit of that age, an age fond of distinctions; and now in the fusion of all classes which has taken place, where no distinctions are suffered to remain but that of wealth, the keeping up of peculiar costumes would be an idle shadow of a thing no longer existing.

Amidst close rows of tall houses—the narrow windows of which displayed no costly wares—and, here and there, through the rows of booths erected before the doors, in which the tradesmen were then accustomed to display their goods for sale, Algernon Grey walked on for about five minutes, from time to time asking a question of his guide, who never replied without humbly doffing his little cap, and adding, "Honourable Sir," or "Noble gentleman," to every sentence. It was another trait of the times and the country.

At length the man stopped at the open door of a tall, dull-looking house, and informed his companion that he would find Dr. Alting on the second floor; and mounting the long, cold, broad steps of stone, Algernon Grey found his way up to the rooms of him he sought. A fresh, sturdy, starched servant wench, who instantly caught his foreign accent, and thereupon made up her mind not to understand a word he said, was at length brought to introduce him to the presence of her master; and, following her along a narrow passage, the young Englishman was ushered into a room, such as the general appearance of the house had given little reason to expect. It was wide, handsome, overhung by a fine carved oak ceiling, and furnished all round with large bookcases, richly carved, containing the treasured collection of a long life in every shape and form, from the enormous folio to the most minute duodecimo.

At a heavy oaken table, near one of the windows, sat two gentlemen, of different age and appearance. One was a man with white hair and beard, whose sixtieth summer would never come again. He was dressed in a long loose gown of some black stuff; and, on his head, which probably was bald, he wore a small crushed velvet cap. His face was fine and intelligent; and from beneath the thick overhanging eyebrow shone out a clear and sparkling eye.

The other was habited in a coat of buff leather, not very new, but laced with gold. His cloak was a plain, brown broad-cloth, a good deal fresher than his coat; and on his legs he wore a pair of those large funnel-shaped boots, which seemed intended to catch all the rain or dust that might fall or fly. His heavy rapier lay along his thigh; but beyond this he was unarmed; and his hat with its single feather rested beside him. In age he might be about fifty. His strong black hair and pointed beard were somewhat grizzled; but there was no sign of decay in form or feature His teeth were fine and beautifully white; his face rough with exposure, but not wrinkled; his frame was strong, tall, and powerful; and the bold contour of the swelling muscles could be seen through the tight sleeve of his coat. His face was a very pleasant one, grave but not stern, thoughtful but not sad; and, as he turned sharply round in his chair at the opening of the door, a faint recollection of his features, as if he had seen them before, or some very like them, came across the young Englishman's mind.

With his usual calm self-possession, Algernon Grey advanced straight towards the seat of the gentleman in black, and, with a few words of introduction, presented a letter. Dr. Alting rose to receive him, and, for a single instant, fixed his keen grey eyes upon his visitor's face with a look the most intent and searching. The glance was withdrawn almost as soon as given; and then, courteously putting forward a seat, he opened the letter and read. The moment after, he took Algernon's hand and shook it heartily, exclaiming, "So, sir, you are a kinsman of this good lord, my old and much respected friend. Ever to see him again is beyond my hopes; but it is something to have before me one of his race. What, if I may ask, brings you to Heidelberg? If you come in search of learning, here you can find it amongst my reverend brethren of the University. If in search of gaiety and pleasure, surely, above there, in the castle, you will have your heart's content; for a more merry body of light young hearts were seldom ever collected — good faith," he continued, turning to the gentleman who had been sitting with him when Algernon entered, "they kept their revel up full long last night. As I sat here at my studies—it must have been past midnight—the music came down upon me in gusts, almost making even my old sober limbs tingle to go and join the merry dance, as I did in boyhood. It must have been a splendid scene."

"This gentleman was there," replied the other; "I saw him for an instant; but I stayed not long; for that music has another effect on me, my good old friend; and I betook me to my tower again, more in the spirit of the gloomy anchorite than yourself, it seems."

"I passed the night there and part of the morning too, I fear," said Algernon Grey; "for it was two before we reached our inn."

"I trust you had a happy night of it, then," answered Dr. Alting; "such scenes are the property of youth; and it would be hard to deny to the young heart all the brief pleasures of which life has so few."

"A far happier night," answered Algernon

Grey, "than many of those have been which I have spent in more powerful courts and scenes as gay. There happened to me that which, in the chances of the world, rarely occurs, to have a companion for the night whose thoughts and feelings were wholly congenial to my own; a lady whose beauty, dazzling as it is, would have fallen upon my cold heart only like a ray of wintry sunshine on a frozen world, had it not been that, unlike every one I ever saw, a high pure spirit and a rich bright fancy left her beauty itself forgotten in their own transcendent lustre."

"You are an enthusiast, my young friend," said Dr. Alting, while the stranger fixed his eyes on Algernon Grey, with a gay smile; "what might be the name of this paragon?"

"The princess called her Agnes," answered the young Englishman; "and more I did not enquire."

A merry glance passed between the good professor and his companion; and the latter exclaimed, "You did not enquire! That seems strange, when you were so captivated."

"There is the mistake," said Algernon Grey, laughing; "I was not captivated; I admired, esteemed, approved, but that is all. Most likely she and I will never meet again; for I shall wander for a year, and then return to duties in my own land; and the name of Agnes is all I want, by which to remember a happy night of the very few I have ever known, and a being full of grace and goodness, whom I shall see no more."

"A strange philosophy," cried Dr. Alting; "especially for so young a man."

"And so you wander for a year," said the stranger; "if it be not a rash question, as it seems you are not seeking adventures in love, is it high deeds of arms you are in search of, like the ancient knights?"

"Not so, either," answered Algernon Grey; "although I am willing enough, should the occasion present itself, to serve under any honourable flag, where my religion is not an obstacle, as I have done more than once before."

"Ah!" said Dr. Alting, "then you are one of those—those very few, who will suffer their religion to be an obstacle to any of their plans."

"Assuredly," answered Algernon Grey. "The strife at present throughout the whole of Europe is, and must be ever more or less for the maintenance of the pure and unperverted religion of the Gospel against the barbarous superstitions and corruptions of the Romish church; and, whatever may be the pretext of war, whoever draws the sword in a papist army—"

"Is fighting for the Woman of Babylon," cried Dr. Alting, eagerly; "is setting himself up against the Cross of Christ, is advancing the banner of the Dragon, destined sooner or later to be thrown into the pit of the nethermost hell;" and, taking the young Englishman's hand, he shook it heartily, exclaiming: "I am glad to hear such sentiments from the kinsman of my noble friend."

"He entertains them as firmly as yourself, you well know," answered Algernon Grey; "they are common to all his family; and, for my part, humble as I am, I shall always be ready to draw the sword in the defence of right, whenever the opportunity is afforded me."

"It is coming, my dear sir, the time is coming," cried the old man. "Great events are before us; and I see for the first time the prospect of the true faith becoming predominant in this land of Germany; thence, I trust, to spread its holy and beneficial influence throughout the world. You have heard, doubtless you have heard, that in the very heart of this great empire, the people of Bohemia have raised the standard of freedom of conscience. Even now they are in deliberation to choose them a new king, in place of the papist tyrant, who has violated all the solemn pledges, by virtue of which alone he held the crown. If their choice be a wise and good one, if it be such as I believe it will be, if the head of the Protestant Union,—in a word—if the Elector Palatine be chosen King of Bohemia, doubtless the spirit of the true faith will, from that moment, go forth with irresistible might, and shake the idolatrous church of the seven hills to its foundation. I look to it with confidence and trust: I look to every gallant spirit and faithful heart to come forward and take his share in the good work; and, with the name of the Lord on our side, there is no fear of the result."

The conversation proceeded for some time in the same strain. With eager fire, and with sometimes a not very reverend application of the words of Scripture, Dr. Alting went on to advance his own opinions, becoming more eager every moment, especially when the probability of the Elector Palatine being chosen as their king by the states of Bohemia was referred to.

The gentleman who was with him when Algernon Grey entered, took little part in the discussion, remaining grave and somewhat stern in look; though, from the few words he uttered, it was evident that his religious views were the same as those of his two companions. He smiled, indeed, in turn at the different sorts of enthusiasm of the old man and the young one; and once Dr. Alting shook his finger at him good-humouredly, saying: "Ah! Herbert, you would have men believe you cold and stoical, and, for that purpose, in every affair of life you act like no other man; but I know the fire that is under it all."

"Fire enough, when it is needed," answered Herbert; "but only when it is needed, my good friend. If troops spend all their powder in firing salutes, they will have none to charge their cannon with in the day of battle; but as you are not expected to put on the cuirass, it is just as well that you should keep up men's spirits, and fix their determinations by your oratory. Only let me be quiet. You won't find me wanting when the time comes."

"I trust none will be wanting," said Algernon Grey; "but yet I cannot help feeling, that in this light-minded world, many whom we count upon rashly, may fall from us readily."

"Too true, too true," said Herbert, shaking his head.

"I will not believe it," cried Dr. Alting; "with such a prince, and such a cause, and such an object, every man, who has a particle of truth in his nature, will do his duty, I am sure; and let the false go—we can do without them."

"You must add the weak, too, my reverend

friend," said Algernon Grey, rising to depart; "but still, I do think, and I do trust, that there are enough both firm and true in Europe, to accomplish this great task, unless some sad accident occur, or some great mistake be committed. We shall see, however; and in the mean time, farewell."

Dr. Alting shook hands with him warmly, asked where he could find him, how long would be his stay in Heidelberg, and all those other questions which courtesy dictated: but perhaps the reverend doctor felt, in a degree not altogether pleasant, that his young friend, if not so learned a man as himself in books and parchments, had another sort of learning—that of the world—which he himself did not possess.

The gentleman who had been called Herbert seemed to feel differently; and, when the young gentleman was about to depart, he rose, saying: "I will go with you, and perhaps may show you some things of interest." Then bidding adieu to Dr. Alting, he followed Algernon Grey out of the room, and descended the stairs with him in silence. Under the shadow of the doorway they found waiting the Knecht, who had guided the young gentleman thither; but Herbert dismissed him, saying to his companion: "I will be your guide back. Shall we stroll along to the church, or visit some of the fortifications? Both are somewhat in your way, it would seem."

"Nay," answered Algernon, "with the church I have little to do, except when my opinions are drawn forth by such a man as our learned friend; but I will go whithersoever you choose to lead me."

"Well, then, we will stroll along and take things as they come," answered Herbert; "we can scarcely go amiss in this town and neighbourhood, for each step has its own particular interest, or its own beauty. It is a place I never weary of."

As he spoke they turned into one of the narrow streets that led up towards the hills, and were crossing the castle-road, in order to take a path through the woods, when Algernon Grey's quick ear caught the sound of a voice calling to him. Looking round, he saw a gentleman coming down with a hasty step, followed by two or three servants, and instantly recognised the Baron of Oberntraut. A feeling—I might almost call it a presentiment: one of those strange, inexplicable foresights of a coming event, which sometimes put us on our guard against approaching evil, made him say to his companion: "Oh! this is the gentleman with whom I had a bet last night, I will rejoin you in a moment;" and he advanced a step or two up the hill.

The next instant Oberntraut was by his side.

"I wish to speak a moment with you, sir," he said.

Algernon Grey bowed his head and was silent.

"We had a bet last night," continued the baron, whith a flushed but somewhat embarrassed air; "my servants are carrying down the amount to your inn."

"Thanks," answered Algernon Grey; "they will find some of my people there, to whom they can deliver it."

"I always pay my debts, sir," said Oberntraut; "but I rather think there is another account to be settled between us."

"Indeed!" replied Algernon Grey, calmly; "I am not aware of it. What may it be?"

"Oh! sir, you assume ignorance!" rejoined the other, in an insulting tone: "in a word, then, we do not suffer foreign gentlemen to come hither, win our money, and court our ladies, without making them pass through some ordeal. Do you understand me now?"

"Perfectly," answered the young Englishman, with a slight smile; "such words are not to be mistaken; and let me assure you, as I wish to see everybody pleased, I will not disappoint you; but, at the same time, we may conduct a matter of this sort without warmth, and with all courtesy. I know not how I have aggrieved you; but that I ask not: it is quite sufficient that you think yourself aggrieved, and I will give you such opportunity of redressing yourself as you may wish for."

"I thank you, sir," replied the other, in a more moderate tone; "when and where shall it be?"

"Nay, that I must leave to you," answered the young Englishman; "I will make but two conditions—that it be speedily, and that we embroil no others in our quarrel. I have but one friend here, and as he has been somewhat too famous in our own country for rencontres of this kind, I would fain spare him any share in an affair of mine."

"Be that as you like," replied the baron; "on all accounts we shall be better alone: the place must be one where we shall have no interruption. Let me think! Yes, that will do. Will you meet me to-morrow on the bridge, each with a single page whom we can leave behind at our convenience? I will lead you to a spot secure and shaded from all eyes, where we shall have good turf and space enough."

"Agreed," answered Algernon Grey, "but why not this very day? I am quite prepared."

"But I have a few hours' journey to take first," replied the baron; "no, in your courtesy let it be to-morrow; and the safest hour will be just before nightfall. Come a little earlier to the bridge, for we have some small distance to go—with our swords alone—is it not so?"

"As you will," said his companion. "Be it so then—in the grey I will not fail you—good morning, sir;" and turning round, he rejoined his new acquaintance Herbert, with an easy and unembarrassed air.

Herbert was not entirely deceived, however. He had been standing where the young Englishman left him at about five paces' distance, where the greater part of their conversation was inaudible; but he knew one of the parties and his character well, and divined the other rightly. The last words of Algernon Grey, too, which, detached from the rest, had seemed to the speaker insignificant, had been uttered in a louder tone, and Herbert had heard him say distinctly, "In the grey I will not fail you—good morning, sir." The expressions were nothing in themselves; they might refer to any trifling and accidental arrangement; but Herbert's eyes had been fixed upon the face of Oberntraut, who stood fronting him, and he read the look that it wore, if not with certainty, assuredly not wrongly.

As the two separated the baron doffed his hat and plume to Herbert with every sign of high respect; and the other returned the salutation, though but coldly. For a moment or two, as Algernon and his companion walked up the hill, nothing was said; and then the younger gentleman began to speak lightly of indifferent subjects, thinking that longer silence might lead to suspicions. Herbert answered not, but went on musing, till at length —as if he had paid not the slightest attention to the words which had been falling on his ear for the last two or three minutes—he broke forth at once with a dry laugh, saying: "So, you have contrived to manufacture a quarrel already."

"Nay, not so!" answered Algernon Grey; "if you mean with the Baron of Oberntraut, let me assure you there is no quarrel of any kind between us. I know of no offence that I have given him, and for my own part I may safely say that I have received none. There was a bet between us which I won, and he seems perhaps a little nettled; but what is that to me?"

Herbert looked down thoughtfully, still walking on, and after a while he paused, asking as abruptly as before,—"Have you many friends in this place?"

"Nay, I have been here but eighteen hours," answered the other; "happy is the man who can boast of many friends, take the whole world over and pick them from the four quarters of the globe. I have none who deserves the name within these walls, but the one who came with me."

"Well," replied the other, "should you require one, on occasion of import, you know where to find one who has seen some hard blows given in his day."

"I thank you much, and understand you rightly," said Algernon Grey; "should I have need of such help, depend upon it, I will apply to you and none other. But at present, believe me, I have none."

"What! not '*in the grey?*'" asked Herbert, with a laugh; and then, whistling two or three bars of an English air, he added, "Will you spend an hour or two with an old soldier to-night, my young friend?"

"Willingly," replied Algernon Grey, smiling at the suspicions in which he clearly saw the invitation was given. "When shall I come? My time is quite free."

"Oh! come an hour before twilight," answered Herbert, "and stay till the castle clock strikes ten—Will that suit you?"

"Right well," said the young Englishman. "I will not fail by a moment, though I see you doubt me. But where am I to find you, and who am I to ask for?"

"I have deceived myself, or you are cheating me," answered Herbert bluntly, and speaking in English; "but come at all events. You will find me at the castle—ask for Colonel Herbert, or the English Ritter. They will show you where I lodge."

"Be sure I will be there," rejoined Algernon; "I did not know you were a countryman; but that will make the evening pass only the more pleasantly, for we shall have thoughts in common, as well as a common language; and, to say sooth, though this German is a fine tongue, yet, while speaking it badly, as I do, I feel like one of the mountebanks we see in fairs dancing a saraband in fetters."

"You speak it well enough," answered his companion, "and it is a fine rich tongue; but at the court, with the usual levity of such light places, they do not value their own wholesome dialect. They must have a dish of French, forsooth; and use a language which they do not half know, and which, if they did, is not half as good a one as their own—a poor pitiful whistling tongue, like the wind blowing through a key-hole without the melody of the Italian, the grandeur of the Spanish, the richness of the German, or the strength of the English."

"Yet is a good language for conversation," replied Algernon Grey, willing to follow upon any track that led from the subject of his rencontre with Oberntraut.

"To say things in a double sense, to tickle the ears of light women, and make bad jests upon good subjects," rejoined Herbert, whose John Bull prejudices seemed somewhat strong; "that is all that it is good for. Now look here," he continued, as they reached a commanding point of the hill, "did you ever see a place so badly fortified as this? There is not much to be done with it that is true; for it is commanded by so many accessible points, that it would cost the price of an empire to make it a fortress. Yet if the Elector would spend upon strengthening his residence against his enemies, one-half of what he is throwing away upon laying out that stupid garden, I would undertake to hold it out for a year and a day against any force that king or emperor could bring against it."

"Something might be done, it is true," answered the young Englishman; "but it could never be made a strong place, domineered as it is by all these mountains. If you fortified them up to the top, it would require an army to garrison them."

"Ay, that is the mistake that will be committed by engineers to the last day, I believe," answered Herbert, who had his peculiar notions on all subjects. "They think they must fortify every commanding point. But there is another and better method of guarding them. Render them inaccessible to artillery, that is all that requires to be done, and then they need no further defence. On the contrary, they become ramparts that will crumble to no balls. There is no escarpment like the face of a rock. Now this same mad gardener fellow, this Saloman de Caus, who is working away there: he has filled up half a valley, thrown down half a mountain, and the same labour and money, spent in another way, would have rendered every point inaccessible from which a fire could be opened on the castle.—But, look there! Horses are gathering at the gates, and men in gilded jackets. The prince and his fair dame, and all the wild boys and girls of the court, are going out upon some progress or expedition—I must hasten down as fast as I can, for I want to speak with one of them before they go.—Remember the hour, and fail not. Can you find your way back?"

"Oh, yes! no fear!" answered Algernon

Grey, "I will be with you to-night;" and waving his hand, Herbert hurried down towards the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

"Tony," cried the page, standing in the gateway of the Golden Stag, and turning half-round towards a sort of covered, half-enclosed shed or booth in the court-yard, where the English servant, who had accompanied the two travellers on their journey to Heidelberg, was cleaning a pair of his master's silver stirrups, "here's a man inquiring for my lord, and I can not make out a word that he says."

"What does he want?" cried Tony from the shed, rubbing away as hard as if his life depended upon making the stirrups look brighter than the groom had been able to render them.

"I can't tell," replied the boy; "but he seems to want to give me a hundred crowns."

"Take them, take them," rejoined the man, sagaciously, "and ask no questions. I'll tell you what, Frill, always take gold when you can get it. It comes slow, goes fast, and calls no man master long: a very changeable servant: but a very useful one, while we have him; and there is no fear of his growing old in our service. Don't let the man know you can speak French, or he might put you to disagreeable interrogatories. Pocket and be silent; it is the way many a man becomes great in this world."

The advice was given in that sort of bantering tone, which showed evidently that it was not intended to be strictly followed, and the page, taking the crowns, held them up before the eyes of the man who brought them, saying: "For Algernon Grey?"

"Ja, Ja!" said the German servant; "for Algernon Grey;" and adding a word or two more, which might have been Syriac for aught the page knew, he withdrew, leaving the money in the boy's hands.

As soon as he was gone, Freville or Frill, as he was familiarly termed by the household, walked back to where his companion was at work, and quietly counted over the money upon the loose board which formed the only table of the shed.

"I must give this to some one to keep, till my lord's return," he said: "will you take care of it, Tony?"

"Not I," replied the servant; "I repeat the Lord's Prayer every morning and evening; the first time, to keep me out of temptation by day; the second, to defend me against it by night—I'll have none of it, Master Frill; it is a good sum, and too much for any poor man's pocket, especially where the placket-hole is wide, and the bottom somewhat leaky."

"I will take it up to Sir William, then," said the boy; "for I won't keep it myself. It would be risking my lord's money sadly. Even now my fingers begin to feel somewhat sticky, as if I had been handling the noses of horse-chestnut buds."

"Get you gone, for a graceless young villain," answered Tony; "what have you to do with the noses of other men's children? you will have enough to do with your own, if I guess right; but as to the money, methinks it is quite as safe in your pocket as Sir William's."

"Why, you don't think he would keep it, Tony?" said the page, in an inquiring tone.

"As to keeping it," answered Tony, "that's as it may be. He never could keep his own, therefore why should he keep other people's? but between you and I, Frill—" and he dropped his voice as if he did not wish to be overheard—"our young lord is not likely to gain much by Sir William's company. We did very well without him; and though he may not choose to pick my lord's pocket of hard gold, he may take from him what gold will not buy. I have a strange notion, somehow, that it was not altogether for love he came. If it were, why did not he come long before? But I remember him well, when he was a boy; and he was a cunning devil then; as full of mischief as a pistachio-nut. Why he hung the buttery hatch with a wire like a bird-trap; and the moment old Jonas put his hand out, it fell and nearly chopped off his fingers."

This was a jest fitted to the meridian of a boy's understanding; and he burst into a fit of laughter at the anecdote.

"Ay, ay," continued Tony, "it would have passed as a wild lad's fun, if we had not known that he had a spite at Jonas, who, one day, when he was thirsty, refused him a cup of hypocras that he wanted, and would only give him a jug of ale.—But who in the name of silks and satins, is this peeping about the court on the tips of his toes, with rosettes and sword-knots enough to swallow him up? It is a page of the court, I do believe. To him, Frill, to him! Speak French to this one, for he looks as if he had been dieted on comfits and spiced wine; and nothing will go down with him, depend upon it, unless it be garnished with French tongue."

Following the suggestion of his companion, Frill advanced, and the two pages met in the midst of the court-yard, where they stood bowing and complimenting each other with an extravagance of courtesy which had nearly overpowered good Tony with laughter.

"My heavens! what a pair of monkeys," he exclaimed. "Take away their cloaks, and stick a tail through their satin breeches, and you have got the beast as perfect as at a puppet-show. Look at that little monster, Frill, if he has not wriggled himself into an attitude in which he cannot stand while I count four. There, 'tis all over; and now he twists to the other side. What does he want, Frill?" he continued, raising his voice; "talk to him, boy, and don't stand there grinning like a cat-ape."

"He comes down from the castle," answered Frill, turning round, very well satisfied with the graces he had been displaying, "to ask my lord and Sir William to join the court in a progress to Schönau."

"Tell him Master Algernon Grey is out, and Heaven knows when he will be back again," exclaimed Tony, who was wearied with the courtly air of the pages. "What does the devil's foal say now?" he continued, when Frill had rendered the reply he dictated, and received a speech and a low bow in return.

"He says I must tell Master William Lovet, then," replied the page; and conducting the other youth ceremoniously back to the threshold of the gateway, he took leave of him after some farther civil speeches on the one part, and directions on the other.

"There, go and tell Sir William," said Tony, when the boy rejoined him, "and lay the money on the table in our lord's room. And hark you, Frill, you may as well keep an eye on Sir William's doings; I've doubts, Frill, I have doubts; and I should like to know what he is seeking; for I can't help thinking there's more under his jerkin than God's will and a good conscience."

"If I thought he meant my lord any harm," answered the boy, boldly, "I'd drive my dagger into him."

"Pooh! nonsense; prick him with a needle or a cobbler's awl," answered Tony; "you'd only let him blood and make him more feverish towards spring time. No, no, my boy, he'll give no cause for offence; but a man may do more harm sometimes with a simple word than with a drawn sword. I'll watch him well, however; do you so too; and if you find out anything, let me know. Now, away with you, away with you, and tell the good man above; for if he do not make haste, he will not be in time, and then your young bones are likely to suffer."

The page turned to obey, but he had scarcely reached the archway, when William Lovet issued forth, descending from above, and called loudly for his horse.

The page's communication, however, seemed to make an alteration in his purpose; and after pausing for a moment or two to think, he reentered the house, ordering everything to be prepared for him to join the train of Frederic and Elizabeth, as soon as he heard them coming down the hill.

William Lovet was a very different man in the solitude of his own chamber and in the company of his cousin. He now waited some twenty minutes, expecting almost every moment to hear the approach of the cavalcade, which was to pass before the windows; but he showed no impatience, no lover-like haste to join the lady at whose suggestion he doubted not the invitation had been given. Sitting at the table, with his hat cast down and his sword taken out of the belt, he leaned his head upon his hand, and seemed buried in meditation. His brow was contracted, and heavy with apparently gloomy thought; and his hand played with the curls of his long dark hair unconsciously. Like many men of strong passions, who set a careful guard upon their tongue when any other human being is near to hear and comment on their words, but feel painfully the restraint then put upon themselves, he was apt, as if for relief, to suffer the secret counsels of his heart to break forth at times, when he felt perfectly certain they would reach no other ear but his own. And this was one of those moments when the workings of strong purposes within him forced him to give way to the dangerous habit. It was no long-continued monologue that he spoke, no loud and vehement outbursts of passion; but broken fragments of sentences—as if a portion of his thoughts would clothe themselves in words, and were suddenly checked before they were complete—came forth muttered and disjointed from his lips.

"It must do this time," he said; and then he fell into thought again, continuing, in about a minute after, "If it do not, means must be found to make it—the time is very short. In another year he goes back—to think of his having wasted full four years amongst all that could tempt a man! He must be stone—but he is touched now, or I am mistaken—I must get this woman to help me—make her a tool when she thinks herself a conqueror! Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed aloud. "I will never leave it till it is finished. It may cost a good deal yet; for he is not easily led, that's clear. Example, example! That has been always wanting. We will accustom his mind to it—break him in like a young colt that first flies from the hand, but soon suffers every child to pat him. Ay, he is in the high road, if he do not take a flight and dart off; but surely, in the wide world of accidents, we shall find something, which, improved by skilful management, will keep him here till that same glittering web of golden threads, called love's net, is round him—then let the poor stag struggle, and pant, and toss about, he will not easily break through, and the prize is mine."

His farther thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. "Come in," he said; and then exclaimed, in surprise, as the very object of his contemplation stood before him, "Why, Algernon, you have become mighty ceremonious."

"Nay," answered Algernon Grey, laughing, "I thought you were not alone; for I heard one voice speaking, at least; and, with a gentleman of your pursuits, one can never tell how inopportune a visit may be."

"Pshaw!" cried Lovet; "'tis a bad habit I have from my mother. We rash and thoughtless folks, unlike you calm and cautious ones, cannot keep the secrets of our bosom in the safe casket of the heart. We must speak out our thoughts, whatever they may be; and, if we can find no other man to tell them to, we tell them to ourselves."

"The safest confidant by far," answered Algernon Grey. "What now, boy?" he continued, turning to the page, who had followed him into the room, and was waiting at hand for an opportunity to speak.

"May it please you, noble sir," replied the page, "a man, with a badge upon his arm, brought hither a hundred crowns, whence or why I could not make out, for he had neither French nor English; but he said Algernon Grey well enough; and so I laid them in your chamber."

"I understand," replied his master; "what more?"

"A page from the court, sir," answered the boy; "a very gallant youth, full of fine essences and rich conceits, with satin in abundance, and no lack of ribands—"

"On my life, he must have been your counterpart, Frill," exclaimed his master, laughing; and, turning to his companion, he added: "This boy has been studying Sidney or Lilly, or some high-flown writer. Well, most

delicate Frill, what said your delicate young friend?"

"He brought a message, noble sir," replied the page, "inviting Messieurs Algernon Grey and William Lovet to join the cavalcade of the court, going joyously to Schönau. They were to pass by the inn in half an hour."

"And, pray, how did this ingenuous youth deliver himself?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Oh! with marvellous fineness, my lord," replied the page, "with every courteous invention that his genius could suggest."

"But the tongue, Master Frill, the tongue?" cried Algernon; "if you could not understand one man, how could you understand the other?"

"He spoke French, my lord, with the utmost perfection," replied the boy.

"Come, Algernon, you are wasting time," exclaimed Lovet; "order your horses and your people, or you will be too late."

Algernon Grey mused for a single instant, and then replied: "I do not go, William."

"Nay, not go!" exclaimed his friend. "Why, you cannot help yourself, unless you would be called the Great Bear of England. In every country of the world such an invitation from the prince is considered a command."

"What reply did you make, Frill?" asked the boy's master.

"I said what Tony told me," replied the page, "namely, 'Master Algernon Grey is out, and Heaven knows when he will return.'"

"I shall not go, William," repeated the young gentleman, in a thoughtful tone; "I have my own reasons, and assuredly I do not ride today."

"Then you are either going to fight a duel, make love, or, in the silent and tender solitude of your chamber in an inn, give yourself up to sweet meditation of your lady's ankles," replied William Lovet, resuming his usual bantering tone. "Methinks, I see you, sitting with the indicator digit of your dexter hand pressed softly on the delicate cheek of youth, the eyebrow raised, one eye to heaven, the other to earth, with a slight poetical squint upon your countenance, and your bosom heaving sighs like a pot of hot broth.—Come, come, Algernon, cast off these humours, or turn anchorite at once. Live like other men, and don't go about the world as if your grandmother's brocade petticoat were hanging forever over your head, like an extinguisher, putting out the flame of youth, and health, and strength, and love, and life. Look about you; see if you can find one single man, of your own age, bearing willingly about upon his shoulders scruples enough to cram a pedlar's pack full of wares, as flimsy and worthless as any it ever contained. Be a man, be a man! Surely, your boyhood is past; and you have no longer to fear the pedagogue's rod, if you stray a little beyond the tether of your mother's apron-string."

Algernon Grey smiled calmly, but merely nodded his head, saying: "I shall not go, Lovet, and all the less for a laugh. If I could be turned from my purposes by a jest, I should think myself a boy, indeed. You will find that out at last, good friend. But, hark, there are the trumpets; get you gone, and good fortune attend you. Call out his horse, Frill, that he may not imitate my sullen boorishness, and keep the princely party waiting."

"Well," cried Lovet, shrugging his shoulders, "most reverend cousin, I will wish you a good morning. In your solemn prayers and devout outpourings of the heart, remember your poor sinful cousin, and especially petition that he may never see the evil of his ways, nor let one pleasure slip from him that fortune offers to his lip. It is a devout prayer; for if I did not enjoy myself I should do something much worse; and the devil would not only have me in the end, but in the beginning. Adieu, adieu! Here they come; I hear the clatter;" and running to the door he closed it sharply behind him, while Algernon Grey, without approaching too near, turned to the window and gazed out into the market-place.

The next instant a gay and splendid train swept up, preceded by two trumpeters in gorgeous liveries. Magnificent horses, many-coloured apparel, gold and embroidery, graceful forms, and joyous bearing, rendered the party one which any young heart might have been glad to join; but the eye of Algernon Grey ran over the various groups of which it was composed, seemingly seeking some particular object, with a curious and inquiring glance. It rested principally on the various female figures of the princess's train; but almost all the ladies wore the small black mask, or loup, then common at the court of France, and sometimes, though not so frequently, seen in England. The heat of the day and the power of the sun gave them a fair excuse, in the care of their complexions, for adopting a mode most favourable to intrigue; and, whoever it might be that the young gentleman's eye sought for in the cavalcade, he could not ascertain, with any certainty, which she was.

The etiquette of the court prevented the train from stopping for any of the expected party; but, before it had defiled toward the bridge, the horse of William Lovet dashed forward from the gateway; and, after a low reverence to the Elector, he fell back and attached himself to the side of one of the ladies in the train, who greeted him with a playful nod.

Algernon Grey seated himself at the table, leaned his head thoughtfully upon his hand, and remained in that position for nearly a quarter of an hour.

"No," he said at length, "no, I will not risk her happiness or my own—I will not do it again—it has been once too often."

He rose as he spoke, and after giving some orders to his servants, strolled down to the river's side, and there, hiring a rude bark, many of which were moored to the bank, he directed the boatman to let it drop slowly down the stream. The hours passed dully, though he was not one of those to whom the silent commune of the heart with itself is wearisome. But there was a cause why that calm meditation, in which he had often found true pleasure, was not now a resource. He tried to cast it off, to fix his mind upon subjects foreign to that upon which his heart was resolved to dwell: and the struggle to escape from an ever recurring object of thought is always heavy labor. Still the hours flew, though with a flagging wing; and when he calculated that the time of

—nis promised visit to Colonel Herbert at the castle was approaching, he returned to the town, and making some change in his apparel, walked slowly up the hill.

The sun was indeed declining, but when he reached the gates of the castle, which stood open, the clock in the bridge tower struck seven, and showed him that he was earlier on the way than he had proposed to be. "Well," he thought, "it matters not. The great and the gay are all absent, and I can stroll about the gardens and courts till the hour comes. Doubtless they will give me admission."

He found no difficulty in gaining entrance, and a servant, of whom he inquired for the lodging of Colonel Herbert, courteously accompanied him across the court-yard, saying he would point it out. Entering the building at the further angle of the court, they passed under the arcade of three stages near the Knights' hall, and then through a long stone passage, to the foot of a flight of steps in the open air, above the highest of which, on a level with his own breast, Algernon Grey saw a wide stone platform, like that of an enormous rampart, surrounded by a balustrade flanked by two small octagon turrets. The tops of the mountains on the other side of the Neckar appeared above the balustrade, the clear blue sky was seen over head, and the evening song of one of the autumn singing birds made itself heard from the castle gardens, rising clear and melodious over the dull hum which came up from the city below.

"I am half an hour before my time," said the young gentleman to the servant, "and if you will just point out to me which is Colonel Herbert's lodging, I will wait here till the hour appointed. I may as well pass the minutes in this pleasant place as any where else."

"This is the Altan, sir," replied the man; "the view from it is greatly admired; and if you turn to the right at the end, it will lead you by the only passage there to a door in the first tower—you see it there. The English knight's lodging is above, and you cannot miss your way. You might, indeed, go round by the arsenal; but the sentinel will not let you pass, unless I am with you."

"Oh, I shall find it easily, I doubt not," answered the young Englishman; and adding thanks, and a substantial token thereof, he mounted the steps and walked slowly forward to the parapet, while a crowd of the beautiful objects which only nature's treasury can display, rushed upon his eyes in dream-like splendour. Hardly had the first feeling of admiration been felt, however, when a slight exclamation of surprise uttered close to him made him turn his head towards one of the two small octagon turrets which stood at either extreme end of the Altan.

The door was open, and he beheld coming forward a female figure which it required but one look to recognize. There was a well-pleased smile upon her countenance, bland, frank, and simple. She saw her agreeable companion of the night before; she remembered with satisfaction, and without one agitating thought, the pleasant hours she had spent with him, and advanced gaily and gladly to meet him, only conscious of friendship and esteem.

Algernon Grey was better read in the world than his companion Lovet believed—ay, even in its most difficult page, the heart of woman.

Nevertheless, though he marked the lady's manner, and instantly drew conclusions from it, those conclusions were not altogether just. He saw that straightforward, well-pleased look—the free and unembarrassed air, and he said within his heart,—"She at least is in no danger. It is for myself I must beware."

The courtesies of life, however, were not to be omitted; and, though with a grave look, he met his fair companion with the usual salutations of the morning, proposing to himself to speak a few words, and then withdraw. But there are as strong attractions as those of the magnet for the needle; and once by her side, resolution failed.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, with the same beaming look; "I had come out hither for a solitary walk upon the Altan while the court is absent, and little thought of having a companion who can enjoy this scene as I do."

"How comes it you are not with the gay party?" asked Algernon Grey; "I thought all the world had gone."

"But you and I," answered the lady, "and one whom you have not seen, but whom you should know before you leave this place; for a wiser or a kinder being does not live than the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana. No, I stayed to read to and amuse her; for she has been ill lately—what with some anxiety and some sorrow. She would not let me remain longer, or I would gladly have done so; for she has been as a mother to me when I most needed a mother's care—and what can I ever do to repay her?"

"Love her," answered the young Englishman; "that is the repayment from noble heart to noble heart. But this is indeed a splendid view! What a confusion of magnificent objects present themselves at once to the eye, with the sun setting over yon wide plain and those golden hills beyond."

"Ay," answered Agnes, following with her eyes the direction in which he pointed, "and those golden hills hide in their bosom, as in a rich casket, a thousand jewels. There is not a valley among them that is not rich in loveliness, not a hill or craggy steep that does not bear up some castle or abbey, some legend of old times, or some deep history. Can you not mark, too, the current of the glorious Rhine, the King of Europe's streams, as he flows onward there?—No! Beside those towers, you catch a glistening of the waters as they pour forward to revel in the magnificence beyond."

"I see," answered Algernon Grey, "I always love the Rhine, with its vine-covered hills and castled rocks and its storied memories. Its course seems to me like that of some fine old poem, where, in even flow, and amidst images of beauty, the mind is led on with ever varying delight till in the end it falls into calm, solemn, contemplative repose."

"I know little of poetry or poets," replied Agnes. "Some, indeed, I have read, especially some of the Italian poets, and they are very beautiful, it is true; but I fancy it is better to know the poem than the poet, the work rather

than the writer—at least so it has been with all those I have seen."

"It is true, I believe," said Algernon Grey; "our thoughts are generally more poetic than our actions, almost always than our demeanour; invariably, I may say, than our persons; and when we remember, that the highest quality of the human mind places before us in a poem only that which mature and deliberate judgment pronounces to be the best of its fruits, it is not wonderful that the man should seem less, when we can see him near, than the poem gave us cause to expect."

In such conversation as this, of an elaborate and somewhat didactic turn, the young Englishman thought himself perfectly safe. He fancied he could discuss poetry and poems, beautiful scenery, the grand works of nature or art, with the loveliest being ever eye beheld, without the slightest danger to himself or others. Unwarned by the fate of Beatrice and her lover, or of Abelard and his pupil, he fancied that on such cold and general themes, he could discourse in safety, even with the fair creature beside him; but he forgot, that through the whole world of the beautiful and the excellent, in nature and in art, there is a grand tie which links with the rest the heart of man: that sympathy is love, in a shallower, or a deeper degree: and he forgot, moreover, that the transition is so easy, by the ever open doors of association, from the most cold and indifferent things to the warmest and the dearest, that the heart must be well guarded, the mind well assured, before it ventures to deal with aught that excites the fancy in companionship with one who has already some hold upon the imagination.

Insensibly, they knew not well how, their conversation deviated from the mere objects tangible to the senses, to the effects produced by those objects on the mind. From the mind they went to the heart; and Agnes, for a time, went on to talk with glowing eloquence, of all those feelings and emotions, of which, it was evident enough to her companion, she spoke by hearsay rather than by experience. Her words were careless, brilliant, even, perhaps, we may say light, in its better sense, for some time after their discourse took that turn. She jested with the subject, she sported with it—like a child who, having found a shining piece of steel, makes a plaything of it, unknowing that it is a dagger which, with a light blow, may cut the knot of life. Suddenly, however, from some feeling, undefined, even to herself, she stopped in full career, became thoughtful, serious, more avaricious of her words. A deeper tone pervaded them when they were spoken; and she seemed to have found unexpectedly, that she was dealing with things which at some time might have a more powerful and heartfelt interest for herself, and that she had better escape from such topics, treating them gravely, whilst she was obliged to treat of them at all. Her conversation, in short, was like a gay pleasure-boat, which quits the shore in sunshine and merriment, but, finding itself far from land makes it way back with earnest speed with the first cloud that gathers on the sky.

Her altered manner called Algernon Grey to himself; and, as they turned back again along the Altan, he said, anxious to fly from a danger which he felt had its fascinations too, but yet mingling with the adieu he was about to speak such a portion of feeling as might pass for ordinary gallantry: "I must now leave you, I believe, for the sun is so low, that it warns me of my engagement to spend this evening with a countryman of ours, named Colonel Herbert, whom I have made acquaintance with this morning—indeed, it is past the hour."

"Oh, I will show you the way," answered Agnes, with a smile; "I am going thither, too; but do stay for an instant to look at that star rising over the Odenwald. How clear and calm it shines! How round, and full, and unvarying! It must be a planet; and I cannot help thinking often, that woman's true sphere is like that of yonder star. There may be brighter things in the heavens, twinkling and sparkling with transcendant light; but her fate is like that of the planet, to wander round one sole object, from which she receives all her brightness, in constant, tranquil, peaceful watchfulness, calm but not dull, and bright but not alone—now come."

CHAPTER VII.

In a large circular room, with a massive column in the midst, from which sprang the groins of the numerous arches which formed the vault, sat the stout soldier Herbert, with his two companions, Algernon Grey and the fair Agnes. The chamber itself, notwithstanding its unusual form, was comfortable and highly decorated. The floor, somewhat unusual in those times, and in that country, was of wood; the stone column in the centre was surrounded by a richly-carved oak seat, furnished with cushions of crimson velvet; and the heavy mass of the pillar, which rose above, was broken and relieved by four groups of armour gathered into the shape of trophies. Seats and bookcases, and those articles of furniture which are now called *etagères*, all likewise of oak, ornamented with velvet and fringes of a crimson colour, occupied the spaces between the windows, and on the one side, midway from the pillar to the wall, was a table covered with clean white linen, supporting various baskets of rich and early fruit, with wine and bread, but no other viands.

On the other side was also a table, on which were cast negligently some books, a pair of gauntlets, two or three daggers from different lands, and a number of objects, valuable either for their rarity or for the beauty of their workmanship. A fine picture stood on the ground, leaning against a chair, at one point; an antique marble vase, richly sculptured, was seen at another; a lance appeared resting on the shoulder of a statue; and the mask of a satyr, from some Roman building, was placed in the gaping vizor of a helmet which stood at the foot of a bookcase. The whole was lighted by cressets hung against the column, which shed a soft and pleasant lustre through the wide room.

The host and his guests were seated at the table where the fruit was spread, and they seemed to be enjoying highly their simple and

innocent meal. Herbert himself was gayer in manner than he had been in the morning; Agnes gave way to the flow of her young bright fancies with as little restraint, or even less, perhaps, than when she had been with Algernon Grey alone; and the young Englishman feeling that, for that evening at least, it was useless to struggle against the fate that had brought them together, yielded his spirit to the pleasure of the moment, and resolved to enjoy the cup which he had not sought to taste.

It must not indeed be supposed that the conversation was all of a bright or cheerful character; for it went on, in its natural course, from subject to subject, resembling in its aspect a rich autumn day, where glowing sunshine and sombre masses of cloud alternately sweep over the prospect, giving a varied interest to the scene.

The conversation of Herbert himself was not in general of a very cheerful tone; it was occasionally pungent, shrewd, and keen in the remarks, but that of a man who, having mingled much with the world—partaken of its pleasures, shared in its strife, and known its sorrows—had withdrawn for several years from any very active participation in the pursuits of other men, still watching eagerly as a spectator the scenes in which he had once been an actor.

The connexion between him and Agnes had somewhat puzzled Algernon Grey at his first entrance. Their evident familiarity, their affection one for the other, had perhaps pained him for an instant—it was but for an instant; for, though she gave the old soldier both her hands, and kissed with her glowing lips his weather-beaten cheek, it was all done so frankly, so candidly, that the young Englishman felt there must be something to warrant it—that there was nothing to be concealed. He then asked himself more than once, what the relationship could be? but it was not till he had been there nearly an hour, that the fair girl, in addressing Herbert, called him "My dear uncle."

Algernon Grey asked himself why he should have felt pained at her familiarity with any man, whether her near relative or not?—but it was a question which he could not or would not answer, and he hurried away from it to other things. "I knew not," he said, "that this fair lady was your kinswoman, Colonel Herbert, though we spoke of her at good Dr. Alting's this morning."

"You gave me no reason to know that it was of her you spoke," answered Herbert with a smile.

"Yes, methinks I did," said the other gaily: "I told you I had been at the court revel last night, and had passed the hours with a lady whom I described right well."

"Oh, let me hear, dear uncle! let me hear!" exclaimed Agnes; "I should so much like to hear a stranger's description of myself,—you must tell me all he said."

"That is because you are vain, my child," answered the old soldier; "you would not like to hear it, if you thought he had blamed you. Nay, I will not tell you a word."

"Then I will divine for myself," cried Agnes; "and you shall see whether I am vain or not. He said he had met a wild romantic girl, not very courtly in her manners, who had talked to him all night on themes which might have suited a painter or a chaplain better than a court lady; that she danced better than she talked,—dressed better than she danced,—and had a sovereign objection to love-speeches."

Algernon Grey smiled, and Herbert replied, tapping her cheek with his fingers, but looking round to their young companion: "You see, sir, in what these women's vanity consists—dancing and dressing! But you are wrong, Agnes, altogether. He said not a word of your dress,—he took no notice of your dancing,—he did not object to your prattle,—and he told me nothing of his having made you love-speeches."

"Neither did he," cried Agnes, with her cheek glowing at the conclusion which her relation had drawn; "we heard many a one passing around us, but he made none. That was the reason I liked his conversation, and I told him so."

"You tell too readily what is in your heart, my child," said Herbert; "and yet, good faith, I would not have it otherwise. But of one thing you may be sure, that the man I would ask here was too much a gentleman to say aught of a lady which was not pleasing to my ear. What he said came to this: that you were a good girl, and unlike most others he had met. Was it not so, Master Grey?"

"Somewhat differently expressed and coloured," answered Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, the substance was no worse;" and, willing to change the theme, he went on to say, "That good Dr. Alting seems a zealous and enthusiastic man. It is strange that in the commerce with the world of a long life, he has not lost more of the fire which generally burns brightly only in youth."

"He has seen little of life," answered Herbert, "knows little of the world, or he would not entertain such high hopes from such doubtful prognostications."

"Then you think his expectations regarding the result of this election will be disappointed?" asked the young Englishman.

Herbert mused gravely, and then replied: "I know not what portion of his expectations you allude to, or whether you mean all. If the latter, I say some of them will certainly be verified: Frederick will be elected, of that I entertain no doubt. These stern Bohemians will never choose a drunkard and a knave, and with that exception there is no other competitor of name. Then, again, that there will be the grand, perhaps the only opportunity that ever will be seen of rendering the pure Protestant faith predominant in Germany,—nay, more, of breaking the Austrian chain from the neck of the captive empire: I do not at all deny that the opportunity will be there, but will there be men to seize it? That is what I doubt. Will there be men who, having stretched forth the hand to take the golden occasion, will not, when they have clutched it, suffer it to slip from their grasp? That is the great question; for to fail is worse than not to undertake. The head on which the crown of Bohemia now falls should be one full of those rare energies which lose no chance, and which command success; there should be experience or genius, and, above all, indomitable firmness of character and activity

of mind. He should be a man of one grand purpose,—cautious as resolute, watchful as enterprising, leading not led, obstinate in preference to wavering,—with the whole powers of heart and mind bent to the attainment of a single object;—with neither eyes, nor ears, nor thoughts for aught but that. The path is upon a glacier, with a precipice below: one slip is destruction. Now, good as he is,—brave, intelligent, noble, sincere, devoted,—is the Elector endowed with powers that will bear him up through dangers and difficulties such as the world has seldom seen?"

"Often, where princes themselves would fail," answered Algernon Grey, "wise counsellors and great generals render them successful."

"He must be a wise prince, to choose wise counsellors," said Herbert. "Have we any here?—Besides, if you would calculate the results of the strife about to spring up, look at the materials of the two parties. This is, in truth, a struggle betwixt the Protestants and Papists of Germany. Now, there is something in the very nature of the two religions which gives disunion to the one, consolidation to the other. The Papists are all agreed on every essential point; they are all tutored in the same school, look to the same objects, have in the most important matters the same interests. The least attack upon their religion is a rallying cry for them all; their wills bend to its dictates, their banners unfurl at its call, their swords spring forth in its defence. They are one nation, one tribe, by a stronger tie than common country or common origin. They are one in religion, and the religion is one. But what is the case with the Protestants? Split into sects, divided into parties, recognising no authority but their own individual judgments, they hate each other, with a hatred perhaps stronger than that which they feel towards the Romanists; or are cold to each other, which is worse. There is no bond between them but the worst of bonds—a common enmity to another faith. No, no, the whole tendencies of one party are to division, the whole tendencies of the other to union, and union is strength."

"Nay, my dear uncle," cried Agnes, "to hear your arguments, one would think you a Papist."

"Hold your wild tongue, you unreasoning child," answered Herbert, good-humouredly; "my arguments go to quite a contrary end. Were there not innate truth unimpeachable in the doctrines of the Protestants, there would not be one sect of them left by this time, so potent are the means arrayed against them, so feeble are the earthly bonds that hold them together. Were it not for the power of truth upon their side, the first blast of wind would blow them from the earth; but great is truth, and it will prevail, however weak be the hands that support it, however strong the arms raised to crush it."

"Yours is a gloomy view, nevertheless," rejoined Algernon Grey; "but we must still trust to the vigour of truth for the support of a just cause. Many will doubtless fall away in the hour of need. Of that I am aware; but if they carry with them only their own weakness and the divisions of the party, their absence will but give strength."

"Well, let us talk of it no more," answered Herbert; "the book of fate has so many pages unopened that who can tell what may be written on the next? That casque which you see there, crowning the arms on this side of the pillar, was worn by the good and great Coligni. Did he think when he last carried it, that the day of St. Bartholomew, then so nigh, would see his massacre and that of his companions? Did he think that the king, who then leaned upon his shoulder, promising to act by his counsel in all things, would command his assassination? or that the gallant young prince, whom he appreciated in most things so justly, would abandon the faith for which they had both shed their blood, and be murdered by one of the base instruments of the religion he adopted? He must be a madman or inspired, who ventures to prophesy even the deeds or events of to-morrow."

"And this, then, was the casque of Coligni!" said Algernon Grey, rising and approaching the pillar; "one of the greatest men, undoubtedly, that ever lived, whose spirit seemed to revel in misfortunes, and whose genius appeared, even to his enemies, but the more bright for defeat."

"Ay, fortune was only constant against him," answered Herbert, following with Agnes, "he went on with still increasing renown and disaster, till his glory and his reverses were closed by his assassination."

"The body perished," said Agnes in a sweet low tone, "and with it all that was perishable. The immortal remained, the fame that calumny could never sully, to this earth; the spirit that triumphed over every reverse, to heaven, from whence it came."

Herbert laid his hand upon her shoulder, gazing at her with a well-pleased smile. "You may well speak proudly of him, my child," he said, "for your noble kinsman has left a name which the world cannot match. There are some strange things here," he continued abruptly, turning to Algernon Grey. "Do you see this ancient cuirass shaped almost like a globe?"

"Ay, and that ghastly hole in the left breast," cried Agnes, "what a tale that tells! Without a word one reads there that by the wound then given when the lance pierced through the strong iron, a gallant spirit was sent from earth on the long dark journey. What tears were then shed! How the bride or the young widow wept in inconsolable grief! How brethren or parents mourned! What ties were broken, what long cherished hopes all blasted, what bright schemes and glad purposes then all passed away like a dream!"

Algernon Grey fixed his eyes upon her, while she spoke, with a look of sad and solemn earnestness. It was intense and thoughtful, yet full of admiration, and lasted till she ceased; but Agnes saw it not, for her eyes were raised to her uncle's face, and her whole spirit was in the words she uttered.

"It is the pleasant part of life, I fear," he said at length, "which thus passes like a dream. The painful things remain—ay, and grow too. With the bright days pass the bright thoughts; with the light season flies the light heart. Man has but one summer; if it be clouded, let him

not look for sunshine. Winter will surely come."

"Ay, on this earth," answered Herbert, "there is another climate hereafter, where winter is not. Still you are, in some sense, wrong. Each season has its sunny hours for those who seek them. Youth looks forward to age with apprehension, age to the state beyond. Neither know rightly what is in store. All they are sure of is, that there are deprivations coming of things which they fancy treasures; but still each step of life shows that the most prized jewels of the former were but tinsel and false stones. What will the last stage show of all the rest? That cuirass was young Talbot's, slain in the wars in France; that gap let in his death-wound. A noble spirit passed away to a nobler world; a kind young heart mourned, and went to join him. These are brief tales, soon told. Why should we think more of man's life and death than of the opening and fading of a flower? His immortality itself makes his life the less worth thought, but as he uses it."

"These gauntlets, too," said Algernon Grey, "they seem less ancient than the cuirass, but yet are not of our own times."

"They are those of a king," answered Herbert; "one whom men esteem great; but, like most of the world's great men, with many littlenesses—Francis the First of France."

"All that was great in him," replied Algernon Grey, "belonged to the spirit of a former time. He had a touch of the old chivalrous honour, and compared with others of his day, with our own Harry, and even with his more famous rival, the Emperor Charles, he stands out bright as knight and gentleman, if not as monarch."

"Compare him not with Harry," said Herbert, "that king was a brutal tyrant. He might have been better, indeed, had not men stupidly abolished polygamy, for I dare say he would have been contented to let his wives live, if the laws of society had not made them a burden to him; and so, like most men, he committed great crimes with a pretext, to escape from smaller faults less easily excused." He spoke laughingly, and then added, "But still he was a base, bloody tyrant, an ungrateful friend, an ungenerous master. No, no, Francis was too good to be likened to him. No, compare him with the man whose sword hangs yonder—with Bayard, and then how small the king becomes, how great the simple gentleman!"

"He was noble, indeed!" exclaimed Agnes; "and it is a consolation, too, to see that men admire him more for his gentler than his sterner qualities. Would that they took his lesson more to heart; for of the great men, as they are called, of this world, how few are there whose renown does not rise on deeds of blood and rapine, how few whose monument is not raised on violations of all justice and equity; the marble their fellow-creatures' corpses, and the mortar ruin, devastation, wrong, watered with blood and tears."

Algernon Grey gazed upon her again with the same sad and thoughtful look; and Herbert replied, "Too true, my child; but yet"—*and he smiled somewhat* sarcastically—"I have rarely known the lady who did not love these sanguinary gentlemen more than the humble man of peace. It is you, and such as you, who spur us on to war."

"War must be, I fear," answered Agnes; "and Heaven forbid that any gentleman should be a coward, trembling for so light a thing as life; but if, when driven unwillingly to strife, men would, like that great hero you have mentioned, soften the rugged trade by the virtues of the Christian and the knight, protect, defend, support, rather than oppress, injure, and trample down, the warrior would be worthy of all love, and great men would become great indeed. As it is, one turns with horror from the blood-stained page of history, where grasping ambition rides in the tinsel chariot of a false renown, over the craunching bones of whole generations slain. The world's greatness is not for me; and, all woman as I am, dear uncle, I would rather be a nun, mewed in a cloister, than the wife of one of these great men."

She spoke with a fire and energy which Algernon Grey had never seen in her before; but some of her words seemed to affect Herbert more than might have been expected. He walked suddenly back to the table, and seated himself, leaning his head upon his hand, with a sad and gloomy look. Agnes paused a moment, and then drew gently near, laid her hand upon his, kissed his furrowed brow, and murmured, "Forgive me! I did not mean to pain you; I thought not of what I said."

"It is nothing, it is nothing," answered Herbert; "it will pass, dear child;" and almost as he spoke, a servant, dressed in a different livery from that of the court, entered, saying: "The Dowager Electress, madam, has sent to tell you she is ready when you like to come."

"I will be with her directly," answered the fair girl; and turning to Herbert again, she added in a sad tone, "I have given pain enough here, for one night at least—Farewell, countryman," she continued frankly, holding out her soft white hand to Algernon Grey, "I do not know whether we shall ever meet again; but, methinks, you will remember this night, so unlike any you have probably ever passed."

Her words were free and unembarrassed; but Algernon Grey had deeper feelings in his heart, and he merely replied, "I will;" at the same time, however, he bent his head and pressed his lips upon the hand she gave him. It was a common act of courtesy in those days, marking nothing but a feeling of friendship or respect; and Agnes, receiving it as such, drew the light veil, which had fallen upon her shoulders, over her head, and left the room.

For a single instant Herbert remained seated in the same desponding attitude. Then rousing himself, he turned to his guest, saying: "Come, taste the wine again. It is but sour stuff this Rhenish wine at the best, but this is as good as any."

"It is better than any that I have ever tasted here," answered Algernon; "and I do not dislike these wines. One does not feel as if one were drinking molten fire, as with the heady grape of Burgundy, after which the blood seems to go tingling in fever to the fingers' ends. One more glass, then, to the health of the fair lady who has left us."

"Yes, she is fair," answered Herbert, thoughtfully, after drinking his wine,—"beautiful as her mother, and as good—more gay, but not less thoughtful.—Now, my young friend," he continued, "there is one thing puzzles me in you. That you should think the child lovely does not surprise me, for she is so: I know it, and am accustomed to hear others say so; but she sets so little store by her beauty, that it gives me no pain. There is a difference between admiration and love. It is evident enough that the blind god has naught to do in the case between you and her; but yet you have more than once gazed at her long, and with a sad and serious countenance, as if there were deep thoughts regarding her silently busy at your heart. If you mind not telling them, I would fain hear what those thoughts were."

"I caught myself so gazing," said Algernon, with a smile, "not long before she left the room. It was when she spoke of the horrors and evils of war; and that theme connected itself in my mind with what had passed before. I asked myself, if these bright scenes are destined to be visited by strife and pillage and desolation, what will be the fate of that young fair being, and many others like her. Hardships and rude alarms and the daily peril of life is what men are habituated to from boyhood; but what can women do at such a season? She can but sit still and weep, awaiting her destiny, whatever it may be. The clang of the trumpet, or the roll of the drum, gives her no inspiring occupation to while away the hours of suspense; and, the rude captor's prey in a town taken by assault, death, and worse than death, may be her portion.—Such were the thoughts which moved me on this last occasion. If I stared at her so rudely at any other time, I have forgotten the cause."

"It will be long, I trust," answered Herbert, "very long, before the storm rolls hither, even at the worst; a. till it comes, here she is safe enough. But yet, methinks, good friend, your thoughts take a gloomy turn, and somewhat strange for the youth of the present day. With nine men out of ten in every court of Europe—France, England, Germany—we should have naught but gallant speeches, courtly discourses of small hands and beautiful feet, and eyebrows marvellously turned, or lectures upon bravery, what colours suit with what complexions, what ribands and what laces best harmonize, what dress becomes the gay and young, the tall, the short—with an intermixture of sighs and smiles. and some slight touch of roses and other flowers, to give an Arcadian glow to the whole. But here you have been as grave as a judge over a long cause which makes his dinner wait; speaking with all calm solemnity, as if you had never been taught to laugh. —Why so sad, my friend! Time enough for sadness, when real sorrow comes."

Algernon Grey's brow became graver than before; not that he looked hurt or pained, but there was a sort of stern and serious earnestness upon his face, as he replied with brief, slow, pointed words: "Most men have some sad secret in their bosom."

"So young!" said Herbert, musing. "Nay, I think not most men; though some few may."

"Have not you, yourself?" asked Algernon Grey, fixing his eyes upon him steadfastly; "and none can say what will be the hour for the poisoning of all life's streams;" and he paused and fell into thought.

"I knew not that the lady was your niece," he continued after a time; "nor certainly did I expect to meet her here. I seek not dangerous companionships; and, methinks, her society might well be so to any one whose heart is not a stone. However, she is too free and happy, too tranquil in her thoughts and her soul, to be easily won; and I do trust, when she is won, that she may meet a person well worthy of her."

"Oh, she will do well enough," answered Herbert. "Women always choose ill; but, perhaps, she may not choose at all; and I believe the gross amount of happiness would be on that side, from all I know of men.—We are strange beings, Master Grey—boys unto the last, we covet eagerly each glittering toy we see: and then misuse it, when we have it safe."

These last words gave a different turn to the conversation; and it wandered wide, and lasted long. Before it came to an end, the trumpets of the Elector's party were heard in the courtyard; and Herbert smiled somewhat cynically, but made no observation. Shortly after, the castle clock struck ten; and Algernon Grey took his leave and returned towards his inn on foot, pondering upon the character of the man he had just left, and striving, as we all do when we meet with one unlike the generality of our acquaintance, to plunge beneath the surface and discover the hidden things of mind and heart. These reveries were not so profound, however, as to prevent him from remarking that thick clouds were driving over the sky, while the stars shone out and disappeared at intervals, as the grey vapoury veil was cast over them, or withdrawn. The wind, too, had risen high; and the night was very different from that which had preceded. When he, at length, reached the inn, some drops of rain were falling; and his heart felt sadder, certainly, rather than lighter, from the visit he had paid.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a night of storms and tempests. As is not unusual in hilly districts, thunder, as well as rain, was brought up by the gusty wind. The house, though in the midst of the town, seemed to rock with the violence of the blast. The panelling cracked; the arras waved over the door; the rain poured down in incessant torrents; and when Algernon Grey looked forth from his window, as he did more than once during the long night, he beheld the livid lightning flaming along the streets, reflected as by a mirror from the wet and shining pavement of the causeway. Quick upon the flash came the pealing thunder, as if one of the granite mountains had been riven by the bolt of heaven, and rolled in crashing fragments into the valley below.

It was late ere he retired to rest; and for more than one hour he continued pacing up and down his chamber in deep thought, reproaching himself for weakness in having given himself up to fascinations, which he now found might soon

become too strong for all his resolution to resist. It is a painful moment when a firm and determined mind first discovers in itself that weakness which is in all human nature, when it has to accuse itself of having yielded, even in a degree, to temptations which it had resolved to oppose; when it learns to doubt its own stability and vigour, and is forced, from experience of the past, to attach a condition, dependent upon its own strength or feebleness, to every resolution for the future. It is a painful moment, a moment of apprehension and dread, of doubt and sorrow; and Algernon Grey, more than once, said to himself, "No, I will not go thither again — whether William stays here or not, I will go forward."

He was weary, however, and when he did retire to rest, sleep soon visited his eyelids; but the form which had troubled his waking thoughts, visited him with more calming and pleasing influence in his dreams. Agnes wandered with him, Heaven knows where; no longer bringing with her hesitation and doubt as to his own course; but smiling with all her youthful grace unclouded, and spreading sunshine around her, even to the very depths of his own heart. As so rarely happens, he remembered his dream, too, when he awoke; and it seemed as if imagination was but an agent of Fate, to bind him in those bonds against which he struggled fruitlessly.

It was late ere he unclosed his eyes. The sun was far up in the sky, but still not showing his face upon the earth; for the storm had sunk away into dull heavy rain; and the pattering torrents, which fell from the gutters into the streets, told how heavy was the descending deluge. Large undefined wreaths of white vapour were wound round the brows of the hills; and the eye could not penetrate either up or down the valley, beyond a few hundred yards from the spot where the observer stood.

William Lovet was in an ill humor; for he had engaged himself to ride again with the court that morning, if the day were fine. But still his spleen took a merry form; and though his jests were somewhat more bitter than usual, he jested still. Often did he look at the sky, and still the same grave blank presented itself till the hour of noon. Then the expanse grew mottled with slight feathery flakes; the flakes separated themselves wider and wider from each other, drew into distinct masses, and left the blue sky visible here and there. The sun shone out over the valley and the plain; but the clouds upon the higher hills looked only the more black and menacing. However, about half-past twelve o'clock, a page came down to the inn with a billet for Master William Lovet, sealed, perfumed, and tied with floss silk of a rose colour, after the most approved mode of tender epistles of a period somewhat antecedent. William Lovet took it eagerly; but yet he could not make up his mind to open it without some slight touches of his own sarcastic humour. He hung the silk upon his little finger, held the note up to Algernon Grey with a gay smile, and then carried it to his nose and to his lips, exclaiming: "Perfumed with sighs, and flavoured with kisses! Verily, verily, Algernon, you are like an anchorite at a feast, with delicate dishes and fine wines before you, and yet you will not taste—But I must read the dear contents. Witness, all ye gods, that I have sworn no constancy. Of all the silly nations in the world, the Lotophagi were the most foolish; for after having once tasted their favourite food, they could relish no other. Now my unperverted palate can feast on every sweet thing that is offered it."

While he had been uttering the last words, he had cut the silk and opened the letter; and, having read it through, he turned to his friend, saying, "The expedition is put off till after dinner; but at two we set forth. Do you come, Algernon?"

"Not I," answered Algernon Grey; "I have no invitation."

"That will be soon procured," replied Lovet; "but faith, I will not press you. For the future, you shall follow your own course; for I see it is all in vain to hope for anything like the fire of youth in you. I did think, indeed, when I saw you and that lovely Agnes Herbert together, some spark might be elicited; especially when my fair friend told me that she is as cold as you are: for you see, Algernon,"—and he laid his finger on his breast, with a laughing look—"by striking flint and steel, two hard, cold things, together, men make a fire—but now I give you up. Continue to live on in sanctified decorum, and bring back a virgin heart to England with you. Were you in witty Venice, the ladies of the place would present you with a coral and bells."

"And I would give them in return a veil and a pair of gloves," answered Algernon Grey.

"Oh, they wear masks," cried Lovet.

"I know they do," said his companion, "and I am not fond of masks."

"Well, well, I must have dinner quick, and ride up to the castle," was the reply. "Every one to his own course, and happiness of his own kind to each."

The dinner was obtained. William Lovet equipped himself in his bravery; and Algernon Grey remained at the inn, pondering over the rencontre that was before him. To few men, even of the most gallant and determined, are the hours, preceding a meeting of this kind, the most pleasant in life. And though, perhaps, no man ever lived who had a smaller sense of personal danger than Algernon Grey, yet they were peculiarly painful and disagreeable to him. Bred, like almost every man of noble family at that time, to arms, he had been in his boyhood inured to peril, and accustomed to look death in the face; but still, educated with very strict notions in regard to religion, he could not free his mind from a belief, that to slay a fellow-creature in such an encounter was a crime. The habits of the day, the general custom of society, had their effect upon him, as upon all others; but still a conscientious repugnance lingered in his mind, and produced that gloom which no feeling of apprehension could create. There was no alleviating circumstance either; there was nothing to excite or to carry him forward. He had no personal quarrel with his adversary; he had neither animosity nor anger, to stimulate him; and, as I have said, the intervening hours were very dull and painful. He wrote some letters and memoranda, however, more to occupy the time than for any other

reason. He ordered his horse to be ready, and the page to accompany him. He examined his sword-blade, and tried it on the ground; and, at length, when the sun was approaching the horizon on its decline, he mounted and rode slowly out, with a calm, grave air, telling his servants to have supper prepared against his return. Not the slightest suspicion was entertained of his purpose; and the page rode gaily after, looking around at every thing they passed, and wondering whither his master was bound.

When they had approached the river, however, it presented a very different scene from that which had been seen from its banks for several weeks before. The green Neckar, so clear and grassy, was now a turbid torrent, red, swollen, and impetuous. The waters had risen in the course of the day and night several feet, and were dashing against the piers of the bridge and the walls of the curious old castellated houses, which then bordered the river, in impotent fury. Many of the rocks, which in ordinary weather raise their heads high above the stream, were now either entirely covered, or washed over from time to time by the waves, which a strong south-west wind occasioned in its struggle with the angry current of the stream. As the horse of Algernon Grey set its foot upon the bridge, a heavy rumbling sound from the east and north, low but distinct, and pealing long among the hills, told that the dark clouds, which were still seen hanging there, were pouring forth their mingled lightning and rain into the valleys of the Odenwald. But the moment that Algernon Grey had passed the slope of the bridge, he saw before him that which engrossed his whole attention. The Baron of Oberntraut was waiting for him under the archway of the opposite bridge-house, although the time appointed had hardly arrived; and, quickening his pace, the young Englishman rode on and joined him. Their salutations were perfectly courteous; and Oberntraut remarked, in a calm, indifferent tone, "We are both a little before our time, I think; but the river is still rising, and this road by the bank has sometimes enough water on it to wet our horses' pasterns. With your good leave, I will show you the way. The stream has not yet come up, I see."

Thus saying, he turned to the right at the foot of the bridge, ascending the river; but it may be necessary to say that, at the time I speak of, the right bank of the Neckar presented a very different aspect from that which it now displays. No houses were to be seen between Neunheim on the one hand, and the old religious foundation of Neuburg, now called the Stift, on the other. The road was not elevated as it is now; but ran low, within a few feet of the ordinary level of the stream. The woods upon the Heiligberg, or Holy Mountain, and the other hills towards Neckarsteinach came sweeping down to within a few feet of the road; and, here and there, a path, large or small, according to the necessities of the case, led away up to the north, wherever a village was situated in any of the dells, or a small piece of level ground, terraced upon the mountain, had afforded the peasants an opportunity of planting the apple or plum tree. The vine was not seen, unless it were a small patch in the neighbourhood of Neunheim, or of the Stift Neuburg.

Along the low horse-road, which served as a towing-path for the boats, the Baron of Oberntraut led the young English gentleman, at a slow and quiet pace, till they were within about a third of a mile of the latter place. There the hills receded a little, leaving some more level ground, still apparently thickly wooded; and, at a spot where stood a boatman's hut, with two or three rude barks, moored to the shore, the entrance of a by-way was seen, which narrowed within view, till the space was not larger than would admit the passage of a single horse. At the entrance of this path the Baron drew in his rein, saying to his companion: "We will leave the horses and pages here, if you please, and proceed for a couple of hundred yards on foot."

Algernon Grey consented, of course; and orders were given to the two youths to lead the horses after their masters, as far as they could up the path—which, indeed, could not be done for more than three or four yards—and then to wait there.

"If you will excuse me," continued Oberntraut, "I will precede you."

Algernon Grey merely bowed his head, without reply, till the other had gone on forty or fifty yards, when he said: "The sun is going rapidly down, if not gone already behind the hills; and I think, if we do not hurry our pace, we shall not have light."

"Oh, it is the wood makes it so dark here," answered his companion, in a gay and somewhat self-sufficient tone; "we shall have more light in an instant; and the twilight last long here."

Thus saying he walked forward; and in less than two minutes led the way out upon a small green meadow, of not more than a quarter of an acre in extent, the second crop of grass from which had been lately carried away, leaving the turf smooth and short.

"This place seems made for the purpose," said Algernon Grey, drily.

"It is often used for such," answered Oberntraut, advancing into the midst, and throwing off his cloak.

Algernon Grey followed his example, drew his sword, and laid the belt and sheath with the cloak.

"Our weapons are of the usual length I suppose," said Oberntraut, speaking through his teeth; for there was more bitterness in his heart than he wished to appear.

"I really do not know," answered Algernon Grey; "but you had better measure them;" and he laid his by the side of his adversary's. There was a considerable difference, however; the English blade was not so long as the German by at least two inches; and when the Baron observed it, his cheek flushed and his brow contracted; but his heart was noble and just, though somewhat impetuous and fierce; and, after a moment's pause, he said; "I cannot fight you with this disparity; we must put it off till another day. It is my fault, too; I should have sent you the measure of my weapon, or asked the length of yours."

"It matters not," answered the young Englishman; "your sword is a little longer than

mine; but my arm is somewhat longer than yours; thus the difference is made up; and nothing of this kind should ever be put off for slight punctilios. Besides, my stay in this country must be short; and I may not have another opportunity of gratifying you. With thanks, then, for your courtesy, I say we must go forward as the matter is."

"Well, well," answered Oberntraut; "if such is your opinion, I am ready."

"We had better move the cloaks out of the way," answered Algernon Grey; "I see the light will not fail us."

"Oh, no fear of that," said the Baron; "these things do not take long."

The young Englishman smiled; and, the field having been cleared, advanced, with ceremonious courtesy, and saluted his adversary. Oberntraut returned the compliment; and their swords then crossed.

The great school for the use of that weapon with which both gentlemen were now armed, was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the low, fallen land of Italy, where Algernon Grey had passed several years. In point of strength, the two adversaries were very equally matched: for, though the young Englishman was somewhat taller and more supple, yet Oberntraut was several years older, and had acquired that firmness and vigor of muscle, which is obtained long enough before any portion of activity is lost. The latter was also very skilful in the use of his arms; but here Algernon Grey, from the schools in which he had studied, was undoubtedly superior. He was also superior in perfect coolness. There was no angry passion in his breast, no haste, no impetuosity. He came there to defend himself, to oppose an adversary, but neither eager nor fearful. He felt as if he were in a hall of arms with baited weapons, merely trying his skill. He was anxious to disarm his opponent, not to hurt him; and in the first three passes Oberntraut was taught that he was pitted against a complete master of the rapier. At first this discovery served to make him more cautious; and he used all his skill; but it was all in vain. He could not approach his adversary's breast; wherever his point turned, the blade of Algernon Grey met it; and more than once the Baron felt that he had laid himself open to the riposte, but that, from some cause, his adversary had not seized the opportunity. Repeated disappointments, however, rendered him irritable and incautious. He watched, indeed, his opponent's defence, thinking to learn what he called the trick, and overcome it by another sort of attack; but whenever he changed his mode, Algernon met it with a different parry; and the clashing sword passed innocuous by his shoulder or his hip.

The light began to wane perceptibly, and, as cool and perhaps cooler than when he began, the young Englishman recollected his adversary's words, and thought, "These things take longer than you imagined, my good friend, with a man who knows what he is about."

A slight smile curled his lip, at the same time; and thinking that he was mocking him, Oberntraut renewed the attack with tenfold fury. Algernon Grey gave a momentary glance to the sky; the rose had died away from above; heavy clouds were driving over in detached masses; a drop of rain fell upon his hand; and he saw that, in two or three minutes, the air would become quite dark.

"I must wound him," said he to himself, "or in this dull twilight I shall get hurt; he is too keen to be disarmed; I must wound him, but slightly."

At the same moment Oberntraut made a furious pass; the young Englishman parried the lunge, but, though his adversary's breast was left unguarded, his heart smote him, and he would not return it, lest he should touch some vital part. The Baron pressed him close with pass after pass; and step by step the young Englishman retreated. Then suddenly changing his mode, Algernon assumed the attack, drove his adversary before him in good guard, and then, in the Italian manner, took a bound back and stood in defence. Oberntraut, following the method, of which he had some knowledge, sprang forward and lunged. Algernon parried and returned; but at the same moment the Baron's foot slipped on the wet grass, the sword's point caught him on the right breast close to the collar-bone, and passed out behind the shoulder. He staggered up, raised his weapon, let it fall, and sank slowly on the ground.

However cool and self-possessed a man may be—though he may think himself fully justified in what he has done, though he may have been acting in self-defence, though the act may have been inevitable—yet no one can inflict a real and serious injury upon another without feeling a certain degree of regret, if not remorse, unless his heart be as adamant. It is at such moments that the strange link of consanguinity which binds the whole human race together is first known to us; it is then that we feel we are brothers, and that we have raised a hand against a brother's life.

The moment that the deed was done—and it was evidently more than he had intended to do—Algernon Grey felt a pang shoot through his heart, and he said internally: "Would that he had not driven me to it, would that he had not provoked it!" but, casting down his sword at once, he knelt by Oberntraut's side, and, raising his head and shoulders on his knee, exclaimed in kindly and eager tones: "I hope you are not much hurt!"

"A little faint," said Oberntraut, slowly; "not much—I shall be better presently, and able to go on."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed Algernon Grey, vehemently, "to go on in combat against a man with whom you have no quarrel, who has never injured, insulted, or offended you, who was friendly disposed towards you! My good friend, I will draw the sword against you no more; I have had enough of it."

"Methinks, so have I," said Oberntraut, faintly, with a light smile passing over his face. "You are a master of the science;—that pass was splendid."

"It was the turf!" cried Algernon Grey; "had you not slipped, I should have hardly touched you."

Oberntraut pressed his hand, saying, "If you could stop the bleeding—it is soaking through all my doublet;—you had better call the page."

"I will try to staunch the blood first," answered Algernon Grey; "no time is to be lost —five minutes more and we shall not see the wound;" and, opening the vest and shirt of his opponent, which were now both drenched in blood, he tore his handkerchief in two, making each half into a sort of compress, as he had often before seen the surgeons do, when hurried on the field of battle. He fixed one on the wound before, the other on the aperture behind the shoulder, and with the Baron's scarf and his own, bound them tightly down, stopping the flow of blood, at least in a degree. Then, after gazing at him for a moment or two, he said, "I will leave you only during an instant, and send the page for a litter or something to bear you to the town."

"No, no," answered his former adversary; "send up to the Stift Neuburg, they will take me in and tend me well. Then a surgeon can be brought;—but remember, whatever happens, this is not your fault; it was my own seeking —my own doing,—no one is to be blamed but myself. Methinks the bleeding has stopped."

Algernon Grey hurried away, found the path without difficulty, and ran down towards the road; but the moment his own page saw him coming, he threw the reins of the horses to the other, and sprang to meet his master, exclaiming, "Away, my lord, away, or you will not be able to pass. The river is rising rapidly; the water is already upon the road."

"Mind not me," exclaimed Algernon Grey, "but hasten with all speed up to the building there upon the left. Fly, boy, fly! and give notice that there is a gentleman lying wounded in the wood. Beg the people to send down bearers instantly to carry him up thither."

The boy gazed at him with a look of surprise and consternation, and seemed about to ask some question, when Algernon Grey exclaimed, "Away! inquire nothing; his life depends upon your speed."

The page instantly darted off to execute the commission, when suddenly a sound was heard as of the feet of many horses coming at a rapid pace round the wood and the rocks beyond. The boy paused and drew back for an instant; and a part of the splendid train of the Elector and his Princess swept along, with their horses' hoofs splashing in the water, which was now two or three inches deep on that part of the road. The boy then ran on, and Algernon Grey advanced a step or two to catch some stragglers of the party and bid them send a surgeon quickly from the town; but, ere he reached the broad road, two or three cavaliers dashed past like lightning, without noticing him; and the next instant a shrill piercing shriek broke upon his ear.

CHAPTER IX.

The court of the Elector, Frederic the Fifth, was, as I have in some degree shown, one of the gayest as well as one of the most splendid in Europe. Nay, the merriment and revelry that reigned therein, puzzled the stern Calvinistic ministers not a little, how to excuse a degree of levity in the Prince and Princess, which they undoubtedly thought most unbecoming in the heads of the severe Puritanical party in Germany. They would have censured and interfered, beyond all doubt, if they had dared; but the ministers of a sect whose religious teachers have little real power beyond that which the fanaticism of their disciples affords, are rather apt to grow sycophantish in the case of great personages, whose countenance and protection are necessary to the support of their authority, if not to their existence. It thus happened, that Scultetus and his brethren, as the good man's own writings show, were exceedingly lenient to the amiable lightness of the Elector, and contented themselves with very severe and menacing sermons before the court, while they seized every opportunity of apologizing for the gaiety of the prince and his consort, on the score of youth, prosperity, and habit.

Thus day after day, some new party of pleasure, some sport, some revel—interrupted only by occasional wild bursts of fanaticism, which had their interest and excitement also—kept up the thoughtless spirits of the court of the Palatinate, and sometimes afforded opportunity for pursuits not quite so innocent.

On the evening of which we have just been speaking, a large party, though somewhat less in number than that of the preceding day, issued forth from the gates of the castle, crossed the bridge, and took its way along the same road which was afterwards pursued by Algernon Grey and the Baron of Oberntraut. I will not pause to describe the amusements of the afternoon, nor to tell how the cavalcade was led through paths and by-ways which had seldom seen aught so gay before. Schönau, which they had visited on the preceding day, was merely passed through, to the renewed admiration of the good peasants; and then, by a narrow road, which naturally separated the party into pairs, the glittering troop reached a little village with a curious contradictory name, called Alt Neudorf, or Old New Town. The look of the village seemed somewhat desolate to the eyes even of the fair Electress, who was naturally inclined to any wild expedition; but the whole party were soon agreeably surprised to find a house and garden in the midst of the place, decked out with flags and banners and pieces of tapestry, as if for their reception, while well known servants of the court appeared at the doors, in quaint dresses, to receive the princely personages, and a rich collation of cold meats, fine wines, and fruits, was spread in a large room hung like a royal tent and carpeted with dry moss.

During the ride thither, William Lovet had maintained his place by the side of the fair Countess of Laussitz; but he seemed in a less cheerful and amiable humour than the day before; and directing her eyes by his own towards the person of a lady who rode near, he said, as they approached the village:—

"You told me she would not be here."

"Why what difference does her presence or absence make to you, servant?" asked the countess; "do you hate her so that you cannot bear her sight? You are as dull and sullen as if you had been crossed in love by her."

Lovet saw that he had shown his ill-humour too far, and replied, with a more smiling air,

"I thought women were better politicians, Beauty. Can you not divine why I am vexed? It is not that I am displeased to have her here, but not to have her somewhere else. On my good cousin's stay in this country depends my own by your fair side; for I have sworn to keep him company for a year. If he goes I must go, and how could I live without you for twelve months?"

"But what has that to do with Agnes Herbert?" asked the lady.

"What! were those bright eyes only made to pierce my heart and not to see?" cried Lovet. "Have you not perceived that love caught him by the hand that very first night; and now he is struggling to free himself. Had she remained behind, he would have seen her, as he did last night; and another link would have been added to the chain which keeps him here, and me at your small feet. You must help me, bright one, to rivet this young girl's chain around his neck. I, too, must find a moment during our ride to-day to prompt her, even at the loss of some part of my sunshine."

In the train of the Elector there were more persons than William Lovet not altogether contented with the events of the day. Critical moments were approaching, when decision was necessary, and when each decision, even upon a small and apparently trifling point, might influence the destinies not only of the Palatinate, but of the whole of Germany; and, more remotely, of the whole world. There were some men at the court of the Elector who took this wider and more comprehensive view, and were anxious to see all his acts well weighed, and his whole thoughts directed to the consideration of questions so great in magnitude. At the same time there were others of a narrower scope, who were anxious to fix his opinions in favour of that party to which they belonged, or of that particular course which their party advocated. The levity and revelry of the court, of course, interfered with the purposes of each; and, on the present occasion, two or three of the young sovereign's counsellors, frustrated in former efforts to obtain his ear, had followed the cavalcade in the hope that some opportunity would occur of enforcing each his separate opinion. The two most influential persons present, as politicians, were the celebrated Louis Camerarius and the Viscount Achates de Dohna, lately the Electoral Ambassador at Prague.* Very different, indeed, were the two men, and very different their views; but, without attempting to paint the characters of each, it may only be necessary to say that, upon this occasion, Camerarius sought eagerly to keep the ear of the Elector entirely to himself, filling it with flattering prospects of greatness to come; while Dohna only endeavored, from time to time, to place before the eyes of his master, by a few brief words, the dangers and difficulties of an undertaking, to which his more flattering or more interested courtiers were hurrying him too eagerly forward.

It was not till the collation was over, nor even till the party had passed through the small village of Ziegelhausen, that either the one or the other found any opportunity of advancing his particular notions. Then, however, on the narrow way, which varied in width at different places, the Elector rode a few steps in advance, calling Camerarius to his side; while the Princess Elizabeth, with some ladies and gentlemen, followed, having Dohna on her left hand, between her and the river. The pace at which they proceeded was at first slow; and the wind, as I have said, blew strong up the turbulent stream. Thus, when the prince and his counsellor raised their voices, the sound was distinctly carried to the party behind. Once or twice, just as they quitted Ziegelhausen, the horse of Dohna was seen to prance and curvet, as if either it or its rider had become suddenly impatient; and at length the voice of Camerarius was heard by the whole group round the Princess, saying, "They cannot pretend that your Highness had any hand in it. The whole affair is of Bohemian manufacture."

Dohna struck his horse sharply with the spur, was in an instant by the prince's side, and answered aloud, "So is the gold chain round your neck, Counsellor Camerarius."

Then, reining in his horse, he fell back to the side of the Electress, leaving Camerarius a little confused. The latter was too old a courtier, however, to suffer his anger and shame to be apparent; and merely saying, "The viscount seems angry this evening," he went on with his flowery discourse.

"Should such a choice be made," he said, "it can but be looked upon as the call of Heaven. That a mixed population of different creeds and sentiments should unite in placing on their throne a prince, not only strong by his own power and his high qualities, but who is also the head and main stay of the great Protestant Union of Germany, must be the result of some supreme directing power, superior to the mere wisdom of man."

Dohna was at the prince's side again in an instant. "How long will the Union last united?" he said; "has it ever been united? Has it ever acted in harmony? Throw that out of the calculation, except as an element of discord."

Camerarius gave him a furious look, the Elector was silent, and Dohna let them again pass on, resuming his conversation with the Electress.

The next words that were heard were from the mouth of Frederic; though several sentences had been spoken in the mean while, which did not reach the ears of those behind.

"They are, indeed, a determined race," he said; "ready to shed their best blood, rather than submit to the tyranny of the Roman church."

"They have shown themselves, for ages, your Highness," answered Camerarius, "resolute and vigorous in support of any cause they undertake."

Dohna spurred forward again: "I know them better than any one," he exclaimed, "and I will not conceal that, though they are headstrong and obstinate, fierce and passionate, they are ready to abandon any leader on the first grievance, and refuse him all vigorous support, unless he square his conscience to their prejudices."

* *By some historians he is called* Baron de Dohna.

This time he did not seem disposed to withdraw; for the road was wider; and Camerarius, trusting he had produced some effect, was unwilling to pursue the subject farther, in the presence of such an opponent. They were now passing the Stift Neuburg, and, casting his eyes forward, he exclaimed, "We had better hurry our pace, my lord; the water there seems rising rapidly over the road."

"Quick, quick!" cried Frederic, shouting to those behind; "spur on, or we shall be cut off by the river."

A couple of hundred yards farther, the road was found covered with the water; and the Elector suddenly drew in his horse with an air of hesitation.

"Is that the spirit to win, or keep a crown?" murmured Dohna to himself; and, striking his spurs into his horse's side, he exclaimed aloud, "This way, your Highness, this way! I will show you the path. The water is not two inches deep;" and, riding hastily on, he soon reached a spot where the causeway rose again above the level to which the river had risen. Those who were immediately behind, followed at once; and, though the whole of the electoral party had separated into distinct groups, another and another passed without fear or danger.

We must turn, however, here, to the last personages of the cavalcade, and follow them from Ziegelhausen.

In that village Agnes Herbert had lingered behind; for her horse had fallen lame; and she had called one of the attendants of the court to examine the beast's foot, when she suddenly found an English gentleman, William Lovet, by her side. As soon as he perceived what was the matter, he sprang to the ground, and before the attendant could interfere, had examined the horse's hoof, and extracted a stone which had fixed itself firmly between the frog and the shoe; then remounting, with a bound, he said, with a graceful inclination of the head, "That is soon remedied. He will go well now; but do not hurry him."

Agnes went on; and Lovet kept close to her side, saying, "I am mistaken, or I have had the honour of seeing you before. My noble cousin Algernon was your prisoner during a night of sweet captivity."

Agnes bowed her head, answering, "I was obliged to obey the electress, even in a jest."

"I will not tell him," replied William Lovet, smiling, "that you consented only from duty."

"His demeanor made the duty a pleasure," answered Agnes.

"Ah, well may you say so," said Lovet, looking down thoughtfully; "he is a great winner of good opinions. Most men gain upon others by concealing all that is evil within them, Algernon by showing all that is in his heart, having nothing that is not noble to conceal;" and then, merely to break the discourse for a time, he pointed down the valley, saying, "What a beautiful scene is this! I know not whether it be more splendid, as when I saw it first, sleeping calmly in the evening sunshine, with the Neckar as placid and clear as a lake, or now, with yon red and stormy sky fading away into *the night*, and the tempestuous waters of the *river below*, foaming and fretting among the *rocks and shallows*."

"The Neckar is terribly swollen," replied the fair girl; "I never recollect to have seen it such a torrent, except in winter;" and, gazing down the dark mass of rushing waters, all turbid and confused, whirling in eddies near, and dashing fiercely over the dark rock beyond, a feeling almost of awe crept over her.

"It is very fine, indeed," rejoined Lovet; "and I can appreciate it better now than I could some time ago; for the society of my cousin has taught me to look upon the beauties of nature with a different and more marking eye than heretofore. There seems a grand harmony between his heart and everything that is lovely—except, indeed," he added, "the loveliness of your sex, fair lady; for I never knew him, that I remember, bestow ten words, even upon the fairest of them, in my life."

Agnes thought—"He has bestowed more on me;" but she did not reply: and William Lovet continued,

"Not that he is a woman-hater," he said, "for he is courteous and kind to all; but, on the contrary, I believe he has formed so high an estimate of woman's excellence, that he never finds his fancy fulfilled."

"If excellence is like other rare things," answered Agnes, "methinks it would take more than ten words to draw it forth."

"Ay, but he is very quick in his judgment," said her companion. "He, like many another man, imagines that nature has written much upon the countenance, that she tells him much in the voice and manner; and that, unless both be well tutored by long experience, a keen observer will read the book aright, and know much of the contents from the first page. I have seldom known him wrong, I must confess."

"Such keen-sightedness may, perchance, be a dangerous quality," the lady replied; "I mean, even for his own peace."

"Oh, no, he is ever on his guard," replied Lovet, in a frank tone; "he never spends any time on one whom he does not think worthy of esteem; but, with with a courteous nothing, some filigree words of *haut-pas* commonplace, meant to cover very little reverence, retires into himself again."

Agnes ran rapidly over in her own mind all that had passed between her and Algernon Grey, and asked herself, "Has he done so with me?" The answer was evident; and she would fain have fallen into thought; but she did not wish to show, or to admit even to herself, that the matter was one worthy of much meditation; and she inquired almost immediately, "Does he deal thus with men?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Lovet; "there, knowing that he is safe, all the fine fancies of his mind, and all the generous feelings of his heart, become apparent. It were worth your while to overhear him pour forth, in words of impassioned eloquence, sentiments that are worthy of a better age than ours. You would find him a very different being from what he has seemed. You must not think him, indeed, a cold and formal egotist, wrapped up in the contemplation of his own fancied excellence. I know, with women, this is often his character, though his person and his manners have great captivation for them too."

Agnes replied not; but looked forward on the road before, saying, "It is growing very dark, we had better ride on faster. My horse goes easily now;" and, shaking the rein, she put her jennet into a quick canter. In a moment after, a boy, dressed as a page, ran out from the wood, and, catching the rein of Lovet's horse, exclaimed, "Oh, sir, help here; there is a gentleman badly hurt—dying, I am afraid."

"Is it your master?" demanded Lovet, reining in his horse; while Agnes paused, listening with eager ears beside him.

"No, no," answered the boy; "it is the other gentleman."

"Then the other gentleman must take care of himself," answered Lovet. "Let go the rein, boy," he continued, in a sharp tone; "the stream is rising fast. Come on, come on, fair lady, or in this increasing darkness we shall get into mischief—come on, come on!" and he dashed forward along the path.

Agnes paused for an instant, and then exclaimed, "Run up to that large building, my good boy; they will give you speedy help."

Then, seeing the danger of farther delay, she struck the jennet with the whip, and the beast darted on through the water upon the path. Lovet was now some thirty or forty yards in advance, and she saw his horse swerve away from some object in the wood near the boat-house. He kept him steady with the spur, however; and Agnes, as she came to the same spot, turned her head to see what had alarmed the beast. She just caught sight of some horses and a page gathered together in an opening of the road; but, at that moment, her jennet shied violently away at the unexpected sight. She tried to keep his head forward with the rein, but the beast reared and struggled against it; his feet passed the limit of the road; and, in a moment, horse and rider plunged over into the midst of the rushing stream.

A loud and piercing shriek rang upon the air; Lovet turned his head and looked. Then, muttering between his teeth, "Ha! we must find another," he dashed on till he reached a spot where the road was free of water.

At the same moment, however, that the heartless exclamation passed his lips, the tall, powerful form of Algernon Grey appeared from the wood. The young cavalier cast a rapid glance over the dark and foaming surface of the stream. He saw a horse's head and neck rise above the water, and a woman's form, still keeping the seat, but evidently with a great effort, holding fast by the mane and the saddle. Another loud scream met his ear, and, with the rapid calculation of a quick, clear mind, he darted to the spot where the rude barks were moored, sprang into the first he could reach, cast it loose, and, with a vigorous effort, pushed it forth into the stream.

In the mean time, the horse, with the instinct of self-preservation, turned itself in the struggling waters, and endeavoured to breast the current, striking violently with his fore feet to keep its head above the torrent, and rolling fearfully under its fair burden. Agnes still clung to it, uttering shriek after shriek; but, whirled round by the eddies, in spite of all its efforts the animal was carried further down. A black looking rock still raised its round head partly above the waves; and as they were carried near, though the strength both of rider and beast was failing, the poor animal, by a violent effort, got its fore feet upon the rock, straining to clamber up. The attempt was fatal to the jennet: the water by the side was deep: there was no hold for its hind feet: the fore feet slipped; and back it rolled into the overwhelming torrent.

With heart failing and strength gone, Agnes loosed her hold and addressed one brief prayer to Heaven. But at that moment, a strong arm was thrown round her, and she felt herself dragged out of the water into something which yielded and swayed under the pressure of her weight. She saw the struggling agonies of the horse; she saw a human figure, and a boat half sinking with the water which had poured into it as it heeled in receiving her; and then, with her brain whirling and her heart sick, she closed her eyes and pressed her fingers upon them.

At the same moment a hand grasped hers warmly, and a voice she knew, said: "You are safe, you are safe! God's name be praised!"

CHAPTER X.

Agnes Herbert left her hand in that of her deliverer. For more than a minute she made no reply; she asked no question. The voice was enough; she knew who it was that had saved her. But she knew not as yet the perils which still hung over both him and her. At length he let go her hand; and she heard a noise in the frail skiff, which made her instantly open her eyes. Then it was she perceived the full danger of their actual situation. Even in the grey twilight she could see that the edge of the small boat was within an inch of the surface of the boiling stream, that the bark itself was half full of water, while Algernon Grey was busily employed in baling it out with his hands, as the only means he had of freeing it even in a degree.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried; "for how much have I to be grateful!"

"Speak not of that, sweet lady," answered the young Englishman; "but for pity's sake, watch every thing with a keen eye as we are carried down the stream; for I cannot—dare not even attempt to reach the land. Tell me the moment you perceive a rock; for, with all this water in the boat, the least touch would sink us."

"Here, take my velvet cap," cried Agnes, "it is better than nothing;" but, ere Algernon Grey could use it twice to bale out a part of the water, his fair companion cried: "A rock, a rock!—There, on the right!" and Algernon, rising cautiously, took the short pole, which was the only implement the boat contained, and watched eagerly in the bow, till they neared a spot where one of the rude masses of granite still held its head above the current, which dashed and whirled around it. Then lightly touching it with the pole, he kept the boat off in deeper water; and in another instant, scarcely able to keep his feet, found him-

self whirled round in the vortex, formed by the impeded torrent the moment it was free.

Oh, what a terrible period was the passage down that stream. At each instant some new danger beset them—now the rocks—now the shallows—now the rapids—now the eddies: no means of approaching the shore; and reasonable doubts, that any effort to do so would not lead to immediate destruction! The sky became darker and darker every moment; and, though by the aid of Agnes, afforded to the best of her power, a considerable portion of the water in the bark was cast back into the stream, still the fragile lightness of the skiff, and the depth to which it had sunk, rendered it little probable that those it contained would ever reach the land in safety. The close falling night, the roaring of the torrent, the howling of the wind blowing strong against them, the agitated surface of the stream, now tossing them to and fro, now whirling them round and round, might well have daunted a strong heart inured to peril, much more that of Agnes Herbert. Algernon Grey felt for her terror, as well as for her danger; and ever and anon he said: "Let us trust in God, dear lady!—Fear not, fear not! There is a stronger arm than mine to protect you.—It is now that faith in Heaven is a comfort indeed."

But still, with eager eye, and steady nerve, and skilful hand, he watched and guided, as well as he could, the boat along the troubled surface of the river.

Night fell; not a star was to be seen; the clouds swept thick and dark over the sky; but still, from time to time, a momentary light was afforded by a broad sheet of summer lightning, which for an instant cast a blue glare through the valley of the Neckar. The mountains were seen and lost; the rocks, the trees, the woods stood out and disappeared like phantoms in a dream; and at length, walls and towers became, for one brief moment, visible; and then all was black again.

"We must be near the bridge," said Agnes; "do you not hear the water rushing more fiercely? Heaven help us now! for, if we strike against the piers, we are lost."

"Sit quiet there," answered Algernon; "I will go into the bow; and be assured, dear lady, I will live or die with you. Only remember, if I am forced to swim, lie quiet on my arm; for, if you clasp me, we both sink."

"I will not stir," she said, in a firm tone; and Algernon Grey went carefully forward.

He heard the roar of the river, evidently dashing in fury against some obstruction; and then he thought he caught the tones of human voices speaking above. Then came a broad sheet of lightning; and he saw the bridge, with its manifold arches and its towered gates close at hand. He had but time to stretch forth his arm, and, with a violent effort, keep the boat from the pier, when it shot in fury through the vault, and issued forth at the other side.

"We have to thank God again," he said, regaining his balance, which he had nearly lost; "that danger is passed; and, if I remember right, the stream is clearer below."

"Much, much," said Agnes. "The rocks cease as soon as the mountains fall away: but there are many sand-banks."

"We must watch still," replied her companion, "but the stream seems already less rapid."

The fearful rushing sound of the swollen Neckar diminished shortly after they had passed the bridge. They could even hear, or fancied that they heard, the hum of human voices from within the town. Lights were seen in various windows, and cheerful images of happy life came thick before their eyes, as they were hurried on, along the course of that dark headlong stream, with many a peril still before them.

"That must be the boat-house at Neunheim," said Agnes, at length, after a long silent pause; "they have got a fire there, though the night is so sultry."

"They must be caulking their boats, I think," replied Algernon; "and from the distance of the fire I should judge we are in the mid-stream. I will call to them as we pass—perchance they may hear and help us."

A moment or two after he raised his voice and shouted aloud; but no one answered—no form darkened the light in the hut, as if one of the inhabitants had come out to see who called. Rapidly the boat hurried past, and all was silence. The river was less turbulent, but seemed hardly less swift; the noise subsided to a low whispering murmur, and the tide poured through the widening banks; and faintly marked objects—willow, and shrub, and decayed oak, which were hardly distinguishable from the banks or the sky—seemed to move away with the speed of lightning.

At the end of about half an hour, during which the two had not raised their voices above a whisper, Agnes said aloud, "There is a star! There is a star! The sky must be clearing. Do you not think it is lighter already?"

"Assuredly, dear lady," replied Algernon Grey, "the moon must soon rise; last night she was up by this time. See, there is a glow upon the clouds round what seems a hill-top there to the right."

"It is the Heiligberg," answered Agnes. "I have seen a gleam like that when the moon was coming up in the east. Oh! Heaven send that she may disperse the clouds and give us light."

Algernon Grey turned his eyes to the sky, and he found cause to hope. The clouds were breaking fast; the stars gleamed faintly out here and there; and the edges of the vapoury fragments looked white and fleecy. Agnes gazed in the same direction; and for five minutes both were silent. Then the boat grated heavily with a sudden shock, and stood fast in the midst of the stream. The two voyagers were nearly thrown down by the concussion, but Algernon exclaimed, "Fear not! fear not! We are on a bank, but no harm can happen; the water must be very shallow here. Let us sit calm till the moon rises; she must be even now just behind those hills. It is growing lighter every moment."

He was right in his judgment; and in less than ten minutes the sky was clear or nearly clear of clouds. The moon, indeed, could not yet be seen; but her pale silvery light spread over the whole heavens; and everything around, to the eye so long accustomed to utter darkness, appeared to stand out as if in the broad

beams of day. Upon the left, the bank seemed somewhat steep and rugged, and no landing-place could be discerned; but to the right was a piece of low sedgy ground, which the young Englishman doubted not was partially overflowed by the swollen stream.

"Do you know where we are, dear lady?" he asked; "I can see neither house nor village."

"I cannot tell," answered Agnes. "I should think we must have passed Edingen by the time which has elapsed. Do you not think we could reach the land? Oh, let us try; for wherever it is, we shall be better there than on the bosom of this dreadful river."

Algernon Grey smiled upon her with that warm heart-springing look we only can give to those we have cherished or protected. "It is only dreadful now, this same fair Neckar," he said, "because we came too near it in an angry mood. To-morrow it will be as calm and sweet as yesterday."

"And would be so," answered Agnes, "if it flowed over our graves. It will ever be dreadful to me, from this night forth."

"Not so to me," replied her companion, "for it has afforded me a great happiness. But I will try to push the boat off the bank and guide it to yonder low ground on the right. Little will do it, if we can once get afloat again."

His efforts were not in vain, though it required all his strength to force the little skiff from the firm bed into which the rapid current of the stream had carried it. As soon as it was free, however, he perceived an increase of the water in the bark; and, judging rightly, that the sudden shock upon the shoal had seriously damaged it, he saw that not an instant was to be lost. Resting the end of the pole upon the sand-bank, as the boat swung round, he gave it a vehement impulse towards the shore. It drifted on with the current, but took an oblique direction, which Algernon Grey aided, using the boat-pole as a feeble sort of rudder; but still the river was deep and swift, the bank some yards distant, and the water in the bark gaining fast.

"The boat seems sinking," said Agnes, in a low, sad tone.

"Fear not! fear not!" replied her companion, cheerfully; "in a quiet stream, such as this is here, I could swim with you three times across without risk. But we are nearing the bank!" and, sounding the water with the pole, he found the bed of the river, and pushed the boat to shore just as she was settling down.

It was a low swampy piece of ground that they touched, covered with long sedge and bulrushes growing upon overflowed land. Algernon Grey sprang out at once, and finding water still up to his knees, he leaned over into the boat, and took his sweet companion in his arms.

"I must carry you for a little way," he said, "and now we may, indeed, thank God with our whole heart for a great deliverance. You shall walk as soon as we reach dry ground, dear lady, for you are wet, and I fear must be cold."

"Oh, no," she answered, "either terror or the sultry air has kept me warm enough. But how can I ever thank you for all you have done."

She lay on his arm; her heart beat against his; her breath fanned his cheek when she spoke. What were the feelings of Algernon Grey at that moment? He would not ask himself; and he was wise. He gave up his whole thoughts to her, to cheer, to soothe, to protect her; to remove from her mind not only the impression of the past peril, but also all feeling of the embarrassment and difficulty of her actual situation, left to wander, neither well knew whither, with a man, a young man whom she had known but a few days, in the darkness and solitude of night.

He felt his load light and his burden a pleasant one, it is true, as he bore her on for more than a hundred yards through the marsh. He would have willingly had her lie there far longer—perhaps for life; but still as soon as they came upon the dry sandy ground, he set her gently down and drew her arm through his.

"Now, sweet comrade," he said, gaily, "we must fight our way to some village where you can find rest for the night. Do you not feel weary? Terror is a sad sapper of human strength"

"Not so tired, perhaps, as I might expect to be," answered Agnes, "considering that I had a long ride before this terrible event took place. Alas, my poor jennet, that bore me so often and so well, I shall never see you more! Yet I am wrong to speak so: my whole thoughts should be gratitude.

"We have both much cause for thankfulness," replied Algernon, "and see, dear lady, the beautiful moon, to guide us on our way, is rising over the hill, half hidden by the woods, half seen through the tree tops. How quickly she wanders on along her blue way. But we must take a lesson from her, and speed forward likewise. What path shall I choose? for I have no knowledge of this land."

"And I very little of this part," said the lady; "but one thing is clear; by bending our course towards the hills again, we shall at all events approach the town."

"That must be far," answered her companion, "and those small limbs of yours will hardly bear you thither to-night; but let us to the right at all events; as likely to find a resting-place there as on any other path;" and bidding her rest upon his arm for support, he led her on.

Theirs was a strange ramble through the wide fields and plains that stretch out between the foot of the Bergstrasse and the Rhine; and yet not without deep interest to both. Each had at heart feelings of many a varied character sufficient to fill up long hours of dull life, and each was disinclined to dwell upon the most thrilling emotions of all; but yet, however they might fly to other subjects, how anxiously soever they might strive to withhold their thoughts from anything that might agitate or overpower—still those emotions presented themselves in vague and indistinct forms, mingling with thought, seizing hold upon fancy, and giving a tone and colour to all that was said, without either of them being aware that they deviated from the ordinary course of conversation between persons of their birth and

station. The scene, too, and the season, the hour, the atmosphere, the circumstances, the events that had lately taken place, the prospects of the future in their very indefinite obscurity, all had an influence, and seemed to combine to nourish a growing passion in their hearts. The moon rose bright from behind the trees upon the mountain tops, shining like the bright pure vision of young and innocent love. The clouds, which at the outset of their stormy and perilous course had swept like the evils of life over the whole sky, had now vanished as if by magic, leaving but here and there a fragment whirling upon the wind, to obscure the twinkling stars with its light veil. In the south-west, some half way up the heaven, shone a lustrous planet, beaming calm, steadfast, serene, like the undying light of hope; and, while opposite stretched in grand masses the hill-slopes of the Bergstrasse, beneath that star appeared the wavy outline of the Haardt mountains, still coloured with a purple hue, as if the rays of the departed sun had not yet entirely left them. Above, and to the south and east, all was bright and silvery with the light of the risen moon. The stars themselves were there extinguished in the flood of splendour; but on the borders of the sky the twinkly lights of night looked out, like gems on the robe of their queen; and, from time to time, a bright meteor crossed the expanse, bursting from space, and dying ere it reached the earth, like the light thoughts of many a great mind, which perish in the brain that gives them birth.

The air was warm, and yet stirred by a strong breeze. There was a certain languor in it, a love-like, luxurious softness, disposing to gentle thoughtfulness; and a sweet perfume rose up from some of the shrubs of the field, mingling harmoniously with that bland air, and rendering its softening powers still greater. Over the wide plain which they traversed, the moon's beams fell bright, but not clear; for a thin vapour, too light to obstruct the view, and only serving to diffuse and generalize the light, rose up from the drenched fields in the warm air.

Rescued from death, and brought safely through innumerable perils by him on whose arm she leaned, the heart of Agnes Herbert might well dwell fondly on the thought of one whose words, whose manners, and whose look had before captivated her fancy, if not touched her heart. All the terrors she had felt, all the dangers she had passed, all the services he had rendered, all the kindness and tenderness he had shown that night, mingled strangely in memory with the words and the conduct of the two preceding evenings, with the interest she had previously felt in him, and with the account given of him by his companion and friend. But she, like himself, would not pause to think of such things—at least she would not scan them; and gladly she joined in conversation upon any topic, which would lead her mind away from that on which it lingered.

Many and varied, too, were the subjects with which he strove to entertain her, to wile her mind away from the thoughts of her situation, and to lighten the minutes of their long and devious course, as they wandered on in search of some human habitation.

"How bright the night has become," said Algernon Grey, after a pause. "Thus very often, when we least expect it, the storms that hang over some part of every man's career are wafted away, and all is clear again."

"And but the brighter for the storm," said Agnes.

"Ay," he rejoined, "I fear me much, sweet lady, that we should never enjoy the sunshine but for the shade. It is in the varieties of creation and the constant changes of the world's life, that the grand harmony of the whole consists. Let the tone of an instrument be ever so sweet, what effect would it produce upon the ear, if it had but one note? How poor is a concert with but two or three instruments! But in the succession and combination of many notes and many tones, how grand, how beautiful is the melodious harmony! Skies ever blue, and pastures ever green," he continued, changing to a gayer tone, "would, I believe, become very dull and wearisome, notwithstanding all the verses of pastoral poets."

"So men think, I have been told," answered Agnes; "and that they choose their wives of tempers that may give them some variety."

"Yes, but there may be pleasant varieties, too," answered Algernon Grey, "even in one character. The storm is, in itself, a grand thing; but no man, methinks, would unroof his house to let it in; and, besides, dear lady, all things have their fitness. The drums and trumpets of an army are fine enough, mellowed by the open air; but who would think of enjoying a full choir thereof in a narrow room? After all," he continued, "in most classes of society this same marriage may be called a matter of fate rather than of choice, arranged by friends, or fixed by circumstances. Man little knows how rarely in life he is a free agent, and, above all, how rarely in this respect. Then again," he continued, "even when man or woman is truly said to make a choice, do they ever know that which they choose! We walk about with vizards, my sweet friend; ay, even up to the steps of the altar; and the real face is seldom seen till the ring is on the finger."

He spoke very seriously; but Agnes replied with a laugh: "Perhaps if it were not so, no one would marry at all; and yet," she added, in a graver tone, "if I thought I did wear one of these same masks, I would never rest till I had torn it off; for I would much rather never be loved than lose the love I had obtained."

"A far happier fate!" answered Algernon Grey; and then changing the subject suddenly, he said, "How is it our discourse ever gets so grave! With this fair scene around us, and such a joyful escape as we have both had, methinks we ought both to be more gay. It wants but the nightingale's song to make this moonlight night complete in beauty."

"Ah! but the dear nightingale," answered the lady, "is penurious of his melody here; and in the month of June, or, at the latest, this last month, all his sweet notes come to an end. I know not why; for the people give the nightingale another flower; but, in my mind, he is always associated with the violet. His song is so sweet, so tranquil, so fragrant I may call it, so unlike the gay and perfumed rose, the

flower of summer sunshine, whose blushing breast seems to court the gaze he shrinks from, that I can never fancy he would love the rose; while the calm violet, pouring forth her sweet breath in the shade, is his true image."

As she spoke, a distant light seemed to glimmer on the plain; but in a different direction to that in which their steps were bent; and they paused for a moment to remark it.

"It moves, it moves," said Algernon Grey; "it is but an ignis-fatuus. How many of them are there in this world. Each man of us, I believe, has his own, which he follows blindly. Love here, ambition there, avarice elsewhere, the desire of worldly honours, the gewgaw splendours of pomp and state, the miserable false light of fanaticism, the dull foul lamp of superstition, are all so many Will-o'-the-wisps, leading us ever from the broad, straightforward way. So will not we, fair lady; but by your good leave, go upon this path, which will conduct us somewhere. Here are tracks of wheels, I see, with the moonlight glistening on the pools the storm has left—but your step seems weary. Do I go too fast?"

"Oh, no," she answered; "yet I confess, a little rest, a roof over my head, and a cup of cold water would not be unpleasant. The thought of a village and all its quiet comforts, which that light afforded, has made me feel more fatigued since I saw it."

"Oh, yes," answered Algernon Grey, "there is something very sweet in human associations, which we know not till we are deprived of them for a time. The mind of man, I am sure, was never intended for solitude; for the very thoughts of home-happiness and quiet converse with our fellow-creatures — ay, even of their proximity, though they be strangers to us, makes the heart yearn for all the warm companionships of society when we are deprived of it."

"But I have society," said Agnes, simply, "when you are with me."

Algernon Grey made no reply, but changed the subject to courts and courtly festivals, and then went on interweaving, as he was well able, lighter with graver conversation, and striving, not without success, to interest and occupy his fair companion's mind. The arts, then almost at their height, or at least very little declined, were one theme. Poetry furnished another. War, the chase, the pursuits of men of his own day, the habits of the world, the differences between countries, then marked out more strongly than at present, all passed under light review, and sometimes speaking gravely, sometimes jesting lightly, he gave that variety to all he said which he himself had praised.

Whether from weariness or from thoughtfulness, I know not, but Agnes grew more silent as they went on. Certain it is, that the words of William Lovet often came back to her mind. "He does not speak thus to every one," she thought; and she asked herself whether it was merely to cheer the way for her that he thus put forth his powers, or that he really esteemed and held her highly. If the first, she was bound to be grateful, though, to say sooth, she would rather have believed the latter. Either conclusion, however, was pleasant to her—ay, very pleasant — almost too much so; for she grew frightened.

It lasted but an instant; and indeed then, with the happy sophistry of woman's heart, she quelled her own alarm. "Surely," she thought, "one may esteem and like without fear or danger. Am I such a vain fool as to believe that every man who may see something better in me than the light coquettes of a court, must therefore love me? Am I such a weak fool that I must needs love, unasked, the first man who seems to treat me as a rational creature? I am silly indeed even to let my thoughts rest on such a matter. I will think of it no more. I will act as if such idle fancies had never crossed my brain, but as the heart prompts, and as nature leads."

She became more cheerful upon her delusion; but the way was long and wearisome. The soft ground loaded the tired foot; the turnings of the road disappointed expectation; and, though the bright moon still shone out to guide them, no village could be distinctly seen; for the thick orchards and small woods, which then occupied a large part of the valley of the Rhine, cut off the view from those who wandered in the low ground. The lady's garments too, fitted for the ride of the morning, were all unsuited to her long night ramble, and fatigue seized upon poor Agnes, and well nigh overpowered her. Twice she sat for some minutes by the road-side to rest; and, whenever the wetness of the swampy ground gave fair excuse, Algernon Grey took her in his arms and carried her; but still she was well nigh sinking from pure exhaustion, when a village clock struck clear and loud the hour of eleven. No great distance could exist between the musical bell and the ears that so gladly heard it; and with renewed hope and strength they let themselves be guided by the sound through the trees, till the tones of laughing voices came upon the air.

"There must be a village close at hand," said Algernon Grey, "and happily some Fair or merry-making seems to have kept the good peasants up and waking. See, there are cottages!" and the moment after they entered the long street of a small hamlet with the church at the further end, and beyond, rising high above the houses, the tower of some old castle built upon a mound.

The cottages were all dark and silent, and the merry voices they had heard seemed to go on before them singing in chorus.

SONG.

Bruise the grape! draw the wine!
Oh the fruit of the vine!
It was given to console for the flood:
To bring light to the eye,
And to raise the heart high,
And to warm the old world with new blood.

When shut up in the ark,
Noah swam in the dark,
And no dove had returned to his breast;
He dreamed a glad dream,
That he saw a red stream
Flow forth from the cluster when pressed.

"We are weary," he said,
"We are cold, and half dead,
But there's comfort beneath this grim sea:
When we touch the hill top
The vine shall spring up,
And its warm juice shall set the heart free."

Bruise the grape! draw the wine!
Oh, the fruit of the vine!
It was given to console for the flood:
To bring light to the eye,
And to raise the heart high,
And to warm the old world with new blood.

Thus sung the peasants as they walked along, and Algernon Grey exclaimed, with a smile, "Their song gives good counsel, sweet lady. Though I saw last night that you were no wine drinker, you must now even consent to take some of the juice of the grape, whose qualities these good men celebrate. The inn where they have been tasting it cannot be far, and you will at length have rest and refreshment."

"Rest, rest," said Agnes, "is all I need;" but Algernon would not believe that food too was not wanted.

At length a light was seem streaming forth from a door not far from the church; and a good stout country girl, throwing forth into the midst of the street some torn and scattered flowers, which had decked the little hall of the hostelry for the country festival, appeared at the door. It was a glad sight for poor Agnes Herbert, and she drew a long deep sigh, while Algernon Grey inquired if they could have refreshment there, and rest for the night.

The girl seemed hardly to comprehend him, but called the bustling landlady, who gazed at the two gaily dressed, but worn and travel-stained strangers, for a moment, with looks of doubt and wonder. Agnes, however, in few quiet words, explained her situation, using, as far as she knew it, the jargon of the country; and the good woman's whole manner was changed in a moment. Instead of doubt and suspicion of her guests, which she had before displayed, she was now all motherly tenderness toward the young and beautiful creature before her, although she was not without some embarrassments, also, as to the accommodation of her unexpected visitors. Situated in a remote and distant village, where a traveller very rarely staid for the night, she had neither room nor bed prepared; and, though plenty of supper, she said, was to be obtained in a moment, and as good wine as any in the Circle, she did not see how she could get two beds ready, although her daughter would willingly give up her own for the young lady's convenience. Algernon Grey relieved her from a part of her difficulties by telling her that he could sleep very well where he was, and that the table or the bench in the large room, where she had received her guests, would form a bed good enough for him, if she would prepare a room for Agnes as soon as possible. With this latter injunction she promised to comply; but there were two obstacles to its literal fulfilment, namely, first, the good landlady's determination that her guests should partake of a supper before they slept; and secondly, that the hostess herself, and all her people, were boors of the Palatinate, who are not celebrated for the quickness of their evolutions.

In vain did the young gentleman hurry her; in vain did Agnes protest that she wanted rest before all things; half a dozen dishes, dressed in various strange manners, were placed on the table before them, as they sat by a dim and comfortless lamp, the mistress of the house observing sagely, that it could do them no harm on earth to eat some supper after so many adventures, and that, in the mean time, the lady's bed could be prepared.

After having discovered that they were in the village of Shriesheim, Agnes Herbert and Algernon Grey were left for more than half an hour alone in the dinner-room of the little inn: and deeply did the fair girl feel his conduct during that time; for although, with kindness and every gentle attention, he pressed her to take some food and drink some wine; though, with cheerful gaiety he strove to amuse and cheer her, yet there was no token of respect that he did not show, to diminish or remove any embarrassment springing from her position with regard to himself. He made her smile; he even made her laugh; he awakened her fancy, to lead her thoughts to gay and happy images: he rendered his conversation light, playful, and sunshiny, but took care that it should be sufficiently reserved to place his fair companion at her ease, and to make her almost forget that she was not with him in one of the saloons of the palace of Heidelberg. Her weariness somewhat decreased as she sat and listened; and, to tell the truth, by the time the landlady returned to conduct her to her bedroom, Agnes Herbert was more disposed to remain where she was, and listen to sounds which fell with dangerous softness on her ear.

Nevertheless she rose instantly, and held out her hand to her companion, bidding him farewell for the night. He took it, and pressed his lips upon it, wishing her good rest, and fair dreams.

Agnes gazed upon him with a smile as he did so, saying, "Methinks it is I who ought to kiss your hand, and thank you again and again for all your acts of kindness in every way, all of which I have felt, from the saving of my life to the soothing of my mind; but I must leave others to do it who are more capable—I have no words."

CHAPTER XI.

One of the first cares of Algernon Grey, when Agnes had left him for the night, was to send off a messenger to the castle of Heidelberg, to announce, even at that late hour, that the lady was in safety. It was with difficulty, indeed, that any one could be procured to undertake the task; for Germany is a country in which there are some things that people will not do even for money. But a man was at length found to walk the distance, and to set out at once. The young Englishman's next thought was how to obtain horses for the following morning; but it was not till the messenger had departed that this occurred to him; and when it did he felt some doubt as to whether a woman's saddle could be obtained for the lady.

The good hostess undertook the task, however, without making any difficulty, naming a neighboring farmer's horse for himself, of whose qualities he was very willing to run the risk, and saying that their minister's daughter had a nice ambling pad, which she would lend very willingly to bear that pretty lady to the castle.

This being settled, and pure water having been procured to wash away from his face and neck the traces of all he had lately gone through, Algernon Grey was left alone in the hall, to

find repose as he best could. But for a long time he sought no rest, at least for the busy brain and anxious thought. During the three or four hours last past, his mind had been fully occupied, at first with perils and dangers, and with a sweeter and not less engrossing task at an after period; but now, suddenly reverting to still earlier events, he turned to inquire what might be the result to the adversary whom he had met in the wood, of his sudden departure from the scene of strife. Apprehensions crowded upon him for the fate of the Baron of Oberntraut. The page, he feared, might have seen him hurry to the rescue of Agnes, and, thinking only of duty to his master, might have neglected to fulfil the orders he had received, in his anxiety to trace and assist him. The wounded man might have been left to bleed to death on the meadow, and, though he felt that he was not to blame, yet Algernon Grey would have given a king's ransom to be sure that his opponent had met with proper aid and treatment.

Thought, he knew, was fruitless, upon this subject at least; and yet he continued to think upon it for some time, till the image of Agnes Herbert began to mingle with these waking reveries, and with it a new source of anxiety; she was so beautiful, so gentle, so full of every grace and quality which he had dreamed of as perfection in woman, that he could not but think of her with tenderness. He would not believe that he thought of her with love; and yet he dreaded his own sensations. Once more he made strong resolutions to quit Heidelberg and the Palatinate immediately—to see her no more—to wander far—to forget her. Poor youth! he had some experience of the world, but he had not learned how completely all human resolutions are the sport of circumstances; he had not yet learned that if in our weakness or our passions we do not break them voluntarily, there are a thousand little incidents over which we have no control, which step in between us and their execution. His determination was firm and strong, however; his conviction of the right course was not in the least shaken; and, making up his mind at length to accompany Agnes back to the castle, letting her see no change or difference in his manner, but to leave her there and to depart the next day, he seated himself near the table, bent his head upon his arms, and gradually sank into sleep.

In that strange, mysterious state, when a dull heavy curtain falls between the mortal senses and all their external objects, when life alone remains, and the spirit is cut off from all communication with the rest of creation, while fancy yet from time to time—ay, and memory too—wakes up with strange caprices, to deal with past and future things; in that great mystery of sleep, which none have solved, notwithstanding the laborious idleness of their efforts, images, not new, perhaps, presented themselves to his eyes, but surely arranged in novel and fantastic forms. Neither was it remembrance of the things last past that called up the visions to his eyes; he saw not his adversary lie bleeding on the grass; he saw not the drowning horse, the sinking girl; no fierce engulfing stream rolled before his eyes; no whirling bark bore him onwards through the darkness of the night. Yet Agnes was with him in his dreams. Bright, as in her festival beauty she had led him through the castle halls, she now guided him through gardens of sweet flowers, stopping here and there to pluck them, and wind them into coronets for his brow. Then came another form across them, beautiful but fierce like a young tigress, and aimed a dagger at his heart, when William Lovet grasped her hand and plunged it in her own bosom.

The vision passed away, more profound sleep succeeded; and when Algernon Grey woke on the following morning, the early light was shining through the uncurtained windows of the room. His toilet was necessarily brief; but the matutinal peasantry were all astir before it was finished. A substantial breakfast was soon laid out for him and his fair companion; and, after waiting for a few moments, he sent up to inquire if she were ready. Agnes had been long up, and immediately joined him in the hall, refreshed with sleep, though somewhat pale with the terrors and fatigues of the preceding day. All her cheerfulness had returned, but yet it is an invariable law of human nature that no great emotions can be felt without leaving some permanent effect behind. The scenes she had gone through, the agitation she had felt, even the feelings she had experienced while wandering through the fields at night with Algernon Grey, had made an impression, never to be erased. I will not attempt to look into her heart, for she would not look into it herself; but yet there were external signs and indications, which, to any experienced and observing eye, would have told the change. There was a deeper tone in her manner; there was more soul and spirit in her look; there was a thoughtfulness even in her gayest smile. All spoke of the heart, and of newly-awakened sensations therein; and it seemed to Algernon Grey, as she advanced, and, raising her eyes full of deep thankfulness to his face, placed her hand in his, that she had now all which had been previously wanting to render her beauty well nigh divine.

The meal passed gaily over; they spoke of the adventures of the past day with the pleasant gratulation of dangers ended. They spoke of their morning ride back to Heidelberg with the sweet anticipation of pleasure to come; and, when breakfast was done, they mounted the two horses which had been procured for them, and, with a youth on a third to bring those which they rode back, they set out, with the bright morning sun shining on their way. The clouds and storms of the preceding day were all dispersed; and, in one bosom, at least, was a gay and cheerful heart, unburdened with anticipations of evil, or regret for any act in the past. As they rode along at the best pace which their horses could command, Agnes poured forth to her companion's ear all her bright and sparkling thoughts, lighted up by that purest of enjoyment, which the expectation of giving pleasure to others affords to a fine spirit. She talked of the joy her uncle would feel in clasping her in his arms again, after he had thought her lost for ever; of the calm, but hardly less heartfelt satisfaction of the Princess' Dowager in seeing her once more; and, although in Algernon's bosom many a bitter and painful thought arose, many a struggle, when

he fancied that the last hours of their companionship were passing away for ever, he would not suffer any appearance of his own gloom to bring a shadow over her young happiness.

Thus fled the time; till, once more turning along the course of the Neckar, the town and the hills, and the laughing valley, and the proud castle, appeared before their eyes; and, crossing the bridge, and threading the narrow streets, they began to ascend the hill. For one moment they paused as they went up, to breathe their horses and to gaze over the scene; and Agnes, before they proceeded, let fall her rein, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed, "I never thought to see all this again."

Her eyes were raised to heaven in thankfulness, and then turned with a momentary glance to Algernon Grey. From an impulse she could not resist, she held out her hand to him, saying, simply, "But for you—but for you!"

They rode on more slowly, and, as they entered the court-yard of the castle, Algernon Grey said, "I must here leave you, dear lady, I believe; but be assured, that to have rendered you service in a moment of peril has been a happiness which will brighten many a future hour."

"But you will come with me to my uncle!" replied Agnes, with a start, and a look almost of alarm. "Oh, come, I beseech you; it is but fit that the deliverer of his child—of one that he loves as his child—should take her back to his bosom. Oh, come."

"If it will give you pleasure," replied Algernon Grey, with a faint smile; for he could not resist the temptation to linger still for a moment beside her, and he felt himself weak.

At the farther angle of the court there were a number of gentlemen and officers collected together, talking in the morning air; and, when Agnes and her companion rode up, several of them sprang forward to assist her in dismounting; but she paused till Algernon Grey was by her side, and then suffered him to lift her from her horse. Returning courteous, but brief answers to the congratulations, which showed how much anxiety had been felt for her fate during the preceding night, she looked round to her companion, saying, "Now I will lead the way to my uncle. I know he would never forgive me, if I did not bring you to him at once."

But, at that moment, a tall, elderly man, dressed in a military garb, advanced, and laid his hand on Algernon Grey's shoulder, saying, "I am sorry for the task, sir, but I am commanded to arrest you, wherever I may find you, in the Elector's name. I have sought for you all through the town this morning. Give up your sword."

Algernon Grey merely smiled, replying, "I have no sword to give up, sir. May I know my offence?"

"Your fatal encounter with the Baron of Oberntraut," replied the old officer; "his father last night formally charged you with the murder of his son; and the Elector issued instant orders for your apprehension."

Agnes had turned deadly pale; and she raised her hand to her head, and thought deeply for a moment.

"*Where is the Elector?*" she exclaimed, at length; "I will see his Highness myself. This gentleman saved my life; he rescued me, when all others abandoned me; he perilled existence a dozen times for a person whom he hardly knew—and is this his reward?"

"Fear not, dear lady," replied Algernon Grey; "this can have no bad results—a little inconvenience, but naught else. I met the Baron of Oberntraut, as one honourable gentleman meets another, when called by him to the field; I met him without provocation on my part, without anger or animosity, in a place of his own choosing, on a quarrel of his own seeking. I spared him as long as I could; and, though I deeply grieve to hear that he is dead, I will ever maintain, that the wound I gave him was only in defence of my own life."

"He was supposed to be dying, though not dead," replied the old officer, "when the news came last night. This morning we have no intelligence."

"Where is the Elector?" asked Agnes again; "can any one tell me where I shall find him?"

"He was in the Princess's cabinet a few minutes ago, fair lady," said a young gentleman, stepping forward; "I do not think he has come forth yet."

With a quick step, a flushed cheek, and an eager eye, Agnes hurried away; and, at the same moment, the old officer whispered to a page who stood by: "Run and tell old Oberntraut, he may want a word or two." He then turned to his prisoner, saying: "As I know not what may be the Elector's pleasure, sir, concerning you, it may be as well, that I should take you to his presence as speedily as possible. We can wait for him in his audience room, till he comes forth from the Princess's apartments. Have the goodness to follow me."

Thus saying, he led the way to the castle, up the stairs and through a gallery above; and then opening the door, he conducted his prisoner across a sort of waiting-hall, which displayed numerous doors on either side. At one of these, as he crossed, Algernon Grey beheld his fair companion of the night before, standing with a page by her side. Her beautiful head was bent down; her eyes fixed upon the ground; and she moved not in the least, though the sound of steps must have reached her ear. The old officer then opened a door on the opposite side; and the young Englishman followed into a small room containing but one chair. There they paused for about ten minutes, left entirely alone; and, at the end of that time, the old chamberlain, who had so unwillingly introduced Algernon and his cousin to the Elector's presence on the night of the nineteenth of August, passed through with a hurried step. As he went, his brow gathered into a heavy frown; and he glanced at Algernon Grey with his teeth set and his fingers clasped tight upon the sheath of his sword. A moment after a bustle was heard without; and the door being thrown open, the Elector entered with a stern brow, accompanied by several of his officers, and followed by Agnes Herbert and the chamberlain. Without noticing in any manner the young Englishman, the Prince advanced towards the chair, but did not sit down, turning as soon as he had reached it, and looking round.

"May it please your Highness," said the

gentleman who stood by Algernon's side, "I have, according to your command, arrested Master Algernon Grey here present, and crave your further orders concerning him."

The young gentleman took a step forward before the Prince could reply; and with a calm and well-assured countenance demanded, almost haughtily, for what offence his liberty had been abridged. The proud spirit of the free islander, the source of so much that is good, and alas, too often the source of so much that is disagreeable, showed itself for a moment in his tone and manner, though he took care to use all courtly terms and titles of reverence, and in the end, softening his lofty bearing, professed himself ever willing to abide by the laws of the land in which he sojourned, adding, "But knowing my innocence of all offence, I claim fair and equal justice, and a full inquiry, ere I am punished in any shape."

"Justice and fair inquiry you shall have, sir; fear not," answered the Elector, somewhat offended by his bold tone. "It is fortunate that we have been in England, and know that noblemen of that country fancy themselves equal to the princes of other lands, or we might think your bearing somewhat strange.—My lord of Oberntraut, you laid a charge against this gentleman yesterday late at night—a most serious charge. We had not at that hour time to inquire fully; but will now hear you further."

"I charged him, your Highness, with the murder of my son," exclaimed the old chamberlain, coming forward, "the cool deliberate murder of my only child."

"What, is he dead, then?" inquired the Elector, with a look of stern grief.

"Not yet, sir," replied the other, "but he is dying. I saw him an hour ago—his voice could be hardly heard—his eyes were faded and dull, and his strong limbs, which have so often served the state, were feeble as an infant's; but this man, I say—this stranger who comes here, it may be as a spy into your court, seeks a quarrel with one of your best servants, lures him at nightfall into a remote place, and there, having left the two pages behind that no eye may see, slays a man, who, as we all know, in fair honest fight and deeds of arms, had no superior —scarce, indeed, an equal. It is of this I charge him, your Highness—it is for this I demand his punishment. Justice I will have by one means or another, and if by honied words, which he can well use, he should escape the arm of law, let him look well to himself, for I and mine will do ourselves right at last."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the Elector; "you injure a good cause by such rash threats.—What would you, lady? I am glad to see you safe.—I will speak with you presently.—This is no scene for you."

"Pardon, your Highness," answered Agnes, with the bold bearing of strongly roused feelings; "it is a scene in which I must bear a part whether I will or not. Listen to me for a moment. To this noble gentleman I owe my life, and I must raise my voice against his enemies. As I followed your royal lady here last night, my horse, frightened at some object in the wood, plunged over the bank into a torrent against which no living thing could struggle. He perished there, poor beast! Your Highness's servants saw it. They can tell you all."

"I have heard, I have heard," answered Frederic, bowing his head.

"All abandoned me," continued Agnes.—"Your followers—some of them stout soldiers —the gentleman who rode by my side, those who went before and they who followed—not one would venture on that frightful stream to aid a drowning girl, when this noble man, almost a stranger, in a frail bark, not stronger than a toy, which sank ere we reached land, came, found, and saved me. Many a time that night he perilled life for me—for one without a claim upon his goodness. Ay, at the very moment when this old lord declares he had just committed cool deliberate murder, he risked life, and all life gives, on the first generous impulse of his heart. Is this likely, noble prince? —Is this possible? Oh, no! the same high heart that bade him venture on that dark stream, at the scream of a dying girl, be you sure has ruled his actions, whatever they were, in his dealing with a proud adversary. Believe it not, believe it not! or else believe that honour is a name, truth falsehood, and noble self-devotion but a murderer in disguise."

She spoke eagerly, vehemently, and her beautiful countenance, lighted up with the roused energies of her heart, beamed like that of some reproving angel, till in the end the emotions that she felt overpowered her, and the light went out in tears.

"My lord and prince!" cried the old lord of Oberntraut, his bitter rage taking the form of scorn under the restraint, such as it was, of a formal sense of courtesy towards a woman, "it is easy to understand and to forgive a lady pleading for her lover. But let us have done with such trash now. Love tales are not for such occasions!"

"Sir, you imply, if you do not assert, a falsehood," said Algernon Grey, sternly; "the very name of love has never been mentioned between this lady and myself. When I pushed off the skiff to save her, I saw not even who she was. But I will beseech you, dear lady, to leave us. In the justice of this noble prince I will fully rely, and by staying, you only expose yourself to wrong constructions from the fury of a rude old man."

The lord of Oberntraut laid his hand upon his sword, and partly drew it; but one of the attendants held his arm, whispering a caution in his ear; and Agnes replied, "I go then, but only to call a better voice than mine to advocate the same cause."

"Now, Master Algernon Grey," said the Elector, "what have you to say to this charge brought against you? Speak, if you will; but if you do, I need not, I think, remind you that the truth is ever best, and in this case more especially, as it must undergo full inquiry before judges who will not be deceived."

"It is my habit, sir, to speak the truth," answered the young Englishman; "and if the Baron of Oberntraut be still living, I require that his statement be taken from his own lips. He is a brave and noble gentleman, and will not belie even an adversary. Let his statement be compared with mine, and they will be found to tally, I am sure. I declare then, in this

presence, that he fixed a quarrel on me for I know not what: that he himself led me to the spot, made all the arrangements, attacked me first, I passively parrying his thrusts till the last moment, and then only lunged in self-defence. He will tell you, too, that I did all in man's power to staunch the blood and give him help; and I should have returned to remain with him, after having sent my page for aid, had not that lady's cries called me to another task, and the swollen Neckar borne us both far away. Let his own boy be asked if he did not hear him give me directions on the road he followed, invite me to dismount, and lead the way himself. This is my simple tale, and, unless a gentleman and a soldier may without shame refuse such invitations, I have done no wrong in yielding to his."

"In this land, sir," answered the Elector, sternly, "a gentleman and a soldier not only may without shame, but must, refuse such invitations; for, by my own law, now of some four years' date, all such encounters are prohibited most strictly."

"Then his be the blame," replied Algernon Grey, "for leading a stranger unacquainted with the law your Highness names, to violate it. Gladly would I have avoided that which I personally do not approve, but which habit not only sanctions but requires."

"My noble prince, this tale must be false," exclaimed the old lord of Oberntraut; "you know my son right well, and that he is not one rashly to violate your Highness's laws."

Frederic smiled; and, notwithstanding the sad importance of the occasion, a light murmur, somewhat like a laugh, ran round the court, to hear so peaceable a character given to the young baron. But the Elector immediately exclaimed, "Silence, gentlemen. This is unbecoming! I am sorry, sir, to show severity to any one of your land," he continued, speaking to Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, till your adversary's state is better known, and till we are sure what the termination will be, you must endure confinement as best you may; I will myself inquire of those who have tended his wounds, whether they are mortal or not, and, when they shall judge it necessary, will cause his own account to be taken from his lips. Fear not: you shall have justice; but at present you must retire. My good lord of Helmstadt, will you see him conveyed to the great tower, near the English building? Let him have the vacant rooms on the third floor; and I will afterwards put him in ward of some inferior officer."

"Look that you hold him safe, Helmstadt!" exclaimed the old lord of Oberntraut; "for I call Heaven to witness that I will require blood for my son's blood, if not from him, from those who hold him."

"Silence, sir!" said the Elector, "and quit my presence;" and waving his hand, as signal, to the lord of Helmstadt, then chief marshal, to remove his prisoner, the Elector turned to the Chancellor, Christopher of the Green, by Wegersberg, and spoke to him for several minutes, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XII.

In the large round room I have described in a former chapter, with its column in the midst, decked out with arms and banners, just as it had appeared when Algernon Grey first saw it, sat Colonel Herbert, the English Knight, as he was called at the castle, at the same hour when his visitor was brought before the Elector on the charge of murder. His brow was grave and thoughtful; his eyes bent down, as if he were considering some subject deeply. Nevertheless, it must be said that his mind was not affected by any immediate apprehensions for his niece, though he was not yet aware of her return to the castle; but Algernon Grey's message of the night before had reached him duly, showing that she had been rescued from the great peril which she had encountered.

The first news of the preceding evening had represented her as lost to him for ever. When her horse had plunged over, the greater part of the train of the Prince and Princess had, as I have shown, galloped quickly forward. William Lovet had followed immediately after the accident; and the small party of servants and attendants, whom Agnes and the Englishman preceded, saw the accident as well as he did; but not one of them ventured to make an effort for the lady's deliverance. All that they thought fit to do, was to hurry on as quickly as possible, and to inform the Elector of what had occurred, very naturally believing the case to be a hopeless one, and the lady lost beyond recovery. Frederic, for he was in truth a kind-hearted and an amiable prince, at once stopped the cavalcade, and eagerly consulted with those around him what was to be done. But all agreed, that long ere assistance could be rendered, the lady must have perished, so that it was in vain to attempt aught for her deliverance. Elizabeth of England, though not more hopeful than the rest, urged immediate search, or exertion in some way; but her voice was overruled by those who felt that no exertion could be successful; and one old man even ventured to say,—"It is all in vain. The Neckar will have its dues; a certain number are drowned in it every year; and if it had not taken this one, it would have taken another."

In deep, stern, solemn bitterness of heart; with that feeling of despair which nothing can produce but the loss of the only one truly and entirely beloved, Colonel Herbert had passed the hours from the moment that the first news had been communicated to him till he heard a hurried foot ascending the stairs of the tower; and then he started up and gazed towards the door. He had not wept—his was too stern and powerful a nature for tears; but, concentrated in the heart's deepest recesses, the feelings, which in other persons so often melt away like spring thunder-clouds in falling drops, burned and seared, till all seemed desolate as a desert.

"They have found the body," he said to himself, when he heard the step; but his servant ran in with a face of joy, exclaiming, "The lady is saved, Sir Henry, the lady is saved; here a peasant has come from the country to bear the news to the castle."

"Where is he?" exclaimed Herbert; "bring him hither—quick!"

"Alas! sir," cried the man; "the hall-porter has let him go."

Herbert seized him by both the hands, and

gazed earnestly in his face,—"Are you lying?" he exclaimed; "are you lying?"

"No, Sir Henry, I would not lie for the world—on such a matter as this," the servant answered. "The hall-porter sent his boy; and before I would bear you the news I went up to inquire; but there I found it was beyond all doubt. The man had come on foot three or four leagues from a village down the river; and the gentleman, who saved the lady, had given him two gold pieces to bear the tidings. He fancied himself as rich as a prince, the porter said; and had gone to get himself drink in the town."

"Enough, enough!" answered Herbert; "a man would not give gold to spread such a report falsely. Leave me!" and seating himself at his table again, he remained in deep thought, without one exclamation of joy, with scarcely the movement of a muscle, till the castle clock struck two; and then, retiring into his bedroom, he laid himself down and slept profoundly. When he rose on the following morning, a new train of somewhat anxious thoughts took possession of him. "Who was it that had saved his Agnes?" he asked himself. "Who was it that had borne her company through the past long night? Was it one who could be trusted? One who would respect the purity of her mind and heart, and guard her like a child from all that would sully as well as injure?"

He was still busy with these fancies, when his ear caught a light step on the stair; he knew it well; and, starting up, threw wide the door. In an instant Agnes was in his arms, and a few moments were given up to joy and gratulation. But the lady soon turned to a different theme. "I will tell you all hereafter," she said; "but at present you must come to the Elector to plead for and defend the saviour of your Agnes;" and with rapid and eager words she gave a clear brief account of all that had taken place since her arrival at the castle.

Herbert gazed upon her glowing countenance as she spoke, with a thoughtful and inquiring look, and then said in a low voice: "So it was this Englishman, then, was it?"

"Yes," exclaimed Agnes, eagerly; "all others abandoned me; even his own cousin, who had been riding by my side, spurred on and left me. But for him, I must inevitably have perished."

"And he fought Oberntraut, too," continued Herbert, in the same tone, "and vanquished him—that were no easy task. But I knew what would take place between those two—I saw it; but deceived myself as to the time, else I would have stopped it."

"Nay, come," said Agnes, laying her hand upon his arm; "if you come not speedily they will have sent him to prison."

"Stay awhile, my child," answered Herbert. "So this young man was kind to you?"

"Most kind," replied Agnes, somewhat surprised at her uncle's manner; "nothing that could be done to make me comfortable was left undone by him."

"He has seen much of the world—been in courts, and camps, and corrupt foreign lands," said Herbert, musing. "Where slept he at the place of your last night's rest?"

"In the hall below," answered Agnes.

"And doubtless, by the way, he cheered and comforted you?" continued her uncle.

"With the kindest courtesy," replied the lady.

"And with tales of love?" said Herbert.

"Not one word," cried Agnes, with the warm blood mounting into her cheek; "naught that could be so construed for an instant. What is it that you seek to know?" she added, pressing her hand upon his arm, and looking full into his face. "Why do you speak so strangely? I have naught to tell—not a syllable to say that your ear would not be well pleased to receive. If you seek to know how my deliverer treated me—it was as a kind and gentle brother toward a sister just saved from danger—somewhat colder, perhaps, than a brother might have been, but still as tender, as considerate, as feeling. He aided, supported, cheered, strengthened me, with more reverence than was needed, perhaps; but yet I thanked him for it, for it set me at my ease; and through those long hours, I walked, hanging on his arm as if it had been your own, with the same confidence and trust, and to the end was not deceived; for not one word, nor act—and I am sure I may say thought also—was there which could give me even a moment's pain. Surely you do not doubt your Agnes?"

"No, no, my child." cried Herbert, throwing his arms round her; "I wished but to be sure that this young man was what I thought him. Now let us go: I am ready to plead his cause for you, and I trust I shall not plead it vainly. I saw the challenge given, and though I was not near enough to hear the words, feel sure that it came from Oberntraut. Come, Agnes," and, with the lady leaning on his arm, he walked quickly from his own tower to that part of the castle where the apartments of Frederic and Elizabeth were situated. He was there informed that the Elector was still in the small hall, as it was called; and, hurrying thither, he threw open the door. The figure which his eye first sought did not appear; for Algernon Grey had already been removed. But the Elector was still standing at the farther end of the room, conversing with the gentlemen around him; and Herbert advanced at once towards the Prince, bowing low as he approached.

"Ah, Herbert, is that you?" exclaimed Frederic, when he saw him; "I wish to speak with you a moment alone. Gentlemen, I need not detain you longer. Stay you, fair lady: I have counsel for your ear also."

At the hint thus given, the room was instantly cleared of all persons but the Prince, the English officer, and his niece; and, as soon as the door was closed, Frederic exclaimed: "What is it, Herbert? there seems an angry spot upon your brow. The affair of this young nobleman, I will warrant. Well, that will be easily explained."

"You mistake me, noble Prince," answered Herbert; "I may be deeply grieved to find that a noble gentleman, who has not only just saved this dear child's life at the hazard of his own, but through a long night, when she had no one else to protect her, has treated her with that mingled respect and courtesy—that tenderness, united with reverence, which none but the noble heart can feel or show—should

have fallen under your indignation; but anger, on my part, towards the Prince I serve, is out of the question."

"You have heard the cause?" said Frederic, interrupting him; "this sad duel with young Oberntraut."

"Oh yes, your Highness, I know all that," replied Herbert; "I saw Oberntraut seek the quarrel, and give the challenge."

"Then you are sure it came from him?" inquired Frederic.

"I heard not the words which were spoken, sir," answered Herbert; "but there are looks and gestures as good as any words, and from them I feel quite sure that the challenge came from him, who has fallen, it seems. Besides, it was he who stopped my young friend, calling him from my side, and, as he did so, I marked the frowning brow and flashing eye—the lip that quivered with scorn and anger, and the impatient gesture of the hand. It must have been hard to bear that demeanour of his, and yet the other's was calm and grave, as if resisting passion rather than yielding to it. Let the matter be inquired into, my Prince; and if it be as I say, surely you will not visit the faults of Oberntraut on the head of Master Grey, even by imprisonment."

"For his own safety, Herbert," replied the Prince, putting his hand upon his arm, "he must endure confinement for a while. If this young lord recovers, we can easily settle all differences between them, and quiet down the old man's rash heat; but if he dies, you know old Oberntraut, and are well aware he would move heaven and earth, and take any means, lawful or unlawful, for revenge. In that case, we must get this young gentleman out of the Palatinate as secretly as may be. In the mean time, however, he must be a prisoner; for a chance-meeting between him and the old man might be fatal to one or both."

"I trust your Highness will take care then," answered Herbert, "that all shall be done to make his imprisonment light."

"As light as may be," replied the Prince. "I have been forced to put on a stern face, and use harsh words, in order to satisfy my court that I show no unjust favour to one of my fair lady's countrymen; but, at the same time, I never dreamt of dealing hardly with him, and I was but even now thinking of giving him into your custody, my good friend. Then you can attend to all his wants and wishes,—but you must be responsible to me for his safe custody, and you shall swear, upon your honour, that by no indulgence you grant him, shall he be seen beyond the walls of his present prison at any time when old Oberntraut is within the castle-gates."

"Then the youth must be mewed up altogether," answered Herbert, "unless we bring him out to walk at night, for that fierce old wolf is here from sunrise till evening close."

"All that you must arrange as you can," answered the Prince. "I would not, for half my dominions, have those two meet— But will you accept the custody, and give the promise? for I must now go."

"Well, well, since it may be no better," rejoined the English officer, bluntly, "I must even take what your Highness is pleased to grant: I give you my honour then, sir, to observe the orders you have given, but I must have a soldier or two to keep guard, for we cannot prevent him, I suppose, from seeing his friends."

"During the day," answered Frederic, "but not after nightfall. You can take a guard if you think it necessary. Come to me in half an hour, and you shall have an order for his custody. We must hear the tale of your strange adventures, fair lady, at some other time,—for the present, fare-you-well!"

Thus saying, the Prince quitted the room by the door on his right side; and, drawing Agnes's arm through his, Herbert returned towards his own lodging, saying: "You shall be his little gaoler, Agnes; and, as he has dealt nobly and truly by you, so you shall repay his services by kind services in return."

CHAPTER XIII.

In a large and stately chamber of one of the older parts of the castle at Heidelberg sat a lady of the middle age, about half an hour after Algernon Grey had been removed from the presence of the Elector. The room was a long parallelogram, tapestried all round with richly worked hangings, representing in glowing colours and somewhat warm designs, the loves of Vertumnus and Pomona. Few specimens of that now abandoned branch of needlework could compete with those which were there displayed. The flowers and the fruit seemed to stand out from the background; the rich clusters of the grape and apple, the leaves of the trees, and the very birds upon the branches, all seemed to project into the chamber, and gave it the air of an arbour. While the forms of the garden goddess and her changeful lover were displayed with a truth and energy which, though not at all offensive to the less delicate eyes of those days, would be judged rather indecorous in our own. This fine suite of tapestry had not been treated with much reverence by the hands that hung it up; for over each door, and there were three in the walls, a piece of the same size had been cut out and bordered with gilt leather, much to the inconvenience of the legs of Vertumnus in one instance, and to the waist and arms of Pomona in another—for the purpose of nailing the slips so detached to the door, the opening and closing of which were greatly facilitated. The ceiling above was of dark oak, richly wrought in pentagons, which, rising one above the other, diminishing as they came forward and ending with a spot of gold in the centre, took the shape of stars to the eye below, before it had time to trace out the elaborate workmanship; and from the central pentagon hung a large rich gilt lustre of twelve lights. Chairs covered with crimson velvet, tables with spiral legs and inlaid tops, a small moss carpet for the feet in one corner of the room, a lute, a number of books, amongst which were several huge folios, and a quantity of very fine rare porcelain, made up the furniture of the chamber, which, though the light was by no means strong, even on a summer morning, had an air of comfort and calm state about it, which was pleasant and impressive to the eye.

There is a general harmony in all things, which we seldom see violated—or rather, perhaps, I should say, things naturally fall into harmony, and are never long in adapting themselves harmoniously to each other. The man and his dress, the room and its tenant, the church and the worship there celebrated, have all their peculiar fitness to each other; and so it was in this instance; for the lady, who was there seated, was exactly what one would have expected to find in that place. She was a woman of a grave and thoughtful aspect, tempered by a kindly look about the mouth, though the brow was firm and thoughtful, and the eyes clear and very bright. The lightness of youth was gone; and, if she could not exactly be called graceful, she was dignified; and yet there was the ease of high birth and high education, which is in itself a kind of grace, and the dignified carriage was softened by an occasional touch of homeliness of manner the most remote from vulgarity or coarseness. She was large in person, though not very tall; and the fine cutting of the mouth, the dimpled chin, and the small, though somewhat aquiline nose, displayed some pretensions still to that beauty, which courtiers had celebrated in her younger days. Her dress was very peculiar, consisting of a gown of black velvet, covered down the front and on the arms with embroidery of the same sombre colour; and, from the neck to the bosom, she wore a tucker of the most magnificent white lace; above this, round the neck, was a large frill of plain white muslin; while springing from the shoulders was a sort of black silk wimple or hood, much in the form of a cockle-shell, stiffened with whalebone, and ready to receive the head and neck, ruff and all. The coif consisted of a piece of black velvet trimmed round with lace, fastened to the hair behind, and brought over the head in a peak upon the wide-extended forehead, from which the hair was drawn back, so as to leave the whole brow completely exposed.

Such was the dress and appearance of the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana, sister of the famous William, Prince of Orange, one of the most remarkable and clear-sighted women of her day; and I have thought it fit to dwell thus far upon the mere description of her person and habiliments, inasmuch as portraits of this princess are very rare, and no description, that I know, exists.

At the moment I speak of, she had just seated herself in a great chair, and taken up a book; while one of her waiting-maids, who had run forth from her dressing-room by the door on the left hand, was thrusting another large pin into the black velvet coif to fasten it more securely to her hair, a precaution which, it seems, she had neglected while actually at her toilet. When she had done, the Electress looked up, inquiring, "Have you sent to my cousin, the Lady Agnes?"

"Eldrida is gone, may it please your Highness," said the maid with a low reverence, and withdrew.

The reader will remark that the Electress Dowager applied the name of cousin to the person of whom she spoke; but it must not be thence inferred that they stood in that degree of consanguinity to each other, for the lady to whom she sent was no other than Agnes Herbert; and it was very common in those days for high personages, either as a mark of reverence or love, to give the name of cousin to others of inferior station in no degree related to them.

For about five minutes Louisa Juliana continued to read with somewhat of a careless and inattentive air, as if she were merely seeking to occupy a short space of time with the semblance of some employment, while her thoughts were really busied with other things. At the end of that period a slight tap was heard at the door—not the great entrance which issued forth on the corridor and the stairs—but that of the dressing-room, and the next instant Agnes Herbert entered and approached the chair of the Princess. She had changed her dress since her return; and though, perhaps, her face was a shade paler than it had been before all the adventures of the preceding day, yet her exceeding loveliness was not diminished, even if the character of her beauty was somewhat changed.

The Electress rose partly from her seat as soon as she saw her; and when Agnes bent, almost kneeling at her feet, she cast her arms round her and pressed her warmly to her heart.

"Welcome, welcome, my sweet child," she cried; "I thought that fate, after taking from me so much and so many that I loved, had deprived me also of my Agnes. Oh, my dear girl! you cannot fancy the anguish of my heart during many a long hour last night; seeing what I suffered, they came to my bedside at one this morning and told me that, by some miracle, you had been saved. I would scarcely believe the tidings, loved one; and till I heard just now that you had returned, a shade of unbelief would linger in my mind."

"I should have been here ere now, your Highness," answered Agnes, "as bound in duty and in love, had not a matter of importance called me to the presence of the Elector. My deliverance was, indeed, a miracle, though yet one should scarcely say so, when it was brought about by that which should be as frequent as it is seldom, the gallantry and devotion of a gentleman and a courtier."

"Nay, sit you down here, my Agnes, and tell me all your marvels," said the Electress; "for as yet I have heard naught of the story. Indeed, I believe all in the castle are as ignorant as myself."

"Not now," replied Agnes; "in different forms, part truth and part falsehood, it has spread, I find, far and near. But I will tell you all, noble lady, exactly as it happened; for it is a pleasant task when one has naught but gratitude and praise to speak;" and with more minute details than even she had indulged in towards Herbert, the fair girl proceeded to relate to her high friend all that had occurred since she had left her on the preceding day, till the moment she had left the Elector's presence. "I have said all;" but there were two things which she omitted: William Lovet's praises of his cousin, and the keen questions which her uncle had put to her on her return. For some reason, she knew not what herself, she spoke not on these two themes, but all the rest was told.

Louisa Juliana listened with thoughtful, earnest attention; her countenance did not vary much, for she was habituated to command its expression; but still there were particular parts on which she seemed to ponder more than others. All Agnes said of her escape from the imminent peril of death, and of him who had delivered her, she seemed to mark peculiarly; but, at the story of his arrest and what had followed, she took apparently but little heed, merely saying: "It will be found that Oberntraut provoked it."

When the young lady had done, she laid her hand upon her shoulder and kissed her brow, thanking her for her tale, and adding: "This is indeed a noble and a generous man, my Agnes; and I must see him and tell him what I think, for your sake, my sweet cousin."

"But he is in prison," answered Agnes; "and I fear, may not be enlarged for a long time."

"I must see him, nevertheless," replied the Electress, thoughtfully, "on many accounts, dear girl—" she paused, and seemed to meditate a moment or two, after which she added: "I had heard of his being here before, Agnes—nay, you yourself told me of his demeanour the other night, but it is not that alone; a hint has reached my ears, that he has more objects than one, that he is not merely a traveller for pleasure; and this calm and thoughtful character in one so young, bespeaks, methinks, a brain burdened with weighty matters. My son, I can see, judges the same—he denies not that he knows him, and that he is not exactly what he seems. I must see him, Agnes; and that, too, as speedily as may be."

"But how," dear lady?" inquired Agnes Herbert.

"Oh, that will be easy," answered the Electress; "your uncle has him in custody, you say; well, you shall be his turnkey for the night, and bring him forth to take the air upon the walls, or in the gardens; then lead him out beneath my windows, which shall be open; and, when you hear my little silver bell, conduct him hither by the small staircase in the tower. I must know more of his errand, Agnes; and, if it be what I think, I may find cause for a long conference. The fate of my son and his whole house, the fate of Germany, nay, perhaps of Europe, is now in the balance, and I would fain prevent any fresh weight being thrown into the wrong scale. Wait till night has fallen, and I will ring my bell some time before ten,—tell Herbert you have my commands."

"Which shall be obeyed, depend upon it, madam," answered the young lady, and then remained silent, as if waiting to receive any further directions.

"And so you are doubtless very grateful to this young cavalier, my Agnes," said the Princess, at length.

"What would I not do to show my thankfulness!" cried the fair enthusiastic girl.

"Anything in reason, child," replied the elder lady, "but let not gratitude carry you too far in your young fancies. The saving of a life may be paid too dearly by the peace of the heart."

Agnes smiled gaily. "Oh, no fear of that, *noble lady*," she answered, "he is no love-*maker*, and if I could thank him for anything *more earnestly* than for his chivalrous deliverance, it would be for his kind, calm, brotherly treatment throughout yesternight, without one word or look that the vainest heart could construe into gallantry."

"Strange conduct for so young a man! Strange gratitude for so fair a girl!" replied the Electress, laughing. "Yet be not too sure of yourself or him, dear child. Love may be heaping up the fuel before he sets the flame to the pile. Mark me, my Agnes, and do not let your cheek glow so warmly. I do not tell you not to love: that were both vain and dangerous: I only say, know him better before you do. All I have heard of him speaks well, and marks him out for no ordinary man; but yet it is right when gratitude is so warm in a young heart, to take care that it lights up no other flame without our knowing it. Yours is a rich fancy, my Agnes, and an ardent spirit, and my good cousin Herbert is not so careful as a mother."

"Oh, he is more careful than you deem him," replied the young lady, with a faint smile at the remembrance of his questions; "he interrogated me as strictly this morning as a grand inquisitor; would know all my companion's words and acts towards me, even to the smallest trifle."

"But asked you nothing of your own, I will warrant," said the Princess, "that is his character, my child. All the English are theoretical, and he has his system, good as far as it goes, but often carried too far, and often inapplicable. Because he met with one woman in life who was an angel, if ever one dwelt on earth, and has known few others, his rule would seem to be to trust all women, and to doubt all men. But my advice, my Agnes, to every young being placed as you are, would be to doubt yourself and ever to fly danger!"

"And do *you* doubt me, dear lady?" asked Agnes, almost mournfully.

The Princess cast her arm round her, exclaiming, "No, dear girl! No! I would doubt myself sooner; but what I have said was yet in kindness, Agnes. This same gratitude often leads on along a flowery path into a wilderness. Sweet smiling blossoms strew the path at first, and as we gather them we go forward farther than we know till frightened at the growing desolation; round we would turn back and then find the way shut with thorns and brambles. I say, beware, my sweet child, till you have known him longer, better, nearer. Then if he seek to win your heart, and you can give it, let it be so; for I am not one to undervalue the worth of true and honest love. It may have its pains; but I do believe that woman's life, at least, is not complete till she has known its blessings."

"But why should he seek to win my poor heart?" asked Agnes. "Why should I fancy that he ever will? He has never said one word that should justify me to myself for dreaming of such a thing. Doubtless he has seen many brighter, better, fairer than myself, and will see many more. As yet I have done naught to win his love, though your Highness thinks, I know, he has done much to win mine; but there is a vast difference between gratitude and love. I am too proud to love unsought, believe me, and till he either tells me so, or I have accomplished something worthy of love from him, I will not even fancy that he can feel aught but courteous kindness to me."

"Poor child!" said the Electress, "you are a scholar of the lowest class in this same school of love, I see. You have done naught to merit love! Have you not made yourself to him an object of eager, anxious thought, and apprehension, when, whirling in the torrent, he rushed to save you? Have you not given him cause for the display of gallant daring and fine enthusiasm? Have you not wakened through the livelong night, the tender, soft emotions of the heart for one protected, soothed, supported? What is this but to merit love from any man? You much mistake, my Agnes, if you think men's hearts are won by that which will win woman's. Man's is a different nature, a calling unlike ours. His task to strive with danger for himself and others, to shield the feeble, and love those he shields. Ours to suffer and to shrink, to seek protection from a stronger arm, and pay with our whole hearts the price of man's support. Overwhelm him with benefits, give him wealth, distinction, a kingly crown if you have it to bestow; save him from death, or pain, or misery, still you will twine no bond around his heart so strong as that which binds it to the object of his care or pity. But enough of this, my child, I would but warn you; for every woman carries a traitor in her bosom, ever ready to yield the citadel unless well watched. Bring this brave gentleman to me, as I have said, to-night. When I have seen him, I will tell you more."

Agnes retired, but she went not straight to her uncle's tower. It was her own chamber she first sought, and there, for well nigh an hour, with her fair face resting on her hand, she remained in deep and seemingly painful meditation. I will not pause to inquire what were the busy thoughts that crossed that young and inexperienced brain; what the emotions which filled that pure, warm, gentle heart. For a time her reveries were certainly bitter ones; but then she seemed to cast them off with some strong resolution; the clouds passed from her brow, her sparkling eye looked up, and rising with a gay laugh, she cried, "No, no; I will not give it another thought!" and with a light step, hurried to Herbert's tower.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the custody of the Grand Marshal, Algernon Grey was removed from the presence of the Elector, and passing across the hall where he had seen Agnes waiting, he was led into one of the open galleries which ran along the great court on one side, and thence by innumerable small passages, scarcely large enough for two persons to thread them abreast, to the door of a chamber which opened upon one of the landing-places of a tolerably wide staircase.

The door was low, scarcely of the height of the young Englishman's head, and covered with large bars and bands of iron, as well as heavy-headed nails. When it was opened, it displayed on the right-hand side a small anteroom, with a high window, opposite to which was another low-browed arch with a door, and beyond that a third door equally solid and strong with the first.

The Lord of Helmstadt, as they passed, pointed towards the arch on the left, saying, in a courteous tone: "There will be your bedroom, and here your servants can remain, if, as I trust, it be the Elector's pleasure that your usual attendants should be admitted to you." As he spoke, he led the way towards the third door; and, turning the heavy key that was in the lock, opened it, motioning the young Englishman to go in.

Algernon Grey did so in silence, and with no very pleasant anticipations; but he was agreeably disappointed in finding himself in a room bearing very little the aspect of a prison, cheerful in itself, and commanding that same unrivalled view which he had beheld before from the castle grounds. In shape, the chamber was an exact half-moon; the large round tower in which it was situated being cut by a partition, which left this segment as a sort of wide saloon; while the other half was again divided into two, the one portion being appropriated to the purposes of a bed-room, and the second and lesser part serving as an ante-room, except a small space which was separated from the rest to contain the staircase.

The furniture of the room was costly and convenient. Nothing was wanting that could contribute to the comfort of its denizen; and Algernon Grey drew from the aspect of the whole place an augury that it was not the Elector's intention to show any very great severity towards him. The hangings, the tables, the velvet chairs, however attracted but little of his attention; for he walked at once forward to one of the three large windows, through which the full torrent of light was streaming into the room, though not indeed the sunshine; for it was yet morning, and that side of the tower looked to the south and west.

"A glorious prospect," he said, turning to the Marshal; "methinks a day or two's sojourn here will be no great infliction. Nevertheless, I protest against the right of any one to place me in confinement for that which I have done. Endurance, however, is a serviceable quality; and the Elector's will must be obeyed; but I do trust that I shall not be left here without some attendants within call; and that my servants and baggage may be brought up from the inn where I left them, little anticipating imprisonment."

"I will take the Elector's farther commands," replied the Lord of Helmstadt. "Of course some persons will be appointed to attend upon you; but whether your own servants, or not, I cannot say. I must leave you alone for a time, greatly grieving that such a chance should have befallen so gallant a gentleman. We all know Lewis of Oberntraut well; and there is not a man in all the court who doubts that he has provoked this affair; but the Elector has been very strict in such matters lately, and, of course, he cannot show favour even were he inclined."

Thus saying, he withdrew; and Algernon was left alone. For an instant he gazed round the room, while the key grated heavily in the lock, and laughed in a light, cheerful tone. "Here I am a captive," he said; "well, though unexpected, it is no great matter. A few short hours, a few short days, what are they from the sum of life! and, forgetting that I have lost my liberty, I will think myself a prince

hospitably received, well lodged, and only, like the slave of the Haram, not suffered to go abroad. What an idle thing it is for a man to fret and wear himself with vain regrets over the loss of that shadowy thing, the portions of freedom that is left him by the usages of the world. In courts and cities, with the stiff bit of the law beneath his jaws, he is trained and curbed up by the habits of the land to go through his taught paces, like a horse in the manege, curveting here, and passaging there, with hardly a natural step in his whole allure. Here, with no eyes to watch me, with no form of restraint or customary ceremonies, I can have more real freedom than in a king's halls, although yonder door be locked and bolted. What is it that makes imprisonment painful? Either the anticipation of farther evils as its dark termination, or the prospect of its indefinite, perhaps interminable, extent. In a few days I shall be free. They dare not do me wrong. I have nothing further to apprehend. Why should the locking of that door jar upon my ear, when the hand that turns the key is on the outside! Had it been my own hand, ere I lay down to sleep, it would have been nothing—no, no, I will bear it lightly. Man doubles all the evils of his fate by pondering over them: a scratch becomes a wound; a slight an injury; a jest an insult; a small peril a great danger; and a light sickness often ends in death by the brooding apprehensions of the sick. What a magnificent scene! Methinks, I could contemplate that view for ever; and, forgetting all the world, live here an anchorite in the midst of a great city, worshipping God in the grand temple of his brightest works."

Vain, oh, how vain is it in man to strive, by the mere power of intellect, to quell or overrule the natural affections of the heart. The stoical philosophy would have broken down instantly, had not its teachers skilfully applied emollients to its harsh sternness, teaching not alone to bear the evils that fate inflicts, but often, also, to fly from them—ay, to fly, even though the place of refuge was the tomb: for, after all, the magnificent-miened crime of suicide was but a cowardly flight before a conquering army of the world's ills.

Vain was all the reasoning of Algernon Grey; and silently and slowly the solitary moments, as they passed, sapped the foundations of the tall edifice of lofty thoughts which he had so confidently built up. First he began to find the time go slowly; he felt delight in the beauty of the scene, it is true, but it was all still; nothing moved; the very air had fallen away, so that the leaves of the trees stirred not on the branches; and the green Neckar looked like a sheet of solid glass. He could not see into the streets of the town; the thickness of the walls excluded the garden below; the sky overhead was without a cloud; the glowing heat of the day kept the birds quiet; and the light changed so slowly, that the creeping on of the shadow here and the sunshine there was imperceptible to the eye. The prospect was beautiful, but it became monotonous; and a storm or cloud would have been a relief.

He began to turn his eyes towards the door, and wished that some one would come. The knowledge that it was locked became oppressive to him; he felt that his philosophy was failing, and he determined to find or make an occupation. He had not yet seen the bed-room; and, walking through the door, which communicated with it, he examined the furniture it contained, looked out of the high window over the roofs of some of the buildings and against the walls of others. A pigeon, seated upon one of the gables, took flight at that moment, and whirled up into the free air. Algernon Grey knew then how much he had felt the loss of liberty; for to witness the bird's flight was joy to him, and yet it woke melancholy associations. As he saw it spreading its pinions lightly in the clear sky, sweeping round in a gay circle, and then darting away to meadow or to corn-field, he thought how beautiful a thing freedom is, how terrible is its loss. The bird disappeared; and walking slowly back into the other chamber, he seated himself in the window and gazed out; but bitter thoughts took possession of him; and the mind rambled on from one sad train of images to another. He thought of human life, its griefs, its cares, its changes. He viewed it all darkly, both its accidents and its ordinary course. "What is it," he said, "but a gradual development, filled with many an evil and many a danger, a short maturity and a long and sad decay? Scarcely have we touched our prime, when some failing power, some slackened energy, some corporeal, or some mental weakness, warns us that we are on the descent, and that all is thenceforward downward, downward to the grave. Thenceforward the game of life is all loss. One after another we cast the dice for a new stake; and fate is ever the winner against us; till, bankrupt in body and in mind, we go to bed and sleep—forgotten. Then, too, how often, even in the days of our highest energies, comes something to bar us from the treasures that we covet; some small but fatal obstacle, over which all our hopes fall prostrate; the eternal stumbling-block of circumstance that gives the ever-flying good time to escape us. Often!—Nay, I should have said ever; for that dark inscrutable hand of fate still mingles with the cup of joy, even when sparkling most brightly in the hand of youth, the bitter drop that soon pervades it all."

He turned his mind to other things. "Well, it matters not," he thought, "there is surely one unalloyed pleasure, at all events,—to do good, to save, protect, befriend;" then, for an instant, his fancy rested joyfully upon the events of the night before. He thought of Agnes Herbert, of having saved her from destruction, of having rescued her from the dark waters of that turbulent stream, of having given back to life that creature, so full of all life's brightest energies; and, for a moment, he was happy. She rose before him in her young beauty, sparkling with graces, heart beaming from her eyes; love and happiness upon her lips; her clear, fair brow, like the expanse of heaven; and the soul of loveliness in every look and every movement. The vision was too bright, and, clasping his hands together, he fixed his eyes upon the ground, murmuring bitterly through his closed teeth: "Yet she never can be mine!"

Deep, deep and gloomy were his meditations after; and more than one hour passed by ere he moved a single muscle; till, at length, he heard a step, and a voice speaking without; and, starting up, he strove to clear his brow, brushing back the hair from his forehead, and looking grave, but not so sad. The key was turned in the door; and the next moment, two faces, that he knew well, presented themselves, those of Herbert and William Lovet.

Herbert stayed not long. "For the first time in life, Master Grey," he said, "I have petitioned to be a gaoler; but I have so much to thank you for, that I might well undertake that office on your behalf, to soften, as much as possible, your captivity, which will not be long, I trust. My thanks and my plans of all kinds must have greater room than I will now give to them, as your cousin is here to talk with you; but I will see you again ere the day be over, and, in the mean time, provide for your comfort, as far as may be. So fare-you-well for the present;" and, shaking him warmly by the hand, he turned to Lovet, saying: "The guard without knows your person, and will give you exit when you require it. You can come hither as often as you like during the day; but after sunset the gates of the tower, by the Elector's orders, must be closed against all visitors."

"Thanks, colonel, thanks," answered Lovet, and gazed after him to the door, ere he spoke to his cousin. The opening of his conversation was as strange as usual; for he began with a loud burst of laughter.

"Caged, Algernon, caged!" he exclaimed. "Well, upon my life, a mighty pretty dungeon, and convenient! Velvet chairs, upon my life; and a ravishing prospect, as poets would call it. Good soup, a bottle of rich wine, and bread not too brown, and, methinks, you are comfortably provided for. On my life, I am greatly indebted to the Elector."

"You seem to enjoy his bounty towards me, certainly," answered Algernon Grey, with a slight touch of bitterness; "may I know, William, whether it is from kindly sympathy with my pleasures, or from personal satisfaction, you derive your merriment?"

"Oh, personal, personal!" exclaimed Lovet. "That celebrated cardinal, the son of a butcher, and master of monarchs, bright Wolsey, was a frank and sincere man; and when he wrote 'ego et rex meus,' he only did what every other man would do, if he were not a hypocrite, namely, put himself first, that is to say, the place which he occupied in his own consideration. I love you second to myself, dear Algernon. Don't tell sweet Madame de Laussitz, or her deep sleepy eyes would flash with indignation, to think that I loved any thing or any body, but her fair self; however, can you deny that I have great obligations to the Elector? Here he has caged my bird, just as I thought it was about to take flight, and that I should be obliged to follow. It answers my purpose just as well as if you had fallen in love with all the ladies of the court together, and stayed philandering in orange bowers. As to yourself, from what I know of you, the Elector's prison will be much more pleasant than Cupid's chain; and, on my life, he has put the jewel in a very snug casket. Here you are, like a poor simple Catholic girl's new crucifix, wrapped up in cotton, and laid upon a shelf, all safe and sheltered; while I, like the same poor maiden, go wandering at large in my worldly vanities."

"Take care, William," answered Algernon Grey, "that your vanities don't get you into worse than this."

"Heaven and earth listen to the man!" exclaimed William Lovet, laughing. "Think of his preaching decorum to me. Did I not tell you long ago, Algernon, that your vices were much more serious ones than mine? Here, instead of bowing down and worshipping the embroidered hem of some fair lady's petticoat, the very first thing you do in a strange country is, to go and cut a poor man's throat. Now, I will ask you fairly and candidly, which is the worst, to amuse an hour or two in giving and receiving pleasure, or to spend your time, like a wild cat in a holly bush, scratching your neighbour's heart out? The thing won't bear an argument, cousin of mine; I am the moral and well-regulated young man; and you are the reprobate."

"I only cut another man's throat, as you call it, William, in defence of my own life," replied Algernon Grey; "but, methinks, of all men you should be the last to find fault with such a transaction. Methinks I have heard of some six or seven of such affairs upon your hands."

"Ay, but I never begin with fighting," answered Lovet; "when driven to such extremities, I can't help it. I always commence with love and affection; and, if it end with hate and naked rapiers, it is no fault of mine. And so you pinked this Oberntraut! Why you deserve thanks for that, too. Really it was a public service; if he die, there will be one bubble less upon the stream of the world; and if he recover, the bleeding and the lesson will do him an immense deal of good. 'Tis a pity it was not in the spring; for that is the time, the doctors say, to let blood."

"Pray, do not jest upon the subject, my good cousin," answered Algernon Grey; "I went unwillingly on a quarrel not of my own seeking; I did what I scarcely judged right to save my honour; and I bitterly regret that I was forced to wound a gentleman, who was too skilful a swordsman to be disarmed. Let us talk of other things."

"Pooh!" said Lovet, "he is a coxcomb, and deserved it. If you had not done it, I would have done it for you.—But to talk of other things, as you say. The Elector can certainly mean you no harm by assigning you so pleasant a place for imprisonment. When you have got up your clothes and a few books, you will be as comfortable here as at the inn with a sprained ankle—more so; for you will want the pain. Then, my dear Algernon, you will be out of all temptation, which is a great thing in your case. Here you can neither drink, nor swear, nor game, nor make love; in short, you are now physically in the state, to which you reduce yourself morally, and are cut off from all the little pleasures of life by that door, instead of a puritanical spirit.—I could make myself very comfortable here myself, but for one thing. I have often thought, as I like to try every sort of emotion in this world, that I

would make myself a voluntary prisoner for a few days, only I could never determine upon the gaol."

"And pray what is the one thing wanting in this sweet place?" asked Algernon Grey; "the one thing I want is liberty, but, I suppose, that is not what you mean?"

"Oh, dear, no," cried Lovet, "I mean woman's company; I should want something sadly to play with, to teaze, to irritate, and to amuse myself with, like a petted child, and then to soothe her with soft caresses, and look into her liquid eyes, half full of tears, half light. Liberty, pooh! liberty is nothing. I would sell myself for a sequin to a Turk, if he would but engage to imprison me in his harem. But, on my life! if I were shut up for any of my small misdemeanors in a prison, I would get some fair girl or another to come and entertain me at any price, were it but the gaoler's fat daughter."

Thus went he on for well nigh an hour, with gay, light, apparently thoughtless talk; but yet it was all calculated to produce a certain impression; and it must not be denied that, in a degree, it did so. He did so. He never mentioned the name of Agnes Herbert; he never alluded to her in the most remote manner; he spoke not of his cousin's gallant conduct on the preceding night; he seemed to be ignorant of all that had taken place, except the duel and the arrest. But yet his conversation turned Algernon's thoughts to Agnes, and made him long for her society. His words called up a pleasant dream of how she might cheer his hours of imprisonment, how, under other circumstances, she might make the sad and weary day the sweetest and the brightest of his life. He gave himself up to the dream, too: as there was no substantial source of pleasure, he fancied he might as well console himself from the stores of imagination; and on her his thoughts rested, fondly, tenderly, even while his cousin remained with him.

Lovet marked well the effect he produced; the meditative look, the occasional absence of mind, the random answer, and a sigh that once broke forth; and, when he thought he had succeeded sufficiently, he rose to go. "Well, Algernon," he said, "what shall I send you up? —clothes, books, and an instrument of music by the hands of a pretty maid, if I can find one. They tell me, you must not have your man; but the category did not include the fair sex; and, unless they are barbarians, they will let you have a femme-de-chambre, though they exclude a valet.—Come, come, do not look so grave. I must go and pay my devotions, but first will despatch all that you may require. Leave it to me, I will make a good selection, never fear; and your little coxcomb, Frill, shall carry them all hither, and see if they will let him stay to tend upon you. Whatever be their rules and regulations, if they view him justly, he can fall under none of them; for Heaven only knows what class the little devil belongs to; I am only certain that he is neither man, woman, nor child."

"Well, send him at all events," answered Algernon Grey; "it would be convenient if they let him stay. Send a lute, too, if you can find one in the town."

"A lute!" exclaimed Lovet. "On my life! the man will fall in love at last, if it be but by twanging catgut to his own sweet voice. To think, that two pieces of white board, strung with the entrails of a tame tiger, should give a reasonable creature, full of intellect as he thinks himself, the best consolation in adversity, is a sort of marvel—a lute! Heaven bless the mark!—Well, you shall have a lute, if it be but to make you commit a folly for once in your life, and sing soft ditties to a certain spot in the ceiling. Adieu, cousin, adieu! I will see you again to-morrow."

"Bring me news of this young baron's state, if you can get them," said Algernon Grey.

"Happy for him, I am not his physician," answered Lovet; and thus saying he left the room.

When he was gone, the prisoner relapsed into thought again; but he had found out, or at least his cousin's words had suggested, a new source of pleasant meditations. They were dangerous ones, it must be owned—those sweet alluring fancies that lead us along far, much farther than we think, with steps as light as if the foot rested upon clouds. It was weak, but it was very natural so to give way. For long, long hours there was no occupation for his mind. The choice, if it could be called a choice, was between dark and gloomy broodings over a bitter point in his fate, and sad anticipations of the future, or an unreal dream of happiness, which could hardly, by any possibility, be verified; but yet presented itself to fancy at every moment, whenever thought was left free to roam, unrestrained by a powerful will. Is it wonderful that he grew weary of the struggle? Is it surprising that more and more he gave way to the bright deceptions of a warm, eager heart, and quick imagination? Is it to be marvelled at, that in the *dull* hours of solitude, he turned from the gloomy pictures presented by reason and memory, to gaze upon the glowing pageantry of fancy and hope? Ah, no! And so constituted mentally and corporeally, so situated in the past and in the present, few, very few men on earth would be found to resist more than he resisted, to do otherwise than he did. He yielded his heart to the only comfort it could receive, he yielded his mind to the only thoughts that were bright; and, though his stern resolve to do all that was right maintained its sway, yet the traitors of our peace were busily undermining, in secret, the defences of the castle in which he trusted.

He made Agnes Herbert the companion of his thoughts. He saw her with the mind's eye; the tones of her sweet voice came back to his ear melodiously; the glance of her clear, soft eye, with all its tempered brightness, seemed upon him again; the very memory of her grace and beauty brought sunshine with it, as sometimes, when we shut our eyes in the darkness of the night, resplendent scenes come back to sight, all vivid and distinct, as if they were painted in light upon our closed eyelids. He made a happiness for himself where none other was to be found; and if it was a weakness, be it remembered he was but man.

Nothing was, indeed, wanting to mere corporal comfort, except freedom. A well-served table was provided for him; one of the Elector's

servants attended to all that could lighten his captivity; his clothes, some books, and a lute were brought up in the course of the day; and a small hand-bell was placed upon a table that he might have the means of summoning attendance when he needed it. His page, indeed, was not admitted, and no one visited his chamber after the hour of dinner, but once when he rang. His thoughts, however, had by this time chosen their own course. He read little, he touched not the instrument of music; but, seated near the window, he gazed out, and thought, while wandering slowly round to the west, the bright summer sun presented the scene beneath in the same warm light of evening which had flooded valley and plain, and gilt mountain and castle, when last he had seen it with Agnes Herbert. Her image mingled with the whole, and the prospect was not the less sweet to his eyes for the association with which memory enriched the view.

CHAPTER XV.

The sun set; the beams of the departed orb spread up from behind the mountains of the Haardt over the whole wide expanse of the cloudless heaven; and, from the golden verge of the horizon to the glowing crimson of the zenith, a broad sheet of varied colouring stretched unbroken, hue melting into hue, so that the eye could not detect where one tint blended with another. It changed, too, with each passing minute; the golden verge grew red; blue mingled with the crimson overhead; then came a shade of grey; and then looked out a star, like hope to cheer the heart on the departure of some past bygone joy. At length the grey twilight succeeded to the warm sunset, and stream, and valley, and mountain, and plain grew faint and soft under the prisoner's sight; while his chamber became full of shadows; and many of the bright fancies which had cheered the day, passed away with the declining light, as if they had been the creatures of the sunshine.

His thoughts were becoming gloomy, when suddenly he heard the key turn in the lock, and then a light knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried; and the next moment it was opened. But Algernon Grey could scarcely believe his eyes; for in the dim light he saw a woman's form and garments; and heart, more than sight, told him who it was.

Starting up with a quick and joyful movement, he advanced to meet her; but Agnes only entered a few steps, and that with an air of timid hesitation.

"My uncle has sent me to you," she said, giving him her hand, as he came near; "and I am very glad indeed to have any means of showing my gratitude for all that you have done for me. It is but little that I can do, but still a walk in the quiet evening air will refresh and calm you; and I trust," she added, laying the tips of her small taper fingers on his arm, "that it may tend to soothe the indignation which, I am sure, you must feel at the treatment you have received."

"Indeed, dear lady," answered Algernon Grey, "I feel none."

"Then I feel it for you," answered Agnes, warmly; "I should feel more, indeed, did I not know that it is all weakness, rather than injustice. They fear that fierce old man and his rash son, otherwise this would not have taken place; and for that reason it is that I am obliged to take this unfit hour to give you whatever little liberty I can;—but you must promise me," she added, in a timid and imploring tone, "to return when it is time. My uncle told me to exact such an engagement. He could not come himself; for he has been all the evening with the Elector on business of importance, planning new defences to the place, and so he made me your gaoler—sad, yet pleasant task. But you will return, will you not?"

Algernon Grey took her hand again and pressed it in his own. "Whenever you wish it," he replied.

"Nay, not when I wish it," answered Agnes; "that would never be; for, could my wishes avail aught, you would not be here at all."

"Well, then, when you ask me," said the young gentleman.

"No, not so either," she replied; "I should never have the heart to ask you. Even in my youngest and most thoughtless days, I could not make a prisoner of a poor bird. How much less, then, of one who has saved my life. I value freedom too much to do so. It must be for you to decide. You shall return when it is right, and you shall be the judge."

"I will, then," answered Algernon Grey; "and now let us forth, for I confess I feel the air of imprisonment very heavy; and the lock of yonder door, which my fair turnkey has left unguardedly open, is a chain upon my spirits."

"No, not unguardedly," replied Agnes; "I was quite sure that, for my sake, you would not take a step beyond without permission, when I came to see you. Oh, I know you right well, noble sir. Your conduct to me last night was a whole history; I need no farther insight."

"Indeed," said Algernon Grey, taking his hat from the table as she moved a step or two towards the door; "if you know my history, it is a somewhat strange one; but still I think you read it right if you judge that in nothing I would abuse your trust."

"I am sure of it," she said, leading the way into the ante-room.

Two guards were seated there on duty; but the lady's presence seemed a passport; and they made no opposition to the prisoner's exit, only rising as he and Agnes passed.

The moment that the top of the stairs was reached, however, a change seemed to come over the fair girl's demeanour. So long as she had been in the apartments of the prisoner, a timid sort of hesitation seemed to hang about her, restraining her words and even her movements; but the instant she had passed the door of his prison, her heart and spirit seemed unchained again.

"Not down there, not down there," she cried; "you are ignorant of the castle and its manifold turnings and windings. I will lead you through it, and try to cheer you by the way; here, turn to the left;" and taking her way along a narrow passage, through the tall windows of which streamed a pale and uncertain light, she walked on, till a short staircase

of five or six steps led them down to a broad balcony, running along the face of the western part of the building, and looking down into the court. Here she paused for a moment, and Algernon Grey took his place by her side, gazing thoughtfully at the number of servants and officers who were still crossing and re-crossing the open space below, like so many ants on their busy labours.

"This castle and the sights that it presents," said Agnes, after a moment's meditation, "always make me more or less thoughtful at every moment when one has time for thought. There, on the right, is what they call the Rupert's building, the oldest part of the castle, it is said; and I know not why, but I cannot look at its ornamented windows, and rich arches, without thinking of all the changes that have taken place in this small spot since it was raised. See, how busily they go along, and how gaily, too, as if there had never been any others before or would come others after."

"And they are right," answered Algernon Grey. "Why should men lose the happiness of the moment by thinking of its short duration? A certain portion of life only is given to each human being; and so to enjoy that portion that our acts shall stain no part with regret, nor lay up store of vengeance against us, is, methinks, the wisest policy, as well as the truest religion."

"And do you think so, too?" exclaimed Agnes, turning suddenly towards him with a bright smile; "I am glad of it; for sometimes I am inclined, when I have heard a grave discourse of worldly vanities and mortal pleasures, to think myself no better than a butterfly or a bird, because I am so happy in my little day of sunshine. We have men here, who speak so hardly of the brevity of mortal existence, that I cannot but think that they feel dissatisfied so small a portion is allowed them."

"When I hear such men," answered Algernon Grey, "and there are many of them all over the world, they leave a very different impression on my mind from that which they expect to produce. They can have very little confidence in an everlasting future, who dwell so mournfully over the shortness of the present. To enjoy God's blessings, and, from the heart, to thank Him for all, is to honour Him by the best sacrifice we can offer—at least, so it seems to me; and we may be right sure that, when we can thank Him from the heart, we have not enjoyed amiss."

"I think so too," answered Agnes; "at all events, I know one thing, that though I would strive to bear all misfortunes without repining, yet, when I am happy, I ever feel the most grateful sense at the goodness and mercy of God. But let us come on; and mark that building there, that one with the stony escutcheon on the front; you can scarcely see it, I think, in this dim light; but some day I will tell you a story about it. It is too sad a one for to-night. Let us pass down here; and then, turning to the left again, I will lead you through the chapel."

As the way was now broader than before, Algernon Grey drew his fair companion's arm through his own, turning as she directed him; and, but for that light touch and that sweet companionship, his walk might have been gloomy enough; for the light faded rapidly as they went on. The long dim passage seemed damp and chilly, even in that summer evening. The moon had not yet risen, but there was sufficient light in the sky to throw deeper shadows from the columns of masonry upon the faint grey gleam that still illuminated the halls and corridors in the neighbourhood of the front casements. Agnes, however, was near him. Her hand rested gently on his arm; her eyes were turned to his from time to time, as if seeking the expression which gave point to his words. And Algernon Grey was happy; for he felt as if the dreams he had been indulging were realized; and yet he knew at his heart, that the realization was little better than a dream likewise. But he would not give way to sad thoughts; for he remembered that he should have time for plenty of them in his captivity; and the new philosophy, to which he had given way, taught him to enjoy.

"Shall we see our way across the chapel?" said Agnes, at length, pushing open a small door at the end of a long small passage after descending a few steps, and looking into a wide and splendid aisle beyond.

"Oh yes," cried Algernon Grey, "there is plenty of light;" and, taking a step forward, he led her in. The air was very dim; but yet he could see that, except the architectural decorations, the building was destitute of all ornament.

There is something, however, in the very atmosphere of a place destined for the purposes of prayer, which brings a feeling of awe and solemn meditation upon one. Here the petitions of thousands have ascended day after day to the throne of grace. Here the Almighty has promised to be present "in the midst of the two or three who seek Him faithfully;" here have been all the struggles that bare themselves before the Almighty eye; here the consolation and the hope derived from the pure source of Almighty beneficence. A crowd of grand associations, of mercies sought and benefits received, rush upon the mind and fill it with devotion.

Algernon Grey felt it strongly then, as, with that fair being by his side, whom he had protected, comforted, saved—whom he loved, in spite of reason, in spite of resolution, in spite of every effort,—he walked slowly up the nave, till he stood with her before the altar.

Then what thoughts were they that came thick upon his mind? What memories, what visions? dark and bright mingling together, black as night and brilliant as the dawn? Whatever were the emotions in Agnes's heart, her hand slowly fell from his arm, and he suffered it to drop. How or why, he knew not; but by an impulse, gentle, yet irresistible, he took it in his; and there they stood for a moment before that altar, hand in hand. He felt his fingers clasping upon hers more tightly; and, afraid of himself, of his own heart, of his own fate, he drew her arm once more through his and led her to an open door, through which a faint gleam was streaming, with a deep, heavy sigh.

There was a lamp in the passage beyond; and, by its light, they passed through the north-

ern mass of the building, and mounted the steps to the Altan. The stars were shining forth in exceeding splendour; each bright spot in Charles's wane twinkling like a living diamond in the deep blue sky; and the small pole-star glistening high above, fixed and immovable, like a constant mind, while the others whirled round it in never-ceasing change.

"Ay, this feels like freedom, indeed," said Algernon Grey. "I know not how it is, dear lady, but the sensation of liberty is never so strong upon me, as in one of these bright clear nights. During the day there is a sort of oppressive bondage in the world, and the world's thoughts and doings in the busy multitudes that float about, in the very hum of tongues, and the sight of moving masses of mankind, that seems to cramp and confine the spirit within us. But here, with that profound, unlimited vault above, the wide air all around, and the far-off stars twinkling at immeasurable distances through space, the heart has room to beat; and the soul, upon the wings of thought, wanders unfettered through the infinite creation."

"I love not crowds either," answered Agnes; "and yet it is pleasant to me that I have my fellow-creatures near—perhaps it is a woman's feeling, springing from her weakness; but still I would rather not be free, if I were to be all alone on earth. Not that I do not often love solitude, and to be free from the multitude; but still, a wild ramble over a mountain top, or a gallop over a wide open moor, is enough for my small range; and, like the lark, after I have taken my flight and sung my song, I am ever ready to fold my wings and sink to earth again."

The image pleased her companion; he thought it very like her; and in such conversation passed well nigh an hour, till the round edge of the yellow moon was seen rising above the fringed forest, and spreading new lustre over the sky.

"Here comes our fair and bountiful companion of last night," said Algernon Grey; "I will see her rise into the sky before I go; but then, to show how moderate and discreet I am, and encourage you to give me some more hours of liberty hereafter, I will tell my fair gaoler, that I am ready to return to my prison."

"Strange," said Agnes, looking up in his face with a smile, and leaning a little more heavily upon his arm, "strange that it is I who must ask the prisoner to remain at large for a while; but you know not that you have a visit this night to make to one, who will thank you for Agnes Herbert's sake, for all you did last night."

"Your uncle?" asked Algernon Grey.

"No," replied Agnes; "it is to a lady, a kind and noble one, the Electress Louisa; she is anxious to see you, and bade me bring you to her whenever I hear her bell ring. It will not be long first; there she sits in that room, where the lights are shining through the open windows; and when she thinks that the bustle of the day is fully over in the castle, she will give us notice."

"She loves you much, I doubt not," answered Algernon Grey. "'Tis strange to find here one of my own fair countrywomen, domiciled in a different land, and so linked with a foreign race. There can be no relationship, surely, between you and this Palatine house?"

"The Electress calls me cousin," answered Agnes with a smile, at the half-put question; "but it is not so; I am not her cousin. Mine is a strange history, my noble deliverer; but, doubtless, every one's is strange, if we knew it all—yours, perhaps, as well as mine."

"Most strange," answered Algernon Grey; "and if we meet often, I must tell it to you—yes, I will," he repeated in a low murmur, as if speaking to himself; but then added, "not now, not now, I cannot tell it now."

"Whatever it is," said Agnes, "I am sure it will show naught but honour and high deeds on your part—I have had proofs of it; and as you, like other men, have mingled in the world, your story will be, doubtless, one of action; while mine is more the history of my race than of myself, for I have done naught and suffered little in this life; spoiled by kind friends; supported, protected, and left to follow my own will—often, perhaps, a wayward one; reverses, as yet, I have not known; no strong emotions, either of grief or joy, have visited my breast; and the part of life already gone has lapsed away like a morning dream in pleasant but faint images, scarce worthy the remembrance. You shall tell me your history, if you will; but I cannot promise yet to be as sincere, mine being, as I have said, the history of others rather than my own."

"I will tell mine, nevertheless," answered Algernon Grey. "It were better that one, at least, should know it."

As he spoke, they heard a bell ring; and Agnes exclaimed, "That is the signal of the Electress, now come with me;" and, leading the way into the castle again, she ascended a long spiral staircase in one of the small towers, and then, proceeding along a well lighted corridor, she passed the top of a flight of steps, exactly opposite to a large door surmounted with a gilt coronet, and entered a small room on the right, where, to the right again, was seen another door apparently leading into the chamber, one entrance of which they had already passed. Here Agnes paused and knocked; and a sweet voice from within instantly answered, "Come in, dear child." The lady then opened the door, and, beckoning to Algernon Grey to follow, advanced into the room, which I have already described as the scene of Agnes's interview with the Electress Dowager in the morning.

With a calm and stately step, and his fine thoughtful eyes bent forward on the face of the Electress, Algernon Grey came after his fair conductress at the distance of a few steps. Louisa Juliana gazed at him steadily for an instant, and then bent her head with a dignified air, as Agnes presented him to her.

"Be seated, sir," she said, pointing to a chair near; "and you, my sweet cousin, come hither beside me; here is your accustomed place."

Algernon Grey took the seat she assigned him; and, leaning his arm with easy grace over the back, he turned partly towards the Electress, whilst she proceeded to say, "I have first sir, to thank you for your gallant, I might almost call it, heroic conduct last night, in saving the life of my sweet cousin here, who is as dear to me as if she were my child. Accept them, therefore, I beg, and believe me, it is with pain I find my son has thought himself called upon

to deprive you of your liberty for a less fortunate event."

"I merit no thanks, your Highness," answered Algernon Grey; "I have but done that which any man of good breeding, not a coward, would do in similar circumstances; nor can I even claim the lady's gratitude; for when I went to give her aid, I really knew not who she was. I will not deny, indeed, that the pleasure of the act was more than doubled, when I found who was the object of it; but surely, a thing which affords such great satisfaction to the giver, deserves no thanks from the receiver. 'Tis done for his own pleasure; and his own pleasure be his reward."

"It would be a harsh doctrine on any other lips but yours," replied the Electress Dowager, while Agnes shook her head with a smile; "nor can I admit," continued Louisa Juliana, "that every man of good breeding, not a coward, would do the same. I fear much, my noble young friend, that, pick all the world, you would not find ten such. We have a sad proof of it—you were the only one who went to her rescue."

"I was more near than any one," answered Algernon Grey; "so, still, that is no title, lady; however, I am well pleased it has been as it is."

"The men who do best service," answered the Electress, "are always those who require least thanks. I have found it so through life. But now I have other things to speak of."

Agnes rose as if she would have withdrawn; but the Electress stopped her, saying, "Stay, stay, my child; you shall be of our counsel; I know that I can trust you."

Agnes reseated herself in silence, but looked somewhat anxiously to the face of Algernon Grey, with feelings upon which we must pause for a moment. She was a very young diplomatist. She had not learned the art of that craft, as it was practised in those days—I trust less in the present—and she was not aware, that to deceive a friend or benefactor, to lead one who has aided and assisted us, into a dangerous and difficult position, is a stroke of skill, and not a mark of baseness. A sudden doubt came over her, lest the questions which the Electress was about to put—lest even the visit to her apartments might be painful and unpleasant to him who had ventured life to save her; and, though she saw not how she could have escaped from such a task, she was very sorry that she had undertaken it. After one brief glance then, she withdrew her eyes, and remained gazing at some objects on the table, till the voice of the Electress, speaking after a somewhat long pause, roused her, and she listened.

"You have come from England, sir, very lately, I think," said Louisa Juliana, fixing her eyes upon Algernon Grey.

"Not so, your Highness," replied the young gentleman; "I have been absent from my native land, now, for several years, frequenting the various courts of Europe, and studying the manners of other nations. On my return I received letters at Genoa, which made me resolve to remain some time longer out of England; but I have not seen aught of it for nearly five years."

"Methinks you are very young," said the Electress, "to be such a traveller; doubtless you have forgotten all about the court of England."

"Oh, no," replied Algernon Grey; "I may be older than I seem; but certainly was not young enough when I departed, to forget aught that was worth remembering."

"'Tis a strange court," continued Louisa Juliana; "and yet, to say truth, all courts are strange. Do you know the king?"

The question was somewhat abrupt; but the young Englishman replied immediately: "Oh, yes, I know him well, without being one of the menials, or the favourites of the court."

"And, doubtless, have been trusted by him!" rejoined the Electress, in a sort of catechising tone—"he is a wise and witty monarch."

"I know not any mark of trust that he has ever given me," replied Algernon Grey; "and his courtiers give him right good cause to be witty as well as to be vain. I have always remarked, that where there is much of this lip-service there is little real loyalty, and that downfals are preceded by the most servile adulation of power. I trust it may not be so in our day."

"You doubt it," replied the Electress; "and it may be so; for I always doubt it, too. This court is full of flatterers as well as yours. They would persuade my son that he is a god, as they persuade yours that he is a Solomon. Fortunately, fate holds out no offer to King James of another crown; and even if it did, he would never stretch forth a hand to reach it. Here we are in a different position. The diadem of Bohemia, which beyond all doubt will be offered to the Elector in a few days, will find, I fear, a more ambitious candidate, and one who may not calculate so well the means to the end."

Algernon Grey was silent; for he felt that the subject was a difficult one to speak upon; but, after waiting for a few moments, the Electress added: "What say you, is it not so?"

"Really, your Highness, I cannot answer," replied her visitor; "I have never spoken with the Elector on the subject—I have only seen him once."

Louisa Juliana gazed at him steadfastly, and then said, with a smile: "Come, come, Master Grey, let us be candid with each other. Thus stands the case. The Elector is wealthy, powerful in his own dominions, doubtless a wise and warlike Prince, but at the same time to grasp a crown requires a ruthlessness which he does not possess. What is the Palatinate pitted against the Empire? What can give even the seeming of success to such a struggle, except potent and immediate foreign aid.—Will your king give it, Master Grey?"

"Really, your Highness, I cannot tell," answered Algernon, a good deal surprised at the lady's tone.

"Methinks not," continued Louisa Juliana. "He is a wise and most pacific king; wasting in subtleties those powers of mind, and in pageantry and revelling those vast material resources, which are most needful to keep a turbulent and energetic people under even wholesome rule, which, wisely employed, would be successful, but which, thus foolishly squandered, will leave a debt that naught but the best blood in the land can wipe out.—Forgive me, Master Grey, that I thus speak of your sovereign; but see, what does he do now in my

son's case? What energy, what activity does he display in behalf of his own child?

"But, small, I fear, madam," answered Algernon Grey; "but, perhaps, if he see danger menace, he may do more.—However, I know so little of the court of England, that I have no right to form a judgment."

Louisa Juliana shook her head: "You are a diplomatist," she said; "and for so young a one, a wise one; for I have heard that the chief skill of that intricate art consists in three negatives: 'Not to know more than enough; not to say more than enough; and not to see more than enough.'"

"Indeed, your Highness does me wrong," replied the young Englishman; "I belong to no such base craft; for I cannot hold the task of deceiving to be aught than dishonourable, the task of concealing aught but pitiful. I am no diplomatist, I can assure you; not even of that better kind, who, like the great Duke of Sully, make it their boast to frustrate dishonest craft by wise honesty."

"Then you are greatly mistaken here," replied the Electress Dowager; "for every one thinks you have been sent over by King James to see how the land lies, and give advice or promise of assistance accordingly."

Algernon Grey laughed: "Your Highness will pardon me," he said; "but I beseech you to believe me, when I tell you, that, a mere boy when I quitted the court of England, I am recollected there by friends and enemies, kings and statesmen, but as a mere boy still."

"Hush!" cried the Electress, raising her hand; "some one knocks. See who it is, my Agnes. I thought we should be free from interruption."

Agnes Herbert ran lightly to the great doors, opened them partly, and, after speaking a few words to some one without, closed them and returned, saying in a low voice; "The Elector, madam, with the counsellor Camerarius, is coming up, and has sent forward a page to say he wishes to confer with you."

"He must not be found here," cried the Electress, looking at Algernon Grey; "quick, take him into my dressing-room; then, when you hear that they are all arrived, lead him down by the great staircase and away out upon the Altan. — Quick, Agnes, quick! — Adieu, Master Grey; we will talk farther another night."

With a sign to him whom we now may well call her lover, Agnes ran to the small door to the left of the Electress, exactly opposite to that by which they had entered, and threw it open. All was dark beyond; but Algernon Grey, though he was not fond of such secrecy, followed the fair girl with an inclination to the Electress Dowager; and, drawing the door gently to behind them, Alice took his hand, saying: "I will guide you; but we must open this other door a little to know when they pass;" and, advancing a step or two, she opened a chink of a door, which seemed to lead out upon the great corridor at the top of the stairs.

In a moment or two after, they heard footsteps and a voice speaking, which Algernon Grey recollected well as that of the Elector. They heard the great doors thrown open and closed again; and then the young Englishman whispered:—"We can go now, I think."

"Hush!" said Agnes; "there is some one going down the steps." The next instant a round, fat, but somewhat cracked voice was heard to exclaim:—"So you have caged the birds, Joachim—now let us wait here and watch till they take flight again; and I will instruct thee in the science of courts."

"More likely to instruct one in the science of pottle pots and great tuns," answered a younger voice.

"It is the fool and the page," said Agnes, "waiting on the landing five or six steps down. How shall we get out?"

"Cannot we go by the staircase which led us hither?" rejoined Algernon Grey.

"We must cross the top of the great staircase," answered Agnes; "and they can see up to the very door. We had better wait where we are—hark! they are speaking in the other room; we must keep as still as death."

Algernon Grey made no reply, but remained standing close beside her; and in the silence they preserved, a great part of the double conversation that went on, both in the chamber of the Electress Dowager, and on the landing of the stairs was distinctly audible to the ears of the young pair. A part, indeed, was lost, or conveyed very little meaning; but what was heard, for some time, made a strange medley of ceremonious courtesy and broad vulgarity, questions of policy and absurd jest. Sometimes this strange cross reading read epigrammatically, sometimes gave the most strange countersense; and it was difficult to ascertain at all times whence the voices proceeded, so as to know whether the reply was addressed to the sentence just gone before, or the one that preceded and had been lost.

"I know right well, counsellor Camerarius, what are your opinions, and on what they are founded," were the first words audible. But immediately a merry but coarse voice said:—"Eleven bottles of sack a day, a gold chain and a fool's cap, are no things to be lightly respected, Master Joachim."

"But hear me, your Highness," said another voice, "you, I know, are always amenable to reason, and you must not prejudge me, nor suppose that I am biassed by ordinary motives."

"If what fool a thinks were to guide men of reason," said another tongue; "a fool's cap and bells would be as good as the crown of Bohemia."

"We must discuss this question, dearest mother, without passion or prejudice," said the voice of the Elector; "great interests are at stake, your son's, the Protestant religion, the liberty of Germany."

"The great tun of Heidelberg brimful of wine," exclaimed the juicy tongue of the jester, "would not drown the gabbling of a page; he would still shout from the bottom of the vat and make empty bubbles on the top, as full of noise as a petard."

"Nothing more is wanting to shatter the whole constitution of this empire," Camerarius was heard to say, "than disunion amongst the Protestant princes, the fall of that kingdom which has first raised the voice against tyranny, oppression, and superstition, and the rejection

of a proffered crown by the only sovereign prince who is qualified to guide the march of events by power, talent, and influence."

"Give me reason and a good supper," said the page.

"But have you an offer thereof?" asked the Electress.

"If I had the rule, you should have none," said the jester, "but a good whipping and a book to read."

"The sceptre of Bohemia."

"A fig for your bauble."

"A coxcomb against a page's feather."

"At the feet of your Highness's son, with all the advantages, which—"

"The König's-stool and the Heiligberg upon your head for a mad ape; you have untrussed my jerkin and let my fat out."

"No motives of personal ambition, no hope or expectation of renown, nay, not even the voice of an oppressed people would induce me, dearest mother."

"Though the gods and goddesses were to come down upon earth to wash themselves in the fountains of the gardens, you would still be an ass, and drink deep to the increase of your carcass, and the perdition of your soul."

"Notwithstanding which the voice of the people of Bohemia is not to go for nothing; and, when added to that, is the maintenance of the Protestant religion in merely its just rights and liberties."

"A horse and varlet with legs like a blacksmith's tongs; feet like the ace of diamonds, and shoulders vastly too intimate with his ears."

"Those who could advise the prince to give a decided refusal to such an appeal—"

But here Algernon Grey called off the attention of his fair companion from the curious conversation which they overheard, by gently touching her hand and saying, "Methinks, we must listen to this no longer, sweet lady."

"How can we avoid it?" answered Agnes in a whisper. "To close either of the doors now, would be worse than to risk and go boldly down the stairs."

"Then let us go boldly," answered Algernon Grey. "It were better to risk anything personally, methinks, than to overhear what is evidently not intended for our ears."

"You are right," said Agnes, "you are right—I only feared—but no matter for personal fears; they shall not stop me from doing what I ought. Let us come, then;" and advancing a step, she opened the door upon the corridor and went out.

There was a large lamp suspended opposite to the door of the Electress Dowager, casting a full light upon the stairs. In the corner of the landing leaning with one leg cast over the other, was a fat, short, red-faced man, dressed in the motley garb of the fools of those days; while, opposite to him, lolling against the balustrade, was a lad of some sixteen or seventeen years of age, habited in the splendid costume of the Electoral pages. Advancing straight towards them and descending the stairs with a calm countenance, Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert passed on side by side. The page moved and drew himself up, doffing his bonnet as they went by; but the jester, with the usual license of his calling, remained in his corner unmoved, shutting one eye and fixing the other keen grey orb upon the lady with an inquisitive stare. The moment she and her companion had passed, however, he stuck his tongue into his cheek and winked knowingly to the page, who replied merely by a low laugh.

"What will come of it, Master Joachim?" asked the jester, after a pause.

"Nay, I know not," replied the youth; "love and marriage, I suppose."

"Nay, love won't come," said the jester; "for he is there already; and marriage may come, or may not, as the gods will have it; but if I were pretty Mrs. Agnes Herbert, I would take that long fellow to the buttery, and give him a toast and two or three bottles of Burgundy wine. She is afraid of doing so, for fear of being found out; but, methinks, it would be the seal of matrimony, which Heaven send her speedily; for the walking about in the passages of this old castle is somewhat like to chill the little god, Cupid's brother, who is known to be somewhat aguish."

In the mean while Agnes and Algernon Grey walked on and passed through the lower part of the castle, and upon the Altan again. There she paused with a momentary hesitation; for she felt how sweet a thing liberty must be to her companion, and she could not find it in her heart to say that it was time to return to his prison. Did any personal feelings mingle with her reluctance? Was she unwilling to part with him so soon? Who ever felt a joy that was not grieved to lose it? and Agnes Herbert had been very happy by the side of Algernon Grey.

He saved her the pain of speaking, however, by divining her thoughts ere they were told.

"Methinks, dearest lady," he said, "that it must be time for me to return, and for you to go to other occupations, though your kind heart will not tell me so. Let us on towards my tower, however. My heartfelt thanks are due for the alleviation you have given me, and I would not for the world mingle one pain with the pleasure you must feel in such an act."

"My only pain," replied Agnes, walking on beside him, "is, that you must return at all. The Electress Dowager, I think, may call for me again, or I would say, stay longer."

They were not long ere they reached the foot of the stairs leading up to the place of Algernon's imprisonment; it seemed to him, indeed, marvellously short, and there he stopped to bid her farewell for the night. True, he might have done so as well above; but there the guards tenanted the antichamber, and feelings that he would not own to himself made him unwilling to have witnesses to his parting with her.

"Farewell, dear lady," he said, pressing her hand in his; "if you could tell the relief and pleasure you have afforded the poor prisoner, your heart would, I am sure, rejoice. Nay, I feel that it does, though you cannot know from experience how tedious the hours of captivity are. Thanks—a thousand thanks—for the solace of the free air, rendered trebly bright by your sweet company."

"You have no thanks to give," she answered, leaving her hand in his; "do I not owe you everything? and surely, a few hours from the

life you have saved is but a poor offering for a grateful heart to make. To-morrow night, at the same hour, I know I may promise to come again, and perhaps my uncle will come with me. Till then, I must bid you adieu. Sleep well; and pleasant dreams be yours."

He still held her hand for a moment—he still gazed upon that fair and beaming face by the pale light of the lamp that hung upon the staircase, and sensations he could hardly master rose in his bosom. They frightened him, and, breaking suddenly the spell that held him, he turned and mounted to the chamber, where sat the men on guard. There came another adieu, colder in seeming but not less warm in truth, and, entering, he himself closed the door. He heard her hand laid upon the key; but it did not turn, and the next instant her sweet voice reached his ear, somewhat trembling in tone, as she said to one of the guards—"Here, come and lock it—I cannot."

"Why, it goes as easy as a wheel," answered the man, advancing with a heavy step; and the next moment the door was locked.

Agnes trod her way back with a slow and thoughtful step towards the corridor of the apatriments of the Electress Dowager; but at the foot of the stairs she met her uncle Herbert, and the keen eye of affection soon discovered that from some cause he was agitated, though he endeavored to maintain his usual equable mein.

"What is the matter?" she said, clinging to his arm; "you are disturbed—I see it in your eyes."

"'Tis nothing, my Agnes," he said, "nothing. So you have given your prisoner his little holiday. How did he comport himself?"

"He enjoyed it much," answered Agnes; "in his calm and serious manner, he showed as much pleasure as I hoped he would feel."

"Ay, but to you, my child," asked Herbert, "was there any difference this night?"

"Exactly the same as ever," replied the beautiful girl with a gay smile; "banish all fears and doubts. Indeed, indeed, you may. I thought they were gone for ever; for I know that such things linger not in your heart; and when once you trust, you trust implicitly. You may trust here—on him—on me; for not one word has ever passed our lips that the whole world might not listen to."

"'Tis well!" said her uncle, thoughtfully, "'tis well—I do trust."

"Nay, but all is not well, I am sure," rejoined Agnes; "something has troubled you."

"Nothing but the words of a fool," answered Herbert; "and I am a fool for being troubled by them. Yet something must be done to set this matter right. Listen, dear one; I met just now, Master ——, the Elector's droll. How is it that men of common sense can find delight in the malicious drivelling of a lackwitted knave like that! He spoke with mockery of my Agnes—said he had seen her taking love's walk, which is a crooked one, forth from the bedchamber next the dowager Electress's hall, down to the pleasure gardens, and bade me look well to my pretty bird, as he called you. What more he said, I need not repeat. One cannot strike an idiot, or I had felled him."

Agnes laughed *gaily*. "*Nay, nay*," she said, "he has but proved himself more fool than ever!"

"Laugh not, Agnes, in your young innocence," answered Herbert; "no woman's name must be lightly spotted. You know not, that the slightest foul mark upon a pure reputation remains for ever, breeding doubts and suspicions impossible to be removed. I'll tell you what, my child, I must have done; for it shall never be said, that with my will you ever did aught you were ashamed to acknowledge—you shall go to the Electress Dowager, and tell her the story; you shall petition for leave to speak the exact truth of how and why you were seen coming from that room with the prisoner. You will obtain it, I doubt not; but if she should refuse, I must speak to her myself; for this may rest a stain upon you, my child; and it must not be. So well do I know you, Agnes, that I say boldly and fearlessly, do anything you will, provided it be that which you can explain to the whole world, when it becomes necessary. But, at the same time, I warn you, dear one, never do aught that you cannot explain; for diplomacy is not a woman's trade; and, if it be dangerous in the hands of a man, it is fatal in those of a woman."

"I will go to the Electress, at once," answered Agnes; "for although, so far as I am personally concerned, I would scoff at all idle rumours, yet, were they to give you pain, it would be no matter to be scoffed at."

"Go, Agnes, go," rejoined Herbert. "It is better, both for you and for me; when you have once the power of explaining all, I care not for aught else. Idle rumours affect me not, Agnes; and fools may talk and babble as they please; but doubtful circumstances, unaccounted for, must not affect you, my child."

"I go, then," replied Agnes; and, mounting the stairs, she hurried to the apartments of the Electress Dowager.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a lamp lighted in the chamber, to which Algernon Grey returned. He found the room neatly ordered, as if care and attention had been bestowed upon it; and, in a few minutes after his return, a servant entered, bearing materials for a meal, such as prisoners seldom taste. The man set it down and retired in silence; but Algernon Grey left the supper untouched. For nearly a quarter of an hour he strode up and down the room in deep thought; and then, breaking off suddenly, he said, "I will go to bed and sleep. What need of troubling my mind with things that may never occur? Am I to cast away every enjoyment of this mortal life, for fear of their remote consequences? No, I will guard my heart firmly; I will rule my conduct strictly; but I will not debar myself of my sole solace, lest it should become too sweet. I will go and sleep, and these gloomy visions will take their flight before the morning."

Accordingly, proceeding into the other room, he undressed and went to bed. Neither did sleep refuse to visit his eyelids; for there are few things more wearing and wearisome than the dull lapse of solitary hours to an active and

energetic mind: but his slumber was not calm; it was not of that soft and balmy kind that visits the pillow of careless childhood; nor was it chequered with those light gay dreams which hover over the bed of hopeful youth. Visions he had many; but they were all more or less dark, all more or less troubled; and the same forms and features were in each. Two female figures were ever present, and one was Agnes Herbert. But, as I have already touched this theme, I will not pause here to enter into the details of all that imagination and memory suggested to the sleeping brain. Suffice it, that he slept without repose; and that agitated feelings, running masterless in unreasoning slumber, wore both body and mind, even during the hours of rest.

He woke on the following morning languid and unrefreshed; and, if he lay down somewhat gloomy in his thoughts, the next morning found him sadder and less tranquil still.

The heavy hours rolled slowly on, and nothing occurred throughout the morning to break the dull monotony of his imprisonment. The servant brought in the meals, arranged the rooms, and showed towards him every sort of civility and attention. But still it was not there that Algernon Grey could find companionship; and but few words passed, the young gentleman still speaking first, and receiving but brief and insignificant answers in return. The sight even of a human face, it is true, was pleasant to him; but yet it seemed each time that the man came and went as if his momentary presence and quick departure but added to his heaviness of heart.

He longed for somebody with whom he could converse—any one, it mattered not who; and he looked eagerly for his cousin's promised visit; but that day William Lovet came not. It is true his conversation had something more irritating in it than pleasant to the ears of Algernon Grey; but yet there was something in companionship, something in old associations and mutual habits of thought which he fancied would be a relief; and he felt disappointment as the moments flew, and he saw him not.

Perhaps there might be a desire to fly from other ideas, to rid his mind of reflection upon matters on which he did not wish it to rest; but as evening came on, and with it that change of light which, without diminishing the lustre of day, softens and saddens it, reflection would have way; and Agnes Herbert was again the theme of his thoughts, resolution contending with affection, and an honourable spirit with a warm and ardent heart. He asked himself, "What am I feeling? What am I doing?" And to both, though seemingly very simple questions, he found it difficult to reply. The difficulty existed in the subtlety of man's heart, for skilful, indeed, must he be, and well experienced in the ways of that dark and intricate labyrinth, who can find the path to the arcana at once. And yet he remembered his sensations towards Agnes when he had stood with her in the chamber adjoining that of the Electress; when her hand touched his; when, bending down his head to hear her whispered words, he felt her warm fragrant breath fan his cheek like that of the spring wind. Could he not have thrown his arms around her, and clasped her to his beating breast, and pressed warm kisses on those sweet lips, and asked her to be his—his for ever! Could he not at that moment have poured forth, as from a gushing fountain, the full tide of first and passionate love, bearing all before it on its fierce and eager course! He felt that he could; he felt that he had escaped a great peril; and he asked himself: "Should he risk the same again? Should he madly run into the same strong and terrible temptation! If he did, was it not improbable that any circumstances would arise anew to strengthen and support him; that any means of escape, that any happy accident would present itself to enable or lead him to fly from the immediate danger!"

"It is madness to put it to the hazard," he thought. "No, I will not go!—I will frame some excuse, not to pain her kind and gentle heart; and, even if I do show her a want of courtesy, it is better than to show a want of honour."

He paused and pondered long. He thought of what he should do, and what he should say; he considered how he might best act so as to avoid the perilous society, without wounding one whose sole wish was to give him pleasure. Vain thought! Idle considerations! as they always are with man. We raise an imaginary scaffold, and then build upon it. Comes firm reality and knocks it down beneath our feet; the whole structure falls; and happy is it if our best hopes and brightest happiness are not crushed in the ruins. The last two hours—they were hours of meditation—had passed rapidly, far more so than he had imagined. He had not heard the sound of the clock; he had not marked the rapid decline of the sun and the steady march of night. He saw, indeed, or rather, he felt, that darkness spread through the chamber in which he sat; but he had rung for no lights, and he changed not his position. He remained fixed with his eyes bent upon the ground, his arm resting on the back of the chair, and the left hand playing with his empty swordbelt, not raising a look even towards the window, where the glowing heaven shone in radiant with the last smile of day.

In about a quarter of an hour after the key was turned in the lock, and some one knocked lightly at the door. He knew that it was Agnes's hand; he felt sure of it before he saw her; and, advancing quickly, he gave her admission, saying, in a mingled tone of joy and sadness: "Welcome, welcome, dear lady, you are punctual to your hour."

"Not quite," answered Agnes, "but I was detained a little. Your hour's freedom shall not be abridged, however: for we can stay out the longer—Now, will you come!"

There was a struggle in Algernon Grey's heart; his lips would scarcely utter the words he had resolved on; and, perhaps, had he not seen, as they stood together at the door, that the antichamber was for the moment vacant, the restraint, which the presence of others always more or less imposes, would at once have turned the balance against resolution. As it was, however, after a pause he replied: "Nay, dear lady, you will think me churlish

and morose, I fear, when I say it is better for me not to go; and, with deep gratitude and heart-felt thanks, decline your kindness."

"But why!" exclaimed Agnes, gazing on him with surprise; "surely, I should think it would be a relief."

"And so it is," he answered, "a sweet and joyful one; but that momentary relief, dear lady, makes me but feel the bitterness of imprisonment more painfully when it is over. Believe me, it is better I should stay."

His words, as so frequently happens with words which do not fully express all the speaker thinks, had quite the contrary effect to that which he intended. They made Agnes Herbert but the more eager to comfort and to sooth him, to lighten his hours of solitude, to banish the dark thoughts that seemed to oppress him; and she answered: "Nay, come! Do not give way to such gloomy fancies. I will take no denial. You surely cannot refuse a lady, when she asks your company in a walk through the free air. I fear you hold my gratitude as little worth; but this is the only means I have of showing it. I would willingly come and sit with you and cheer you through the day, if my uncle would come, too; but the Elector has besought him to hurry forward the new defences of the castle and the town; and every instant of his time is employed. Besides, you must come to-night; for I have got news for you of various kinds; and I cannot stay here to tell them."

Algernon Grey smiled faintly; but his resolution gave way; and, taking Agnes's hand, he pressed his lips upon it, answering: "You are very kind—too kind; but I must not make you think me ungrateful for such kindness; therefore I come." At the same moment the guard re-entered the anti-chamber and Algernon Grey followed the lady through it and descended the stairs with her.

Grown somewhat bolder by custom, the lady led him at once across the great court, and thence into the gardens of the castle. "Now," she said, with a gay laugh, "if you had the will to be refractory, who could stop you from breaking prison? Not this weak hand, I fear."

"But these gardens are all walled round," answered Algernon Grey, "and hemmed in with the fences and outworks. Methinks it would be no easy task to makes one's escape hence."

"As easy as a sail upon a lake with a light wind and a summer sky," answered Agnes gaily. "The ground is all pierced over which we tread, with subterranean passages leading hither and thither, some to the mountain, some down into the town. Did you not see those two obelisks just now with two half open doors by the side? Well, they lead straight into the city; and the first night, when I was wandering with you through these gardens, you must have remarked a man appeared so suddenly, he startled me. He was some one belonging to the castle, who had come up by the vaults. But I must not tell you all these secrets, lest, finding so many doors of his cage open, the captive bird should take wing and fly away."

She spoke gaily and lightly; and Algernon Grey replied, "No fear, no fear, dear lady; you have a stronger hold upon the poor bird than wires or bars—the chain of honour. No gentleman could so misuse your trust. But you seem yourself to be well acquainted with all these secret ways; though, doubtless, they are not much trod by lady's feet."

"Oh, I have them all in my little head," she answered, "as if upon a map. My uncle has shown them to me all; for he has a strange sort of superstition, that some time or another the knowledge may be needful to me. I know not what he fears or fancies, but so it is; for gloomy thoughts frequently possess him, and I do not wonder at it. But now I will tell you my news, and first a silly story about myself; for women, they say, always like to talk about themselves before all things. Do you know our adventure last night alarmed my uncle for his poor child's reputation!"

"How so!" exclaimed Algernon, with a start and feeling of more apprehension than the lady's words might seem likely to produce; "what adventure, sweet lady!"

"Oh, our adventure in escaping from the apartments of the Electress Dowager," Agnes replied; "do you not remember passing the fool upon the stairs, and the page! Well, they saw us come forth from the room on the left; and that fool is as malicious and insolent as he is drunken. He met my uncle a few minutes after; he thought fit to jest with my poor name. But I only laughed when I was told; for, methinks, when the breast is clear and the heart quiet, one may well treat a fool's ribaldry with scorn. But my uncle took it up more seriously, and insisted I should ask permission of the Princess to tell the whole, in case of need. I related to her all that had happened to us, how we had overheard in the neighbouring chamber part of her conversation with her son, and how we had determined to confront the fool and the page upon the stairs rather than listen to more. She said we had done well, and gave the permission I asked for."

"Did it end there," asked Algernon Grey, "or has this knave been busy spreading his scandal!"

"Oh, yes," answered Agnes, "he has; and perhaps it is lucky I obtained leave to speak; for early this morning the Elector sent for me, and with a grave brow, told me I had been seen the night before leading the English prisoner down from his mother's lodging. I answered simply enough, 'I know I was, your Highness. The fool and the page both saw me.' He then asked me what it meant; and I replied, that I had her Highness's permission to tell him, if he asked, that it was by her commands that I had brought you thither, and led you away again."

"What more, what more!" said Algernon Grey, as the lady paused.

"Why, this intelligence seemed to throw him into a fit of musing; and, at length, he said, 'So, she has discovered him, too, and his errand;' and then he asked me if I knew who you were; I answered, 'I had been told your name was Algernon Grey;' and thereupon he laughed and shook his head; but inquired no further, saying, 'If it were by his mother's orders, it was well.' Nevertheless, I could see that he thinks you some great man, and that you come here upon some secret mission

of deep moment. So, henceforth, I shall call you 'my lord,' and be vastly ceremonious."

"Nay, nay, not so," answered Algernon Grey, thrown off his guard; "give me none such formal titles, sweet lady; from your lips they would sound very harsh to me."

"Then call me not 'lady' any more," she answered; "none but the servants here do that. I am the child of the castle, and to those who know and love me I am only Agnes."

Algernon Grey felt his heart beat fast; but he had a habit of flying away from such emotions; and after a single moment's pause, he said, "I must clear your mind of one impression, however. The Elector is quite wrong; and so, I fancy, is the Electress Dowager. Because, for an idle whim, I and my cousin have pledged ourselves to each other to go through Europe for a year under false names, they fancy here, I find, that we have some concealed object, and that I, who never meddled yet with the intrigues of courts, am charged with some mighty secret mission. I give you my honour—and by this time, I hope, you know it is to be trusted—that I have no such task to perform; that I have no state secrets of any kind; in short, that I am but a simple English gentleman, travelling hither and thither to while a certain portion of dull time—"

"Which you heartily wish were over," answered Agnes gaily.

"Not so, upon my life," answered Algernon; "although I deeply love my country, yet there are matters therein sooner or later to be brought to issue, which make me long to go on wandering thus, till life and the journey find their close together, and never more to set my foot on British shores. But here come sad thoughts again, and I will not indulge them. You hinted that there was more to be told me. I hope the rest of the tidings is less bitter; for it is painful to me that your great kindness, Agnes, should have brought discomfort upon you or your uncle."

"Oh, to me it is none, and with him it is past; but the rest of my news will, I am sure, be pleasant to you. You have heard of an unfortunate duel that was fought," she said, looking up in his face with a smile which the twilight did not conceal, "between an English gentleman and the Baron of Oberntraut. You have been sorry for the young baron, I am sure, and will be glad to hear that to day he is much better. His wounds, indeed, seem not to be mortal, as was at first thought; and that these terrible faintings, from several of which they fancied he would never revive, proceeded solely from great loss of blood. I heard he was up this afternoon, and seated in a chair."

"This is good news, indeed," aswered Algernon Grey. "Believe me, I did not seek to wound him, and perilled my own safety to avoid it; till, at length, in the half-light—for it was then growing dark—I was obliged to return his attack, seeking to touch him but slightly. He slipped, however, and was thus more sharply hurt. You, too, are pleased if I judge rightly," he added, gazing down upon her with an inquiring look; "for methinks that a part of the young baron's wrath against myself is a sort of retribution for one pleasant evening that I enjoyed so much with you in these same gardens."

"I trust not," said Agnes, eagerly; "I trust not. He should have known better; he should have known that that is all in vain. He is a noble, brave, and upright man, generous, and kind in many things; but still—" and there she paused, as if unwilling to speak farther.

Two or three minutes of silence had passed, and the hearts of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert were, perhaps, both busy with feelings somewhat similar. At length, a wild strain of music rose up from the town below, and they paused on the edge of the great terrace to listen to it.

"A party of young students singing," said the lady. "Do you love music?"

"I must not say better than aught on earth," said Algernon Grey; "but yet, if I were to ask for any sort of consolation in hours of grief and heaviness, I would choose some sweet voice to sing my cares away. I made my cousin send me up an instrument; but I know not how it is I have not had the heart to use it."

"Oh, I will sing for you some time or another," answered Agnes; "I learned from a famous Italian musician who was here, and who said I was no bad scholar."

"It would be, indeed, a great delight," answered Algernon; "but I fear I must not hope for it as a solace of my imprisonment, if your uncle is so busily occupied."

Agnes looked down thoughtfully for a moment, and then laughed. "I do not know," she said; "I do not know; we shall see. I trust your imprisonment will not be long; and you told me once you were going away very soon. I must lose no opportunity of showing my deep thankfulness for what you have done for me. It is little, indeed, that I can offer. Some men have mines of gold and precious stones, and some but a garden of poor flowers; but were I a prince, I would not value less the tribute of the poor man's blossoms, if given with a willing heart, than that of the great vassal's ore. I do hope that you will feel the same, and accept all I can do, though it be but small, as a testimony of what I would do had I greater means."

We need not pursue their conversation farther: for nearly an hour more it went on in the same strain; and if the resolutions of Algernon Grey faltered for a moment now and then—if a tenderer word would fall from his lips—yet still, considering the feelings that were at his heart, he exercised great power over himself. I know not whether it were better or worse for Agnes that he did so; for certainly the calmness of his manner, and the careful tone of his language, aided her in deceiving herself as to that which was in her own breast. She laughed to scorn the thought of love between them. She was grateful, deeply grateful; and if there was aught more in her bosom, she fancied it was but a feeling of compassion for one she thought wronged by unjust imprisonment. She could hear him talk as calmly of his departure, she said to herself, as she could listen to a sermon or a lecture. She could speak of it herself without one emotion. Was this like love? Oh, no. She had a deep friendship for him: well she might have; but that, and gratitude, and compassion, were all. Agnes knew not what she would have felt had she been called

upon to part with him that moment. As it was she went on gaily, like a child treading the verge of a precipice, and gathering flowers upon the edge of destruction. And when the time of his short liberty was at an end, she was sorry for it; for it had been a sweet and pleasant time to her. They parted at the door of his chamber, each with a sigh; and Algernon Grey paced up and down his solitary room; and, as the moon rose solemnly over the hills, he opened his window and gazed forth, as if his thoughts would be more free with the wide expanse of heaven and earth before him. The moment after, he heard the sound of an instrument of music; and turning quickly round to the right he saw the light streaming forth from an open casement, which, as far as he could calculate, was near those of the Electress Dowager. He could not see into the room; but the sweet sounds issued forth upon the night air, as a skilful hand swept the strings; and a moment after, a voice, the sweet, clear, rounded tones of which he knew right well, poured out a flood of melody, rising and falling on the ear like the notes of a nightingale in the spring eventide. The music was not exactly gay; but yet, every now and then, a cheerful tone enlivened the graver strains; and partly from memory—for he had heard the song before—partly from the exceeding clearness with which every word was pronounced, he distinguished each verse as it was sung.

SONG.

The moon is on high, but she's hid by a cloud,
The prospect looks gloomy and drear,
And still through the night may she weep 'neath the shroud;
But daylight is coming, and near.

The heart is bowed down 'neath the cares of the hour,
And the eye may be dimmed by a tear;
But the heart shall rise up in the morn like a flower;
For a brighter day's coming, and near.

We have trusted and hoped, been oppress'd, and have grieved;
But joy will return, never fear;
There's a trust and a hope that is never deceived;
A brighter day's coming, and near.

Each life has its joy, and each life has its pain;
But the tempest still leaves the sky clear;
And for honour and truth, which are never in vain,
A brighter day's coming, and near.

CHAPTER XVII.

Another night passed of agitating thought, with but little sleep and many troublous dreams; and for more than one long hour Algernon Grey remained in deep and intense thought, pondering over the present and the future. I know not how or why—for there are many mysteries in man's nature, which the skill of philosophy, as yet, has not been able to unravel; but certain it is, that at one particular portion of the night, unless sleep deaden the reflective powers and still the imagination, or active exertion occupies the thoughts with tangible things, dark and gloomy images come crowding upon the mind, and seem to triumph over the powers of reason, with a supernatural influence, like that which has been attributed to spectres from the grave. All that is sad and horrible in man's general fate, all that is grievous or perilous or worthy of regret in the history of the past, in the aspect of the present, in the prospect of the future, marches by in long and black procession; and the oppressed heart is fain to exclaim, at this sight of human ills, "What! will the line last to the crack of doom?"

The couch of Algernon Grey was not without such apparitions; and—alas! that I should say it—the thought of her who had just quitted him in all her beauty, in all her sweetness, in all her grace, but rendered the wild phantoms of fancy more terrible. He felt, he could not deny, in that hour of the opening of the heart's secrets to itself, that he loved her, eagerly, ardently, with the first passionate love of enthusiastic youth; that to win her he would willingly have sacrificed rank, name, station, aught on earth but his own sense of right. But still, at the same time, came a voice from his own breast, like that of fate, repeating, "She cannot be thine! she cannot be thine!"

"What should he do?" he asked himself; "how should he act?" He could not repay her gentle kindness, offered in simple innocence, by a grateful heart. Flight was his only resource; but he was a prisoner and had no power to fly. Chained down to the sole society most dangerous to his peace, it seemed as if he were tied to the stake to endure to the utmost the fiery ordeal of temptation. Then again, he strove to cast the thoughts from him, and gained a brief interval of sleep; but visions, all coloured by the same gloomy hues, either disturbed repose, or made him start up again to think of the same themes, and wrestle with the same dark adversaries.

At length the day dawned; and, starting quickly from his bed, he hurried to the window, opened it, and gazed forth. Oh, how sweet was the fresh aspect of the morning to his wearied eyes, as calm and refreshing to the mind as the gentle breath of the early summer day to the heated cheek it blew upon. The golden light spread through the valley and over the hills, sunk in amongst the deep woods and throughout the masses of the dark trees from a soft background of luminous mist; while, here and there, a woodman's fire or cottage chimney, sent up wreaths of faint blue smoke, rolling in graceful lines amongst the leaves and branches.

The day went on in its usual course: many hours of solitude, broken only by the entrance of a servant or the guard. Algernon Grey found no means of relieving the tedious passing of the time. He tried to read, but he could not. He turned from the instrument of music he had asked for, with a sickened feeling, as if sweet sounds would but increase the bitterness of meditation. Thought, devouring thought, consumed the moments; till towards evening, when the guard threw open the door, and to his surprise he saw his old and attached servant, Antony, enter and approach him. The man's face wore a mingled expression, as if he was striving to keep up his usual appearance of gaiety, when in truth his heart was sad; and his master would not suffer one who, he well knew, loved him dearly, to see how bitterly circumstances made him feel his imprisonment.

"Well, Tony," he said, in a cheerful tone, "so they have given admission to you to me, at length."

"Yes, my lord," replied the man; "they have come down from their high flight, now that they find their heavy bravo will not die. I hope your lordship has not fancied I have been negligent; for I have been up here twice a day, and the page as often. The little devil would have stabbed the guard, I believe, to get entrance, if I had not stopped him; but we two are not enough to storm the castle, and we should have only got ourselves in limbo too. However, to-night they let me in, to carry you these letters, which a courier brought just now from England; so there are now four of us; and, if you like, methinks between us all we can contrive to get you out."

Algernon Grey shook his head with a smile, and taking the letters and reading the addresses with a listless, uninterested look,

"No, no, Tony," he said; "they would only catch us again, before we had gone far. But what was that you said of the young Baron of Oberntraut?"

"Why, the fellow you fought with, sir," answered the servant, "if you mean him, is getting better hourly. He was out in the garden up there, to-night, by the bank of the river, sitting in a chair. You have not hurt him much, it seems. Pity you did not send your sword through his maw. The bleeding will do him good, however; for he is mighty pale, and won't affront an English gentleman again, I warrant. I saw him myself when I rode up to get tidings. There he was, sitting all white and colorless in a great gilt chair against the wall of the house, like a wax-candle in a sconce."

While the man had been speaking, his master had slowly approached the window, opened one of the letters, and was reading the first lines as his servant concluded. For a moment or two the subject of the epistle seemed to produce no great effect. He smiled slightly, ran his eye down to the bottom, skimming carelessly the contents, and then turned the page. The next moment, however, he seemed to be stirred by strong emotions; his brow contracted, his eye flashed, his lip quivered, and the hot angry blood rose in an instant into his cheek and overspread his forehead with a fiery glow. Straining his eyes upon the sheet, he read on; and, when he had done, held the letter open in his hand for several minutes, gazing sternly up into the air. He uttered not a word; but the servant could see how his heart beat, by the quivering of the paper in his hand. Then, throwing it down upon the table, he tore open the other hastily and read it likewise. The contents did not seem to mitigate his agitation, though they mingled a degree of scorn with the expression of his countenance. This time some portion of his emotion found vent in a few brief words: "So, so!" he cried. "So bold and shameless—and shall I be restrained by such scruples? Nay, nay, this is too bad—England, farewell! You shall not feel my foot for many a day!"

"Ah, my lord!" said the man, "things seem going on at a fine rate, truly; methinks, when one takes a part so boldly, the other may well choose his part too. Faith, I would let them whistle for me long enough, before I went."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Algernon Grey, turning upon him sharply.

"Why, my noble lord, I have had a letter, too, by Hob, the courier; and I dare say the news in mine and yours is all the same."

"And has it become the common scandal, then?" said Algernon Grey thoughtfully. "So young, so fair, so haughty, and yet so shameless! Leave me, Tony, leave me, and come up to-morrow early; doubtless they will give you admission, if all goes well—I want naught more to-night; leave me, I say."

"Well, my lord, if I were you, I would not take it much to heart," replied the man, lingering for a moment ere he departed. "There's not much love lost on either side, I believe, and never was; and you will be just as well quit of a bad bargain."

Algernon Grey waved his hand for him to leave the room, but answered not; and when the man was gone, he strode up and down the wide chamber for full half an hour with quick and agitated steps. Then, casting himself into a chair, he laughed aloud, exclaiming, "I am a fool! Why should I grieve? Why let such idle passions tear me? I love her not—have never loved her—I contemn, despise her—have ever scorned her pitiful pride, and but strove, against my nature, to bend my affections to my duty. Let her take her course—nay, indeed, she has taken it."

The door opened suddenly, and then, for the first time, he perceived that night had fallen, as the lights from the ante-chamber poured in; and he saw the form of Agnes, without distinguishing her features, standing in the doorway, like a graceful shadow.

"Will you come to-night?" said that sweet, musical voice; and, starting up, Algernon Grey snatched his hat from the table, replying—"Most willingly, fair Agnes."

As they walked along through the courts by the Altan, out into the gardens over the terrace, Agnes saw that a great change had come upon her companion. Far from seeming to have received any heavy news from his native land, it appeared as if some heavy weight had been taken from his mind. His manner was light and cheerful; his words gay and full of unusual fire—somewhat wild and absent, indeed, at times; but still, the whole tone was sunshiny and very unlike the gloomy mood of the preceding night.

The difference made Agnes thoughtful. She asked herself, "Is it his nature to be thus variable?" But she would not believe it. There was something in her breast that would not let her think the slightest ill of him beside her. The picture of his character was already drawn by the hand of affection upon a woman's heart; and, when such is the case, stern, and hard, and continued must be the wearing power that can ever efface the lines. A new light seemed to break upon her; and at length she said, "I think I can divine that you have heard how much better is your adversary. It is said they will bring him into Heidelberg to-morrow."

"Yes, I have heard it," answered Algernon Grey, "and am exceedingly rejoiced to find his wound will not prove dangerous."

Agnes was satisfied; his new gaiety was accounted for; and, as they wandered on, she

gave free course to all her own thoughts, as they sprang up from the deep well of the heart unobstructed to the lips. Once, indeed, she was a little frightened at her own feelings and at his manner. Not that he said aught to alarm or agitate her; but there was a tenderness mingled with the frank and rapid outpouring of all the ideas that seemed to cross his brain, which startled and moved her. But women have always some veil ready to hide agitating truths from their own eyes; and Agnes dismissed the thought ere it had possessed her mind for a moment. Carried away by the quick and sparkling current of his conversation, her brain seemed to whirl as the mind followed him; and he, in the turbulent emotions produced by the tidings he had received and the struggling love within his bosom, suffered himself to be hurried rapidly on, he saw not, he knew not, he cared not whither. Their perilous course in a frail bark some few days before down the furious torrent of the Neckar was but an emblem of the voyage of their two hearts along the troubled stream of love that night. Time flew on more rapidly than either of them knew; the castle clock striking ten roused them as it were from a dream; and, returning to his prison, Algernon Grey, as before, parted from Agnes in the ante-chamber. The moment he had entered his own room the door was closed; he cast himself into a seat, leaned his folded arms upon the table, and, as if utterly exhausted, let his head fall upon his arms; and there, for three long hours, without a change of attitude, he remained plunged in the cares of wild, unformed, unregulated thoughts. An attendant came in, but he took no notice of him. He placed supper on the table, and invited him courteously to take some. He replied not, for he heard not; and the man, thinking that he slept, retired.

At the end of the time I have mentioned the prisoner started up, brushed back the rich brown curls from his broad forehead with a bewildered look, and, taking a light, retired to bed and slept, strange to say, profoundly.

The sun had risen high; an attendant had twice entered the large room; and all the world was busy with the ordinary affairs of life, before Algernon Grey awoke from one of those deep, dreamless sleeps, which sometimes succeed to the exhausting conflict of passions in the human breast. For a few moments he could hardly tell where he was; he could with difficulty recollect the circumstances in which he was placed, or the events of the preceding day. But, as they rushed at length upon memory, a shadow came over his face; and again the question recurred, "What am I doing? Whither am I hurrying?" The gloom of the preceding days came over him more darkly than ever, and he passed a full hour in anxious thought.

"No, no!" he exclaimed at length; "whatever be the temptation, I will not do such wrong to her young and innocent heart as to seek its love, while there is no chance, no hope of our ultimate union. I will rather see her give her hand to another, and live on in loveless, cheerless solitude myself. Yet, if I am kept here, if I linger near her in this constant companionship, with her beauty and her grace before my eyes, her sweet voice sounding in my ears, her high yet gentle thoughts mingling with and softening my own, how can I so guard myself as never to betray the secret of my bosom?—how can I restrain myself so as not to tell my love and seek hers in return? Men have tried the same before and have ever failed. I have no such confidence in my own strength, and I will not risk it; I will fly—whatever it cost to tear myself away, I will fly."

The hours went by; and a little before noon the prisoner received a brief visit from Herbert. The news he brought was so far satisfactory, as it showed Algernon the prospect of his speedy liberation. His adversary had been removed into Heidelberg the day before, had not suffered in the least by the exertion, had passed a good night, and pronounced himself quite well. But the duration of the old officer's stay was so short, that no other information could be communicated. After dinner Algernon's servant appeared again, but he brought no tidings; and when his master inquired, with some surprise, what had become of his cousin, that he saw him not, the stout servant answered, with a laugh, "Oh, sir, he is woman-hunting; some fair lady here has him always at her heels; but, though Heaven forbid I should say I love him much, yet I do believe he has striven to serve you, in this matter at least; for I know he has been twice with the Elector and once with the Electress about your affairs."

"And why love you him not, Tony?" asked his master. "I have seen, it is true, that you have less reverence for him than pleases me; but I would fain know the cause."

"I have known him from a boy," replied the man drily; "and, though he never did aught to injure or offend me, yet there are certain things that one sees, and hears, and knows, which, do what a man will, make up in the course of time an amount of love or disliking very difficult to be changed. I own I love him not; and, to say truth, I have found few that do who have known him as well; but it is no affair of mine, and, if you love him, I have naught to do but to be his humble servant."

"I trust you will show yourself so," replied his master; "first, as he is my kinsman; next, as he is my friend."

"I will, my lord," replied the man; "unless I can some time show you that he is not your friend; for that's a point I doubt."

"You are prejudiced," answered Algernon Grey; "and I thought not to see one, who wants not sense, recollect the follies of a boy, long, long years afterwards. Now leave me."

"It is not only follies I remember, my lord," replied the servant, gravely; "I never accused him of follies. It is not head he wants, it is heart. For ten long years I saw him in your father's house, a child, a lad, almost a man; and I know him well."

"Leave me," said Algernon Grey sternly; and the servant withdrew. But, if the truth must be told, his young master was more inclined to share his sentiments than he would admit. For some years he had not seen his cousin, ere he joined him on the continent. He had remembered him only as the companion of his boyhood, elder by several years, but still bending to share all his sports and pastimes;

devising pleasures for him, and breaking the dull ceremonies of a stately household. After they met again, however, he had seen much that pained and displeased him; and he felt sorry, not without good cause, that he had entered into one of those wild and romantic engagements with him, to travel together for a certain time under feigned names, which had been rendered common at that period by the publication of the most popular, but, at the same time, it must be said, the most idle romance that ever was written—"The Astrea of D'Urfy." He turned his mind, however, from the subject as soon as possible, after the servant had left him; and now he tried to read and pass his time with any other thoughts than those of Agnes Herbert. All those who have made such efforts know how vain they are. She was ever before his eyes, ever present to his fancy; and he gave up the attempt, asking himself whether, if she came again that night, he should go as before, or steadily refuse such dangerous companionship.

He was saved the struggle, however; for about five o'clock Herbert again presented himself, followed by a guard, and, taking Algernon's hand warmly, he said, "Come, my young friend, your imprisonment is drawing near an end. The Elector has sent for you, and, doubtless, it is to give you freedom, for this young Oberntraut is recovering fast. Come with me, and we shall soon hear more."

Algernon Grey followed willingly enough, and the English officer led him, by several of those passages and staircases through which he had passed with Agnes on the first night of his imprisonment, to the eastern part of the castle, where Frederic's own apartments were situated. At length, crossing an antichamber full of guards and attendants, they entered a hall where the Elector was waiting with his court. There was but a small attendance of the Palatinate nobility, it is true, not above fifteen or twenty persons being present; but Algernon Grey saw several who had surrounded the Prince on the first night of his presentation, and amongst the rest Lord Craven and the old Baron of Oberntraut. The worthy chamberlain's countenance, notwithstanding the reports made of his son's health, did not seem a bit more placable than when last the young Englishman had seen it; and that of the Elector bore a somewhat grave and embarrassed look. As the whole party were assembled not far from the door, however, Algernon Grey had not much time for observation before he stood within a step of the Elector, and to his surprise found Frederic's hand extended towards him. He took it instantly, and bent his head over it, without, however, bowing the knee, and the Prince at once began the conversation, saying:—

"I have been much grieved, sir, to be forced by the laws and customs of my country to subject you to the inconveniences of imprisonment till such time as the results of your duel with one of my officers, the Baron of Oberntraut, could be fully ascertained. We have an edict here repressing such encounters; but as you are a stranger to our laws, though amenable to them while in these dominions, I must say the fault was more his than yours. The Baron may now, however, be considered well, and I am willing to pass over the offence on both parts; in his case considering all that he has already undergone, and in yours, your ignorance of our laws. I have sent for you, therefore, to tell you your imprisonment is at an end, and to reconcile you with the family of your late adversary. Henceforth, I trust, you will be friends, not enemies."

Algernon Grey was about to reply that he had never entertained the slightest enmity towards his opponent, when the old Lord of Oberntraut took a step forward and said, in a sharp tone, "I came here, noble prince, to seek reparation, and not friendship; and I beseech your Highness—"

But at that moment he was interrupted by a low voice from behind, saying, "Will you allow me to pass, Lord Craven?"

The gentleman thus addressed made way; and the next instant the Baron of Oberntraut himself came forward, ghastly pale, and apparently somewhat feeble, but yet walking with a firm step and an upright head. The moment he stood before the Elector, he held forth his hand frankly to Algernon Grey, saying, "I, at least, sir, entertain no such feelings; I come here to ask your friendship, and to thank you for a lesson you have taught me, which will make me a wiser man to the end of my life. I have been somewhat spoiled by success and flattery, sir; and needed a check, such as this wound has given, to teach me that no man can always have his way in this world. You are the most skilful swordsman I have ever seen; you dealt nobly and honourably with me, and in this presence I declare that the whole fault, from first to last, was mine. I sought the quarrel, urged it on, led you to the place of the encounter; and I do believe that, exposed by my rash anger to your cooler skill, my life was often at your mercy, had you chosen to take it. I thank you, therefore, for the wound you gave, and trust you will forget the past, and take my offered hand."

"With my whole heart," answered Algernon Grey, pressing it warmly; "and I do assure you, Baron, that only the defence of my own life would have induced me to injure you. I could not help it, however; for you are not an adversary to be trifled with. Indeed it was more accident than aught else that gave me a momentary advantage. Had not your foot slipped on the wet sward, the chance might have been against me, and I should have been lying still enough by this time."

The young baron smiled with a look of pleasure at this testimony to his skill; and the Elector, calling the old Lord of Oberntraut into one of the deep windows, said, "My lord, I intreat—nay, I command, that you let your anger drop, and cease all vain pursuit of revenge. This is no ordinary man you have to deal with. I know him, though he believes I do not, and am aware not only that he is one of the high nobles of England, but also that he is sent hither on a secret mission of deep importance to my welfare."

"A spy, sir, you would say!" murmured the old lord, in a low bitter tone.

"Hush, sir!" cried the Elector, his brow growing dark; "no more of this if you would

merit the continuance of my favour. I am not so powerless that I cannot make my commands respected by my own court. You hear what your son has said. He exculpates him of all blame. No serious injury has been done, and I insist that you yield to reconciliation."

"As the boy is satisfied," replied the chamberlain, doggedly, "and in obedience to your Highness, I submit;" and turning towards Algernon Grey, he added, "By the commands of my Prince, sir, I am ready to let this matter drop; but I must advise you not to try such things again with—"

"Hush, hush, my father!" cried his son, "I will proclaim to all the world that there never was a more noble gentleman than he who now stands before you; and as you have hated him solely as my adversary, I do beseech you now to love him as my friend."

"Well, sir, well," replied the old lord, "I have naught to say; let the matter be passed and forgotten;" but it was evident that his ill-will was but little diminished, and his angry pride unpacified.

"Well," said the Elector, with a courteous smile, "this all being settled, and animosities healed, we will now part for the evening—and you, noble sir," he continued, turning to Algernon Grey, "though I will only call you by the name you are pleased to assume, will, I trust, grace our court by your presence to-morrow at the hour of eleven. We have there matters of some weight, which we wish to make known to all friends and well-wishers, either of the Elector Palatine, or his lady, the pearl of England; and we trust, that you may be ranked in both classes."

"I will not fail, your Highness," answered Algernon Grey; "but I fear it may be my audience of leave-taking."

"Not so, not so," replied the Elector; "we shall find means to keep you with us, I do not doubt. However that may be, farewell for the present;" and passing through the opposite door with a large part of his train, comprising the old Baron of Oberntraut, he left the hall. As soon as he was gone, Algernon Grey's late adversary once more grasped his hand, saying, "You must not go, my friend; the Elector has need of swords such as yours; ay, and of hearts and heads such as yours, too. If there is chivalry in your nature; if there is high spirit and generous enthusiasm—and I know there is—you will give him aid in his hour of need. I may be tied down to this spot by many things; but if you go with him, I know there is a better arm and better brain than any I could bring."

"Nay, not better," answered Algernon Grey, "though equally devoted to any good cause. But I know not what you mean, on what expedition he is bound, or what enterprise is before him."

"I cannot tell you," answered Oberntraut in a low voice; "and I cannot entertain you, as I could wish, at my own lodgings, on account of this sickness; but if you inquire for me to-morrow, ere you come hither, I will tell you more. Now I must return; for, to say truth, I am tired. I never thought to know the day when I should say that a short walk and a brief conference were too much for my strength; but so it is, and I must go and lie once more down and rest."

The party broke up soon; but ere Algernon Grey quitted the hall for the purpose of returning to the place of his imprisonment, to see that all his effects were carefully carried down to the inn below, Lord Craven approached, and, after shaking hands with him, said something in a low voice.

"This evening, if you will," answered Algernon Grey; "but what is it, Craven?"

The young nobleman replied in a whisper; and a dark cloud immediately came over Algernon Grey's countenance.

"I know it all," he answered; "all that you can tell me, Craven. Come and see me, if you will. Right glad shall I be to spend an hour with you; but mention not that name again. Much is, doubtless, false; much is, doubtless, exaggerated; but much must be true that should not be so; and my own course is decided." Thus saying, he turned to Herbert, and, after a few words, walked back with him to the tower where he had been confined.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The fair Princess of England, now in the pride of youth and beauty, in the full sunshine of prosperity and power, with one of the fairest portions of the earth for her dominions, with admiration, flattery, esteem, love, almost adoration, rising up almost like incense before her, but with so sad and dark a fate for the future, sat in her silver chamber, surrounded by all the beauty she could collect from her husband's dominions. There were only three men present, two old German noblemen, and, strange to say, our acquaintance, William Lovet. The hour was nearly the same as that in which Algernon Grey was summoned to the presence of the Elector; and every face around was full of satisfaction as the Princess and her countryman talked somewhat lightly of the imprisonment of Lovet's kinsman, and the prospects before him; using the French tongue.

The Englishman stood before the chair of the Electress, with his hat and plume dangling from his hand, his head slightly bent, his ear turned to hear the Princess's words, and a slight sarcastic smile upon his finely-turned lip.

"Good faith! your Highness," he said, in answer to something the Princess communicated, "I know not well whether to rejoice or be sad at the tidings you give me."

"Sad!" exclaimed Elizabeth, with a look of much surprise; "have you not yourself been urging his liberation?"

"That was a duty," answered Lovet, with the same meaning smile; "but there may be unpleasant duties, madam."

"Are you his friend, his kinsman?" exclaimed the Electress.

"Both," answered Lovet; "but yet, friendship may have unpleasant duties to perform. I urged his liberation not because I thought it best for him, but because it was what he had a right to demand."

"Is he so wild and rash, then," demanded Elizabeth, "that, like a lion, he must be kept in a cage?—But you are jesting; I see it on your face."

"Good faith! not so I, lady," answered the

Englishman; "but because all men do not know what is best for them; and my cousin is one of them—a rare, keen judge for others, but not for himself.—Now, look around, your Highness. What do you see?"

"Too many things for a catalogue," answered the Princess; "vases, statues, hangings of blue and silver, many fair ladies, and—"

"Stop there, I beg," said Lovet. "All these bright things make me judge that it were wise for any gay and courtly gentleman to stay amongst them; but these same things—nay, their very beauty"—and he ran his eye over the circle round the Electress, calling forth a well-pleased smile on many of the faces near—"have quite the contrary effect on my good cousin, making him seek to fly such sweet temptation; and, like a wandering friar, or our good friend St. Anthony, resist the devil, love, Hymen, and the rest, by solitude and maceration." The Electress laughed and he proceeded; "We are of different judgments, he and I; while I am free, I stay even where I am; no sooner is he at liberty than he flies, depend upon it; but if I could have a private word with your Highness, I might tell you more, and say things worthy of your ear."

Elizabeth gazed round the circle for an instant, and then said, speaking English, "There is no one who understands our native tongue."

A momentary hesitation seemed to come over William Lovet; and he paused for an instant, ere he replied. It was seldom that such a thing happened to him; for he was ready and quick at repartee, and had, as is the case with many a shrewd and intriguing man, a habit, as shrewd as nature, of veiling his direct meaning in figures which implied more than was actually said. He rarely found a difficulty in making his hearers easily comprehend all that he meant, while he guarded against an accurate report of anything that he had instigated, requested, or desired, by rendering the expressions in themselves so unmeaning, that, when repeated to an unprepared ear, their sense, if they had any, seemed very different from that which the circumstances at the moment gave them. In the present instance, however, his task was one of some difficulty; for he sought to convey to a mind, naturally shrewd and acute, and accustomed to deal very much with hyperbole and metaphor, a false idea in the general, while all the particulars were in themselves true.

So long did he remain silent, that the Electress at length said in a tone of impatience, "Well, sir, what would you say?"

"Good faith! your Highness," he answered in a frank tone; "I do not know well how to begin. I must not forget that it is my cousin I am speaking of; but yet I wish to give you such an insight into the matter that you may judge fairly of it by yourself. From various circumstances, which it is little worth while to speak of, this good cousin of mine has conceived a horror and fear of woman's love."

"I can conceive the circumstances," answered the Electress; "his history is not wholly unknown to me, Master Lovet."

"*Then* you have the whole affair," answered *her visitor*, catching gladly at the admission; "*I need* say nothing more. You have seen with your own eyes, know right well, must have heard and marked the attractions which your court possesses for my poor cousin Algernon. Within two days he took fright at his own sensations, and was for flying as fast as possible: but a duel, a knight-errant like adventure, imprisonment, and the devil to boot, I believe, have detained him here even till now; and Love's chain, I doubt not, is round and round his heart by this time. Nevertheless, he will snap his fetters as soon as his limbs are free; and as I have promised, by an oath more binding than a marriage vow, to go with him wherever he goes for the next year, you may well judge that I am not very anxious to see his prison doors unlocked."

Elizabeth meditated for a minute or two, and then answered, "I should have thought the mission which brought him hither would detain him somewhat longer at our court."

"There are two objections to that supposition," replied Lovet; "first, that whatever object he had in coming hither—of which I know nothing, for he has his secrets as well as I have mine—must be attained by this time. Depend upon it, your Highness, if he had any object at all, it was but to examine, to see, to inquire, and nothing more. He must have seen enough of your court, must have heard enough of coming events, for a quick mind like his to have formed its own conclusions."

"That is one objection to my view," replied the Electress; "what is the second?"

"A very simple one," said William Lovet, "namely, that the court of the Count Palatine is very soon to become, if what men say be true, the court of a great king. Heidelberg is about to lose its splendour, and those who stay there may study or may sing amongst nightingales and professors, with sweet voices and deep learning; but no courtly auditory, and but small company."

The Electress smiled. "Such things may be," she said, in a grave pondering tone, seeming to consider each word; "but yet, my good sir, as all things must come to an end, so must this gentleman's visit to our court. Only I would rather—whatever my husband's decision may be upon matters which have been bruited about somewhat too largely—I would rather, I say, that a noble gentleman of my own land, supposed to be sent hither expressly by my father, should not take his departure immediately that the Elector's resolution is made public."

Lovet saw his advantage, and exclaimed at once, "Heaven forfend! it would be most detrimental!"

"Highly so," rejoined the Electress. "Rumours, true or false, assign to this young gentleman a high place in the world's esteem; the confidence of his own sovereign in the task of watching here the proceedings relative to the Bohemian crown, and of acting according as circumstances shall seem to need. It will certainly, as you say, be most detrimental, if, immediately that the Elector's decision is known, he were to withdraw himself instantly from our court, from any private motives such as you mention. Men would instantly say that the step we were about to take was disapproved of by the crown whence we have the best right to

look for assistance and support. Little, indeed, have we had hitherto; and such an act on the part of your friend would be fatal. We all know what is the effect of high countenance in the outset of a great undertaking; and I need not tell you that my father's lukewarmness in this cause has already created difficulties, and disheartened our followers."

Lovet laid his finger on his temple, and seemed to consider deeply the subjects brought before him. But, if the truth must be told, this thoughtful mood was assumed; and he answered the next moment with a sudden exclamation, as if some bright thought had struck him, "Were it not better that you took him with you to Bohemia! His appearance at Prague, with all the rumours going before him which your Highness has mentioned, would give hope and confidence, would raise the spirits of the people, would depress and keep in check the adverse party, and would add an ingredient tending to strengthen union, which is all that would seem wanting to complete success."

"But would he go!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "The same motives that made him eager to quit Heidelberg, would surely withhold him from Prague."

"When we set a trap for a linnet," said Lovet, "we take care to conceal the wires. 'Tis needless that your Highness should say, that either the Lady Agnes goes with you, or the fair Countess of Laussitz."

The Princess smiled; for she not unwillingly mixed herself with the small policy of her husband's court, and took some pleasure in the cunning parts of diplomatic intrigue. She made no answer, however, and Lovet proceeded:—

"If ever there was a gallant and chivalrous spirit in this world, it is my cousin Algernon's. To serve a lady with his sword, or his heart's best blood, would be the pride of his life, provided he did not fear that by so doing he would bind himself in somewhat too strong a chain. At your first call, the spirit of his race and his name will rise to defend your cause before the world—a lady, his Princess, the love of all hearts, the admiration of all eyes, would find a right willing servant, and one who, in the camp, or court, or counsel, could do great deeds; ready and willing, I take upon myself to say, he would be, if one fair lady's name was not mentioned in your train."

The Princess mused, and seemed somewhat embarrassed. "I have always intended," she said, "that if we go—of which I as yet know nothing—Agnes should go with me; I have told her so. She would look upon it as a slight if I did not take her. She has been to me almost as a sister since I have been here—but yet I will speak with her; for much must be sacrificed for a great object."

"Nay, your Highness, speak with her not," answered Lovet, laughing; "leave her not behind; once he has promised you the service of his sword, he will not break his word, nor withdraw from the contract; but there is no need in naming those who are to accompany you, that all shall be mentioned at the first. Omit some names which may be added afterwards as you may think fit. Heaven forfend that a high princess shall not have *right* and title to change her mind seven times a day, as well as a washerwoman's daughter!"

"I understand," answered Elizabeth, laughing, "I understand; but you think, then, he will not take flight if he finds that this fair dangerous little friend of mine is one of the train after all?"

"No fear, no fear," replied Lovet; "once promised, he is yours for life or death; and good faith! to say the truth, 'tis fair this lady should be of the party. When he once finds her sweet companionship fixed upon beyond the possibility of escape, he will yield himself gaily to his fate, put on the Celadon, and humanize himself a little, which is all that he wants to make him perfect in his way. Never was statue, or hewn block of stone, from Lot's wife down to the works of Praxiteles, more cold or uncomfortable as a companion than my good cousin Algernon, solely from his lamentable fear of giving way to the fire in his own heart. For my part, I think a little honest love gives the crowning touch to all excellence. With the virtues which the old Romans attributed to the fine arts, it softens manners, purifies the heart and spirits, elevates the character, and takes from us that touch of the wild beast, which is always to be found in what my great-grandmother, who was a Lollard,—Heaven keep her from purgatory!—used to call 'the natural man.'"

"I believe it does, sir," answered the Electress, amused, and even pleased, with the strange picture his conversation displayed of many qualities apparently very opposite, and not knowing that all which was apparently good was thrown in to make the dish suit the palate of the person to whom it was presented,—"I believe it does; but it must be, as you say, honest love to do so."

"Well, beautiful princess," replied Lovet, with a low laugh that he could not suppress,—one of those light, demoralizing, satanic laughs, which attack virtuous principles, unassailable by any argument—"I only speak of honest love. The thought of naught else could ever enter into my good cousin's heart; he is as pure and innocent as what Will Shakspeare calls a sucking dove; and that love, when he finds he cannot escape from it, will be a chivalrous bond to your court and service for ever."

"And your own love, Master Lovet," asked the Princess; "you don't suppose I have been blind to your devotion to a certain fair lady? What of your own love?"

"Oh, immaculate and high," answered Lovet, with his sneering smile; "the pure conception of enthusiastic devotion—a passion, like the flame on Vesta's altar, burning for ever with a holy light—no smoke, high Princess, no red and fiery glare, but blue, and thin, and cold, like the flame of spirits on a sponge—quite spiritual, quite spiritual, I can assure you"—and he laughed again in bitter mockery of the romantic character of the age, which could conceive that love can be separated from the fire that is its life. "Surely, surely, bright lady, if others can be permitted to play Strephons, I am not to be blamed if I *celadon* it a little, though the languishing eyes of the Countess of Laussitz do look as if they would wake the terrestrial Eros, rather than the celestial.

In spite of herself, the Princess could not but smile; but, putting on a grave look the moment after, she replied, "Well, well. Far be it from me to lay any restraint upon gallant and noble devotion to the fair; it is the high moving power to all great actions; and on it am I ready to rest for support myself, should need be: but remember, Master Lovet, I will have no scandals in my court; that is an indispensable condition to your sojourn with it."

"Scandal, your Highness! Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Lovet; "I would not have a scandal for the world. Always consider what such a thing would imply; I declare the very thought of it would spoil my breakfast, had I not made one good meal before I came out. The consequences would be frightful: first, I should lose your Highness's favour; next, I should have to cut the throat of a little fat, small-eyed husband—work for a pork-butcher, but not for a cavalier with clean hands; and last, I should have to marry the fair dame myself, which would certainly put an end to all our fine Platonics. No, no, by that fair hand I swear, you shall have no scandal by any act of William Lovet."

"Well, Sir William," answered the Electress, "you will recollect that false names do not cover well-known faces; that your reputation is not quite so clear and bright as a new crimson velvet cloak, laced with gold; and that, knowing the person and his ways, I have my eye upon him. As to the other matter, I will think of what you have said concerning your noble cousin, and will act after due deliberation. We must not lose him on any account, if it be possible to keep him; but, ere I decide on aught, I must speak with his Highness; for these are matters, in regard to which a woman's judgment is not worth much."

"Oh, a woman's judgment for ever!" cried William Lovet; "in love, war, wine, and policy, there is nothing like a woman's judgment—But now I will take my leave, for I see these fair ladies round marvelling sadly at our long conversation in an unknown tongue—though, Heaven help us! what we should have done on many great occasions I know not, if certain wise gentlemen of antiquity had not thought fit to build a high and very impious tower of Babel, and been cursed with strange languages, which have proved very serviceable to their posterity. However, if we talk farther in one of our Babel dialects before these bright dames, their sweet wits will find or frame treason in it; and I shall be impeached to the Elector for talking something more soft than German to his lovely Princess. Thus, then, I humbly take my leave; and, if you follow my sage advice regarding my good cousin, I will so play my part as to insure that he is bound hand and foot to promote your great and glorious undertakings."

CHAPTER XIX.

About an hour after his liberation, Algernon Grey sat alone in his chamber at the Golden Stag, absorbed in deep meditation. The servants came and went, bringing down from the castle all those parts of his baggage which had been carried up during his imprisonment, but he took no heed of them; and even Frill, the page, obtained little notice, though he endeavoured strongly to attract attention by eloquent speech and graceful demeanour. The great question on which man's fate turns so frequently throughout life: "How shall I act at this next step?" was then before his eyes; but his mind wandered back into the past, and, scrutinizing what had occurred during the last three days, Algernon Grey could not free himself altogether from the reproaches of his own heart. "I have been weak," he said, "I have been wrong; I have yielded to circumstances, where I should have resisted them; I have been tender in tone and manner, where I should have been cold as ice. Better, far better, that she should think me rude, discourteous, unkind, than that she should have hereafter to say, that I did her wrong and sought her love secretly, when I could not ask it honourably. Even now it is far wiser to encounter any sort of reproach than give good cause for dark, well-founded accusation. I will go—that is determined. To-morrow's sunset shall not find me in Heidelberg."

His thoughts ran on from that starting point into the future, and he asked himself, "What was before him; what was the path he could pursue; what was the end to which it would lead?" The prospect was dark and gloomy: no light shone upon it, no variety appeared to cheer it, but one wild waste of life spread out before him, overhung with clouds, and bearing naught to shelter or console. He felt like one of those anchorites of old, who voluntarily quitted the sunshine and the richness of cultivated nature, to plunge into the gloom and sterility of the desert. He felt that at that moment, there was beauty and brightness around him, all that could charm the eye or captivate the heart; that gaiety and pleasure, the exercise of the mind, the sport of the fancy, the kindling of passion, the ecstacy of love, the wild enthusiastic delights of a free heart revelling undisturbed in the enjoyment of the best gifts of Heaven, were ready for his grasp, if he chose to seize them, with but one obstacle—but that obstacle, to his mind, insurmountable. He felt that he was about to fly them all, voluntarily to resign everything that his heart longed for: with the parched mouth and thirsty lip to renounce the cooling draught of the deep well of happiness open before him; and to speed on through the arid desert of existence, with no one to support or cheer, with not one spring of the sweet waters of comfort to give him hope along his desolate course. Barren, barren spread out the years before him. As he looked through the long sunless vista, it seemed as if an open tomb was all that closed the far perspective to receive him at the end of his weary journey, and afford the dull sleep of death and corruption. "May it come soon!" he thought, "may it come soon!" and, with his hands pressed upon his eyes, he remained pondering bitterly over his sad, strange fate.

"Ah, Algernon," cried a voice, as the door opened, "you look marvellous joyful over your emancipation. One would think you had been in a dungeon a whole year, to see your intemperate gaiety at the recovery of your freedom. But I knew how it would be, and I told the Electress the result. I urged her strongly to keep you in your soft bondage, telling her, that

to set you at liberty was but to restore you to the slavery of a most perverse education.—But how goes it, my good cousin?"

"Well, I thank you, William," answered Algernon Grey, rising and shaking off his gloom, determined to encounter Lovet's keen jests with a careless tone. "Faith, you are quite right, my cousin. The cheerful society that you afforded me every day in prison made captivity so sweet, that I could have staid in it for ever."

"See the ingratitude of man!" cried Lovet, laughing. "I have given him up one-third of my whole time, and yet he is not satisfied, although, by the code of love and gallantry, as he well knows, the other two-thirds were not my own to give; they were pledged, pawned, impignonated, and I might as well have stolen a jewel out of Madame de Laussitz's ear, or taken any ring off her finger but one, with as much right and justice as I could have taken one minute more than I did to bestow upon my kinsman's affairs. Did I not thrice see the Elector? Did I not twice see the Electress? Did I not make love to seven of her ladies? Did I not bow nine times to nine old gentlemen? Did I not fee a page for an audience? and actually embrace a chamberlain—the most disgusting task of all—entirely to obtain his liberty? although I knew the first use he would make of it would be to work his own unhappiness and my disappointment."

"Nay, William, nothing of the kind," replied Algernon Grey. "We are all upon the search for happiness, you and I alike; and each must seek his in his own way. I thank you for all the trouble you have taken; but birds, when they are free, will use their wings; and so will I tomorrow. I have not been so long accustomed to a cage as to love its neighbourhood."

"Stay, stay," cried Lovet. "Your pardon, my good cousin! I am not on the search for happiness: that is a wild-goose chase, always beginning, never ending; still disappointing; offering fruition nowhere. Pleasure, pleasure is what I seek—the honey that is in every flower. If we exhaust one, why let us fly on to another. The bee for ever, Algernon! That industrious insect is my emblem. Good faith! I will ask the heralds if I may not put it in my arms. Like it, I seek the sweets of life, wherever they are to be found; and the wild thyme, or the cultivated rose, is all the same to me."

"But a spendthrift-bee, after all," answered Algernon Grey; "for you lay up no store for the future, but consume all the honey that you find, and build no waxy cells for future years. After all, the emblem is not a pleasant one; for, were you as thrifty as the best, one master, Fate, would come and smoke you in the hive."

"I will give him no cause," answered Lovet, gaily; "for I will eat my honey while I have got it, and hoard none to tempt his ruthless hands. But a truce to bantering, Algernon: I have really laboured hard to set you free, thinking that a much better way of spending my time than piping to you in prison, like Blondel to good King Richard. But now, what is it you intend to do? I have trusted and hoped, that a few hours' quite reflection in an airy room up three pair of stairs, would turn the fresh must *of your young proprieties to* good sound wine, and teach you that where you have all before you that can make life happy, it is needless to go like a drunken man into a purse full of gold, and flip the ducats with your thumb-nail into a draw-well."

"What do you mean?" asked his cousin; "I intend to throw nothing away that is good. Base coin is as well in a draw-well as anywhere else."

"Nay, nay, be frank," exclaimed Lovet; "I mean that you do not surely intend to quit this place so soon as you have once threatened."

"I see no reason why I should stay," answered Algernon Grey.

"What! not love?" cried the other. "Nay, my good cousin, do not look detected! Can you suppose, that I have not seen, that I do not know? By every sign and token, from an untied collar to a hat put on wrongside before, from a sigh in the middle of a well-turned sentence to an answer made as irrelevant to the purpose as an old maid's comment on last Sunday's sermon, you are in love, man, up to the neck in that soft quagmire, love. And, good faith! I must own, too, that, considering your inexperience of such things, and the resistance of your nature to all sweet influences, you have not chosen amiss—bright eyes, sweet lips, a cheek like a ripe peach, hair bright and glossy as the sunshine on a bank of moss, a form that might have made Helen envious, and false Paris doubly false."

Algernon Grey seated himself at the table again, and leaned his head upon his hand, with his eyes thoughtfully bent down, and a red spot in his cheek. He would not, he could not say that he did not love; but he was pained that his clear-sighted cousin had divined the truth.

In the mean time Lovet proceeded, seeing clearly that Algernon did not listen; but trusting that a word or two at least would fall through the inattentive ear upon the mind, and produce, perhaps, a more lasting effect than if they were listened to and answered.

"Stay, Algernon, stay," he cried; "stay and be happy. Cast not away from you, for vain fantasies, joy that is seldom afforded to any man more than once in life—opportunities which neglected never return, and leave unceasing regret behind them. Stay, and make her yours."

"Make her mine!" exclaimed Algernon Grey. "How?"

"Oh! a thousand courses are open," answered his cousin. "Shall I point them out?"

Algernon waved his hand and shook his head, with a bitter smile; "I see none," he answered.

"Well, listen," replied Lovet. "This Herbert, this uncle, is a soldier of fortune—a man of no rank or position to bar the path to one of your name and station. Troublous times are coming on; and over this fair Palatinate will, ere long, roll a sea of disasters, which will break bonds, shake ties, and, in a wide chaos of confusion, leave opportunities which a wise lover would profit by."

"Nay, nay," cried Algernon Grey, starting up and raising himself to his full height, "no more of such a theme; you do not understand me, William."

"Right well, my cousin," replied Lovet, with

one of his sarcastic smiles; "but I thought it best to put the worst case first, and set your shrewish puritanism in arms, by displaying the path that any other wicked worldling would take. The fair lady's heart is, doubtless, more than half gone already; and though, perhaps, like all these proud beauties, she might start a little at first from the thought of such unconditional surrender, yet that said little tyrant Love would compel obedience to his commands. Then, however, there is another course to take. The high-stilted course, in all respects suited to your stiff and magnificent ideas."

"Ay, what is that?" cried Algernon Grey, turning quickly toward him, and betrayed, by a sudden gleam of hope, into a greater display of his feelings than he could have desired.

Lovet suppressed the smile, that half curled his lip, ere his cousin saw it; though he knew well that even to have raised up for a moment a vision of happiness before his cousin's eyes, was so much gained for his own plans. "The matter, methinks, is very easy," he answered; "you have naught to do but first to make her yours beyond recall; and then, being much too virtuous to remain in an unhallowed union, give her the deepest proof of your tenderness and love by breaking this boy-marriage of yours with the Lady Catherine. What right have fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, or grandfathers and guardians either, to pledge a boy of fifteen by a vow at the altar to an engagement for life, the very nature of which he does not understand? It is both absurd and wicked; there may be many doubts whether it is lawful—"

"None, none," cried Algernon Grey; "it has taken place a hundred times. Poor Essex and myself are in the same sad case."

"Ay, but he is worse off than you," answered Lovet; "for he, like a fool, went back and took her home, while you have wisely staid away with the broad sea between you. Now, though the lady and her good friends may very likely, as the matters stand, hold fast by an engagement which secures to her high rank and large possessions as your wife; yet, if she finds you entangled irrevocably with another, she will soon consent to that which you desire, and on a joint petition to the peers this baby-matrimony will be soon annulled."

"She will not consent," said Algernon Grey, bitterly; "she will not consent;" and then he added, fixing his eyes upon Lovet, "and is it you, William, who can wish that I should thus treat your own fair cousin?"

"Oh," answered Lovet, with a laugh, "it will not break her heart. I know her well, better than you do, Algernon; and I advise you for the happiness of both. This is no common case of perfidy. What does she know of you to make her love you! or give one sigh because you love another? Do you think, my fair cousin, that your great qualities are so apparent, or your fine person so attractive, that one short sight of you at the altar at the age of fifteen, tricked out in a white satin doublet, purfled with blue, and laced with gold, is quite sufficient to make her die of love for you? or, what were more marvellous still, to preserve a holy constancy of maidenly affection during seven long years of absence? Pooh, pooh! she is not of that spirit at all, I can tell you. If she thought of you at all, when last she saw you, it was but as a pretty, well-dressed doll; and doubtless, had they left you with her then, she would have stuck a new farthingale round your neck better to her taste, or put you in a cradle and rocked you to sleep. She has got other notions now; but, for aught we know, you may not be the object of them."

"Perhaps not," replied Algernon Grey, setting his teeth hard; "perhaps not, Lovet,—I have reason to think so!—But now mark me, my good cousin, and you know that I am firm in keeping my resolutions; I have seen a fair and lovely creature here, beautiful, kind, innocent, high minded: I would as soon pollute that creature, if I could, as I would destroy the beauty of her face; I would as soon bring wretchedness into her heart, as I would break those lovely limbs upon the rack—so, once for all, no more of this. I shall leave Heidelberg to-morrow."

Lovet paused, and thought for a moment, laying his hand upon his brow, with a studied air of meditation: "I thought it was on Saturday next," he said, "that the Elector went."

"That the Elector went!" repeated Algernon Grey; "I know not what you mean, William."

"Pshaw, my good cousin," answered Lovet; "you do not suppose that I am not aware that Frederic has been urging you to go with him in this expedition to Bohemia; I do not mean to say that you are making your love for Agnes Herbert an excuse to me for a rash consent to the Elector's wild and unprofitable scheme; but you will not deny, that, tempted by the prospect of renown in arms, and strange adventures in a distant country, you have taken advantage of the offer, thinking at the same time to divert your mind from what you think dangerous thoughts, and quit a society that you love too much."

"I will deny it altogether," answered Algernon Grey, calmly. "The Elector has never mentioned the name of Bohemia in my hearing; I was not aware he had accepted this thorny crown, or that he was going either soon or late."

"Why, it is all over the castle and the town," cried Lovet; "and if he have not asked you, he will do it, be you sure. Craven goes with him—"

"And the Princess?" demanded Algernon.

"She goes, or follows immediately," said his cousin, "like a true dame of romance, she tells me, with but two ladies and but two waiting-women, some half-dozen antique gentlemen, and a troop of horse."

Algernon Grey mused, calculating whether it was probable that Agnes would be one of those selected to accompany the Electress. At length he asked, in a somewhat hesitating manner, "Did you hear the ladies' names who go with her?"

"Oh, yes," answered Lovet; "one was the Baroness Löwenstein, whom you saw the other night; the other a Countess, with a hard name I do not recollect, and would not utter if I did; all I know is, it is not Laussitz.—But be prepared, my fair cousin: for, depend upon it, the Elector will ask you; and, if you are not mad, you will plead some other occupations; for

nothing will come of this rash scheme but disaster and hard blows. He is a gallant Prince, it is true, and will, doubtless, have to aid him a brave and manly chivalry; but the odds against him are too great. Spain and Savoy, and Burgundy, the imperial power and three-fourths of the empire, papal gold and intrigue, and Italian mercenaries enough to conquer a new world. While France negotiates, England hesitates, and Holland takes care of itself. You had better frame some excuse; so with that warning I will leave you; for there is a pair of soft violet eyes looking for me as I ride up the hill."

Algernon Grey smiled. It was not at his cousin's allusion to the Countess of Laussitz, but rather, that Lovet should think he could be deterred by such arguments as had been used. The reader may inquire if Lovet thought they would deter him. It would seem not, and even Algernon Grey became suspicious as he meditated.

"I will make myself sure," he said, after pondering for some time. "It is more than probable she will remain with the Electress-mother; and if she do, this adventure is as good as any other to fill up a space of time. I will go up and take leave of her and her uncle to-night; for, perchance, I may not see them at the court to-morrow."

His heart sunk as he thought of that leave-taking; and he shrunk from the task, which he felt it would not be courteous to leave unperformed. Minutes and hours passed by; and it was late in the evening before he went; but at length he set out on foot, and, taking his way by what is still called, I believe, the Burgweg, he reached the gates of the castle, and obtained admission. As usual, the courts and passages were filled with a moving multitude; but Algernon Grey walked straight on, noticing no one till he reached the tower in which Colonel Herbert's lodging was situated, and, mounting the stairs, he knocked at the heavy oaken door; a voice said, "Come in;" but it was not that of the English officer; and the moment after he stood before Agnes Herbert, who sat writing at a table alone. She started up, when she saw him, with a joyful smile; and, giving him her hand, congratulated him on his liberation. But, after a few brief sentences had been spoken, her manner became more grave; and she said, "You were seeking my uncle; but he has just gone forth, leaving me to copy this paper for him."

"I came," said Algernon Grey, in a calm and firm, but, in spite of himself, a very sad tone, "to bid him adieu, as I thought it more than likely, from his busy occupations, that I might not see him at the court to-morrow morning."

"Adieu!" said Agnes. "Are you going soon, then?" and as she spoke her face turned deadly pale.

"I must go, I fear, to-morrow," replied Algernon Grey, "as soon as I have taken leave of the Elector and the Electress. The hour named for receiving me is at eleven; will you be there?"

"I think not," answered Agnes, in a voice that trembled slightly.

"Then, dear lady, I will bid you farewell now," said Algernon Grey, using a strong command over every word and every tone. "Believe me, I am deeply grateful for all the kindness you have shown me, and shall remember the days I have passed here, though several have been days of imprisonment, as amongst the brightest things of life."

He had intended, when he went thither, to explain to her his situation; and had Agnes uttered one word, which could have led to the subject, it would have been done at once. But for a time she remained silent; and he felt that to obtrude such a topic would be but too plainly to indicate the feelings of his heart towards herself. When she did reply, she merely said, "You are generous to express any gratitude to me. I have but shown you common kindness, while all the debt is on my side. I, too, shall recollect these hours with pleasure, as having enabled me, however poorly, to show the thankfulness that is in my heart for the noble and gallant conduct which delivered me at a moment when a terrible death seemed certain. I do not think my uncle will be present, either, to-morrow; but I know he will grieve much not to see you before you go; and if you like to give him such satisfaction, you will find him at the fort, called the Trutzkaiser, where he is causing some alterations to be made."

She spoke quite calmly, though her cheek still remained colourless. At one or two words, indeed, her voice trembled; but there was no other emotion visible.

Algernon Grey took her hand, and pressed his lips upon it, saying, "Farewell! Agnes, farewell!"

"Farewell!" she answered; "may you ever be as happy as I am sure you deserve!"

He shook his head sadly, withdrew, and closed the door.

The moment he was gone, Agnes sank into the chair where she had been sitting, covered her eyes with her hand, and seemed to gasp for breath. The next instant, however, she raised her head high, cast back the glossy hair from her face, and exclaimed, "This is nonsense, this is folly! People, with their idle warnings, have put such vain imaginations in my heart. But they are gone, and that is over;" and, drawing the paper to her, she strove to write again.

CHAPTER XX.

Once more the courts of the castle of Heidelberg were crowded with horses and servants; once more guest after guest was arriving, not now for the purposes of revelry and mirth, but for the more serious object of hearing the decision of the Prince upon a question destined to affect the course of his whole life.

Amongst the rest who rode in, followed by their servants, were the two young Englishmen, with whom this history has been so busy. There was no hesitation now as to their admission; and, following some gentlemen who had dismounted in haste before them, they were soon in the hall, where the Elector was receiving his court. No ladies were present, but a door was open on his left, through which the sweet tones of woman's voice were heard; and Algernon Grey remarked, that several of those

present, though not all, after having spoken for a moment with the Prince, passed on, and entered the chamber to which that door led.

Through the greater part of the crowd—for the hall was already nearly full—seemed to reign a sort of joyful enthusiasm. Every countenance beamed with high thoughts; every voice spoke in gay tones; and nothing but satisfaction seemed to be spread around by the tidings, which were now general throughout the whole. If one or two of the noblemen, indeed, who stood immediately round the prince, bore a graver and more sedate aspect, it might well be attributed to courtly ceremony; and Frederic's own face, though there was nothing like thoughtless merriment upon it, was cheerful and serene, as if well and fully contented with the determinations to which it had come.

After waiting for a few minutes till several others had passed, Algernon Grey and his cousin approached and saluted the Prince.

"You have come somewhat late, gentlemen," he said; "but, nevertheless, I am right glad to see you here; and I trust you, sir," he continued, speaking to Algernon, "will understand the motives on which I have acted towards you, and, in your generous nature, will forgive and forget any pain I may have felt myself called upon to inflict."

"Entirely, sir," replied the young Englishman; "and I do assure your Highness, that I come to take my leave of you with a heart free from all rancour towards any one in your court."

"Ere I receive your farewell, sir," replied Frederic, "I will beseech you kindly to pass into the Queen's chamber, on the left, where your own fair Princess may have something to say to you;" and he pointed with his hand to the door which has been mentioned.

Algernon Grey bowed and passed on, followed by Lovet, who whispered, ere they reached the reception-room of the Princess, "You hear! she is queening it already. Mind that you give her the Majesty."

The next moment they had the whole scene of Elizabeth's saloon before them; and, although it would seem that there had been a certain degree of preparation, to produce a greater effect, yet assuredly there was enough to move even cold hearts to enthusiasm. There sat the young Princess of England, still in the first freshness of early life, without one charm impaired, one grace lost. Her eyes were lighted up with the fire of enterprise and courage—her lip smiling with warm hopes—her whole form breathing energy and courage. Even in the hand, which, stretched forth on the small table before her, grasped a roll of papers, might be seen the firm, unconquerable, yet mild, spirit within. Around and behind her stood a number of the ladies of her court,—all beautiful, all radiant with the same enthusiastic light which beamed in their sovereign's face. Around the room, with one or two a little advanced, and one close to the table at which the Electress sat, were all the first men of the Palatinate, young and old: some with white hair, and faces scarred and seamed; some in the prime of vigorous manhood; some with the faintly traced moustaches, showing the first step of adolescence; and, mixed with these, were nobles and princes from several other lands, ready to peril life and fortune for the fair being before them.

The buzz of conversation spread around, for smiles were on every face, the expectation of grand events in every breast; and the rich crimson hangings of the room, the gay dresses, the gold, the varied hues, the lace and jewels sparkling in the sun, rendered the scene to the eye as bright and impressive as a knowledge of the occasion, and anticipation of the results of that meeting, made it matter of deep interest to the thoughtful mind and feeling heart.

Algernon Grey paused for a few minutes near the door, gazing over the groups around, and meditating over all he saw, while the Princess spoke in a low tone with the gentleman at the table. He was a fine looking old man, with a keen eye and a powerfully built frame, and ever and anon he bowed his head with a grave smile, and answered something in the affirmative to what the Electress said. At length the young Englishman saw her eye rest upon him and Lovet, and as soon as her conversation with the other seemed brought to a close, he was about to step forward, when Elizabeth herself raised her voice, and, looking round, said aloud, in a peculiarly clear and silvery voice, "Princes and noble gentlemen, you have heard from my lord and husband the decision he has come to on the petition of the wronged Bohemian states, that he will take upon him the crown of this country, of which his own acts have deprived Ferdinand of Gratz, now emperor. I have no voice to tell the many mighty reasons which induced him, without aught of personal ambition, to accede to the wishes of a brave and indomitable nation, who sought in him both a ruler and a defender. Nor do I think it needful that I should. I will only ask, who would refuse the task? Who would reject the cry of the oppressed? Who would not become the defender of a brave nation struggling merely for its just rights? However, it is not to be denied that there are difficulties and dangers in the way, that mighty powers are opposed to us, that every effort of the oppressor, that every means which subtlety and despotism can employ, will be used to frustrate the efforts made for the maintenance of the privileges of the German princes, for the establishment of religious and political freedom amongst the members of this great confederation. I speak of these things as a woman; and, doubtless, my husband has explained them to you as a man. He has asked your aid, and, if need should be, your swords to support him, and, in supporting him, the freedom of the whole Germanic empire, princes and people alike, in maintaining the rights of every class, and freedom of faith, as the birth-right of our citizens. I appeal to you as a woman; I can use no such strong arguments; I ask you who will support with counsel and in arms Elizabeth Stuart? On your chivalry, on your gallantry, on your devotion I rely: I will found my throne upon the swords of such as those who now surround me; and if the hands that bear those swords be willing, as I believe they are, the banner has not yet been raised upon earth that can prevail against them."

She spoke eagerly, warmly, but without effort.

It seemed as if the words sprang from the heart to the lips, born of the feelings, and uttered without thought. Her cheek glowed; her lip trembled with emotion; her eye flashed; and when in the end it became dim with glittering dew, as the last sounds trembled on the ear, an enthusiastic murmur burst from the crowd, and almost every one took a step forward to express their devotion to her cause.

There was one, however, who was before the rest, a strong and gallant looking man, of seven or eight-and-twenty years of age, whose hair and beard, notwithstanding his youth, showed here and there a line of grey.

"Who is that?" asked Algernon, speaking to a gentleman near, as the other advanced straight towards the table.

"That is Christian of Anhalt; Christian, the younger; his father stands there behind—what is he about to do?"

"Madam," said Christian of Anhalt, bending low, "I will beseech your Majesty for a glove."

With a look of some surprise Elizabeth drew the glove from her hand, and gave it to him.

Deliberately, but quickly, he fastened it beneath the jewelled clasp which held the feather in his hat; and, pointing to it with a proud smile, exclaimed,—"In court, and camp, and battle-field, I will bear this token of my service to your Majesty, till death lays my head beneath the turf—so help me, God!"

Lord Craven, who had stood near, merely touched the hilt of his sword with his finger, and said, "Madam, this is yours, and with it my whole heart."

"And ours, and ours, and ours," cried a number of voices round, in every tone of enthusiasm.

Elizabeth spread forth her hands, as if overcome by the burst of energetic love that her words had called forth; and then, pressing her fingers on her eyes for a moment, remained silent. The next instant she raised her head, showing the traces of tears.

"Thanks, thanks!" she cried; "I now am well assured. Yet will I not spare one noble cavalier, who has a gallant heart to fight for a lady's service; for they can wield swords in case of need; and we shall have to think of marching armies and rude shocks of war, where men are in their place. From these, and worse than these, if need may be, I will not shrink myself; but, by my husband's side, will encounter weal or woe until the last. Ladies, however, I will dispense with, as much as possible; for I have no right to take them from their softer duties, to share those tasks fate has allotted me. The Countess of Löwenstein has her husband's good leave to follow him to war, as war will be perchance, and the fair lady of —— —— follows me for my love. Though my train will thus be small, yet, with such princely nobles round me, I shall want no kind tendance; and, as friend and brothers, in them will I put my trust, in them my highest hope. On Saturday next, our departure will take place. I beseech all, who can prepare in time, to be ready then, and all others to follow. Methinks, I am very nearly sure of all my husband's countrymen. I see several of my own present. One has at once promised me his aid. What say the others?—Will you not go, my lord?" and she fixed her eyes directly upon Algernon Grey; "will you not support Elizabeth Stuart, with a still young, but often tried sword? Will you not follow her, where great deeds are to be done?"

"I say, like my friend, Lord Craven, madam," answered Algernon Grey, lightly touching the hilt of his weapon, "this is your Majesty's, and with it my whole heart. I go with you, of course; for it shall never be said that honour called me, and I refused to follow."

"And you, sir?" continued Elizabeth, turning to Lovet; "we know your reputation; you are a knight, brave, faithful, though fanciful, we have heard. What says your fancy to this expedition?"

"Why may it please your Majesty," answered Lovet, with a smile, "my fancy, like a young and feeble child, is in leading-strings to my noble cousin here. We have a compact that will not let us separate, like a leash between two greyhounds. Henceforth, the noose of the leash is in your hands. You may slip us at any prey you will; and I warrant that we dash forward as far, or farther, than the rest. I could have wished a few things altered, it is true; when, methinks, the state of Bohemia, and your Majesty's prospects, will be both much improved."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Elizabeth; "what may they be?"

"Why first, and as the principal,—for the others are not worth naming," Lovet answered, "more women in your Majesty's court. Depend upon it, bright eyes are great inducements to great deeds—a soft sort of whetstone to sharp swords, but yet it is so; and, besides, you do not consider the unanimity which a number of ladies give to any counsels."

"Methinks, you are jesting," answered the Princess; "at all events, slanderous men have said that ladies bring rather discord than unanimity."

"Discord amongst themselves," said Lovet; "but, if there be enough of them, unanimity amongst men. It all depends upon the numbers. With only two in your whole court, and some five or six hundred gentlemen, all in love with them together, as in duty we are bound to be, the wind of our sighs will toss about your banners in a strange fashion, even if we do not turn our swords against each other's throats, in order to reduce our numbers to the number of the fair. I do beseech your Highness, supply us somewhat more bountifully with objects of adoration. I frankly confess I am an idolator, and must have my share of gods and goddesses."

"Well, well," replied Elizabeth, "that is a fault that may be amended. Is there aught else you would cavil at, Sir William?"

"Naught, madam," answered the Englishman, "unless it be that I do believe you will have so many gallant hearts all armed in your defence, that the task will be too easy, and each man's mite of honour not worth the having."

"There is a quality in glory," replied the English Princess, "that expands it to embrace all who truly seek it. It is the heart and will to do great deeds that truly merit honour. It were a poor and pitiful thing, indeed, if it

could fall down at opportunity. The world may praise the fortunate man; even princes may raise, and courts may applaud; but true honour is the diamond which, though only admired when brought forth and cut, is of as high value even in the dark mine as on an emperor's crown. Fortunate or unfortunate, with opportunity or none, the man who, with a brave heart, arms himself in this our righteous cause, shall still have glory for his meed; and times to come, when his name is written, be it in tale or history, or the mere record of the family-book, shall add, as a mark of ever-living honour, 'He was one of those who drew the sword for Frederic of Bohemia, and Elizabeth, his queen; he was one of those who fought for a nation's freedom from oppression; he was one of those who aided to establish right against wrong, and set men's hearts and consciences at liberty.'"

Elizabeth paused, with the marks of strong and enthusiastic emotions visible upon her countenance, and a murmur of applause ran through the assembled nobles, while one turned to the other; and, though perhaps each might use a different mode of expression, there can be little or no doubt that but one sentiment found utterance,—"Who would not fight for such a being as that!"

After a brief silence, the Electress resumed:—"A thousand thanks, noble gentlemen, to all. Had there been a doubt or misgiving in my heart, your words would have removed it; and now I will beseech you, as you go hence, to speak once more with my noble husband, and to give him, or rather his master of the horse, your names, and the number of followers you will bring with you: not that we may count our strength, for we have no apprehensions, but that lodging and provision for our train may be fully provided by the way: Farewell! And once more, thanks! deep, heartfelt thanks!" Thus saying, she rose and retired by the door behind her, followed by her ladies.

Slowly, and conversing as they went, the gentlemen there assembled returned by the hall, where they had left the Elector and his court; and each, passing before him, spoke to him a moment in turn. When, at length, Algernon Grey approached, the Elector addressed him with a smile, as if quite sure that his purpose had been changed.

"Well, sir," he said, "are you still determined to bid us farewell?"

"For a brief space, your Highness," cried Algernon Grey. "I understand you do not take your departure till Saturday next."

"Not till Saturday week next," replied the Elector; "but I hope then you will bear me company; for my fair wife, who reckons much upon her eloquence, counted fully on winning you to our cause."

"I will go with your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey; "and will but take my leave for a short time, in order that I may make preparation for serving you more effectually. I have with me but a few servants now; but I think, ere long, I may be enabled to swell your force with a small troop of followers not inexperienced in the trade of war. Some have served with me in this Venetian business; and though they returned to England, when there was no longer employment for their swords, yet they will gladly join me again in such a cause as this."

"But if you go back to your own land, you can never be here in time," replied the Elector. "Remember, there is but ten days."

"England will not see me for many a year, my lord," replied Algernon Grey; "but I can make my arrangements better elsewhere than here. I will be ready to accompany your Majesty on the day named. My followers can join me at Prague; and though you may not see me till the very day, do not doubt of my coming, I beseech you."

"I will not," repeated the Elector, earnestly; "I will not. When an honourable man has given his word, it is better than the bond of other people. How many men, think you, you will have with you? We will have food and lodging ready for them all."

"Not so, your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey; "I defray my own followers, wherever I be. Lodging, indeed, it may be necessary to find; but as I lead them, so do I feed them, and pay all expenses. Lodging, indeed, I must have; for the peasantry of the country—ay, and the citizens of the town, have a grand objection, it would seem, to receive strangers in their houses, especially if they be soldiers; and therefore, in this, perhaps, your Majesty's officers must interfere, otherwise it may be difficult to find quarters at once. The number, however, will be about from forty to fifty. Their arms, their clothing, and their food, must be my affair; the rest your Majesty shall provide."

"Leaving little but thanks to furnish," answered Frederic. "However, be it as you will, my noble friend; I am neither poor enough, nor wealthy enough, to take so generous an offer amiss. Farewell for the present; and if you should want aid in any case, two words to our chancellor will be enough to bring it."

CHAPTER XXI.

The next ten days in the world's history are like those minutes of the night, when the hour strikes just as the eyes are closed to sleep, and a period passes by unnoted, except by those who dream. There are many such pauses in all annals, where no event marks the passing time on the recording page; and yet how full of interest to many are these unstoried lapses in the march of time. How many gay scenes, how many sad ones, how much of comedy, how much of tragedy, have been enacted in the days not chronicled! How many events have taken place in narrow domestic circles, which, spreading wider in their influences, like the ripples round a stone cast into a clear lake, have carried, almost imperceptibly, the floating fragments of great things to the shore of fate!

I have said that these ten days passed over unnoted, except by those who dream; but one of those was Algernon Grey, who, at the small town of Maunheim, passed the intervening space between his leave-taking of the king of Bohemia, and his return to Heidelberg, busied

to say the truth, more with deep thoughts than important arrangements. His letters were soon written, his courier soon despatched, and all those measures taken which were necessary to call a lordly following to accompany him on his expedition, and to insure rapid supplies of money to meet even more than his own probable expenses. The rest of his time was given up to meditation; for he had left Lovet at Heidelberg, agreeing at once that the short distance which separated them could be considered no infringement of the engagement into which they had entered.

Close rooms in narrow inns have neither a very wholesome nor a very pleasant character. Such as the small fortress, that Maunheim was in those days, could alone afford, offered no great inducement to remain within doors; and the greater part of his time was spent in wandering by the clear and glistening waters of the Rhine; and, while the current hurried rapidly by, drawing images of life and human fate from the bright waters, as they danced and fled beneath his eye. However those images might arise, the train still led him on to the place which he had lately left, and to one fair dream-like form which rose before him as a remembered vision of delight. All that had taken place immediately before, all the joys and sorrows he had known, would have been but as phantasms, had not still enduring and immortal passion stamped the whole with the mark of reality, and told him that the bitterness was true: it was but the dream of happiness that was false.

Few scenes could have been worse chose to chase such sombre thoughts, to wake him from those dreams of the heart which he believed he had indulged too long. The merry crowd, the gay, enlivening multitude, the ever shifting scenes of busy life might have led on thought after thought to occupy each hour, and banish vain regrets. The grander scenes of nature, the towering mountain, the deep valley, the profound, dark lake, the tempest and the storm, the forest, with its solemn glades and innumerable trees, might well have possessed him, even though it were at first but in part, with other images, and weaned him, if I may so call it, from the engrossing topic which now mastered all his mind. But that calm, grand river, flowing on in its meditative majesty, with sunshine and brightness on its peaceful waters, and none to break, even for a moment, the monotony of solitude, seemed to counsel thoughts of peace, and joy, and love, and spread like a charm over the young wanderer the powerful, passionate calmness in which it itself flows on. Agnes Herbert, she whom he loved beyond all power of forgetfulness, was ever present to his heart and mind. He thought of her in her sparkling beauty, as he at first beheld her, in scenes of reverie and joy: he thought of her in agony and helplessness, as he had seen her in the whirling waters of the dark Neckar: he thought of her in calm serenity and high-minded meditation, as they had wandered together over the moonlight terraces, amidst gardens, and woods, and flowers. And he loved her, oh, how he loved her! How his heart yearned, how his bosom panted to return and press her in his arms; but that a dark and irrevocable barrier stood between, and mocked the eager longing of his love.

The common things of life seemed nothing to him; the ordinary events of the day, the meal-time and the sleeping hour, scarcely broke the lapse of the long, only dream. It was ever, ever Agnes, that was present; and when his eyes, worn down by weariness, were closed to waking things, she came upon the wings of the night, and visited his spirit in its sleep. He felt —he could not but feel—that to his peace, at least, her presence was less dangerous than her absence.

Thus passed day after day, till the last came; and then, to his surprise, by a boat towed up the Rhine, some eight or ten of his old followers, whom he expected not for weeks, presented themselves at the landing-place. His messenger had proved speedy and intelligent; and all those whom he had found in London, he had urged to hurry into Germany without delay. The activity and preparation gave some relief to their young lord's mind; and on the same night he set out to return to Heidelberg, at which place he arrived some two hours after dark, taking his way direct to the inn where he had formerly lodged, and where he had left his cousin.

The town, as he passed through, showed a gay and animated scene; for whatever portion of monotony had existed therein, while the streets presented nothing but their usual population of citizens and students, was now removed by the appearance of numerous parties of military retainers, whose arms here and there caught the light, as they passed by the unclosed windows, from which the beams of taper or lamp were streaming forth. All those inventions which give to our streets of the present times a light little less powerful than that of day, were then unknown. No gas displayed the face of house after house in long perspective; no lamp at every corner of the street lighted the wanderer on his way; no lantern, even, swung across with awkward chains, afforded a dim light to horseman or driver, as he paced slowly along in the midst of the tall and narrow streets. But, nevertheless, every here and there a faint beam, straying through the dull small pane of greenish glass in some still uncurtained casement, fell upon the gay, laced cloak, or brilliant cuirass, which appeared for an instant in the midst of some military party, and was then lost again the moment after, bequeathing the light to the wearer's successor in the ranks.

Round the door of the Golden Stag a great number of persons of different classes were assembled; and some of them seemed to be engaged in the pleasant occupation of wrangling with the host or his servants, in regard to accommodation for the night. No vain and ridiculous attempt had been made at that time to regulate the dealings of one man with another, by the incessant intervention of the police, which at all times aggravates the confusion which men pretend it is established to diminish. The interests of each individual were left to adjust themselves with those of others by the natural course, with this safeguard, that justice was always to be obtained promptly when injustice or wrong was committed; but there

was no endeavor to make men walk in a straight line, if they liked a crooked one, provided that crooked line did not trespass upon the comfort or rights of any one else. A few disputes might, and did occur, as was the case at the door of the Golden Stag; but they very soon came to an end; for knowing that the innkeeper was as much the lord of his own inn as the baron of his own castle, men satisfied themselves with grumbling, when they were told there was no room for them, and sought another lodging with the more haste, because accommodation seemed to be scarce.

As soon as the worthy host perceived Algernon Grey, however, he and his drawers bowed down to the ground. The young gentleman was assured that his old apartments were kept quite ready for him; and, although his entertainer viewed the numbers of his swollen train with some degree of apprehension, yet great care was taken to say nothing before the crowd, which could give any disappointed gentleman cause to suppose that such a party was received without previous notice of its numbers. When the horses had been delivered over to the care of hostlers and horse-boys, under the superintendence of the young Englishman's servants, and Algernon Grey and his host were ascending towards the rooms above, then poured forth the difficulties. Where he was to put the train, how he was to accommodate them, what room he could find for so many, where he was to get beds even of an inferior description, were mighty puzzling questions for the worthy landlord, with his house quite full; but, nevertheless, all was at length arranged. The antechamber was filled with truckle-beds and mattresses on the floor; the room by the side of Algernon's own bed-room received five of his companions; and two more obtained lodging in the rooms previously appropriated to his servants.

This being all arranged, he descended to the public hall, where Lovet, he was informed, was profoundly engaged with his supper. He found him surrounded by half a dozen German gentlemen, with whom he had made acquaintance, eking out very good French, of which they could understand a part, with very bad German, of which they understood not quite so much. They comprehended, however, that he was laughing at everything and everybody—himself amongst the rest—and smoothing their beards, and curling up their moustaches, they seemed to derive a considerable portion of grave amusement from his merriment, which, to say the truth, directed several shafts among themselves, although they were utterly insensible of the point.

"Ah, Algernon!" exclaimed Lovet, starting up and laying down his knife; "I thought you were as treacherous as a Chloe, and had vanished from my sight with some swain of the Rhine-plain. Welcome back to Heidelberg; but have you heard the news?"

"No," answered Algernon Grey; "are there any changes?"

"No," answered Lovet, "none that I have heard of. The Elector and his party, numbering, with ourselves, some six hundred horse, set out to-morrow a quarter of an hour after daybreak. The Electress follows somewhat later with a body of chosen cavaliers to guard and accompany her. All the world is so full of enthusiasm, that if any man were to say 'Come with me and conquer Turkey, let us sack Hungary, or pillage Russia,' they would all go without asking whether the way lay either north or south. Good faith! I am as enthusiastic as the rest; and, like one of a flock of sheep in a dark night, I am all agog to jostle shoulders with my fat companions on whatsoever road the great bell-wether leads."

"And what road is that to be?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Heaven only knows!" exclaimed Lovet, sitting down to the table again; "I have asked no questions. All I know is, that we make straight for a place with an inconceivable name, something like Waldsaxon, a town in the upper Palatinate. I sent on all your spare horses, as they arrived, together with three or four I had purchased for myself, telling the grooms to find the road the best way they could, and so they are probably now in the heart of Austria."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Lovet," cried his cousin; "where have the men gone to? If we are to make a rapid march, as doubtless we must, we must have the means of remounting; and a mistake would be no jest."

"Assuredly not," answered Lovet; "and, as I have scarcely time to finish my supper, before soft devotion calls me hence, sit down and take some food, and I will tell you, most noble cousin. Here, bring platters and knives, fellows; more wine, more meat, more everything. Well, cousin mine, looking on a fair picture of the country, I sent the men on half way to a place called Alkdorf, bidding them there wait for our coming, taking especial care to get themselves dead drunk, if it were possible, for the three consecutive days after their arrival. You will mark the policy, wise Algernon; for, as a man must get drunk sometimes, and always will get drunk in his master's absence, it was much better that they should do it by command than disobedience: and, fixing on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for the operation, I left them Friday for lassitude, and Saturday for refreshment; so that by the time we arrive, they will be as brisk as larks; and the horses, if they have got drunk likewise. This partridge, stewed with sour cabbage, is the only excellent thing I have found in Germany—with one exception, cousin Algernon, with one exception. I beseech you take a wing thereof; for I would fain share with you as far as possible; and of the other good, which fortune sends me, I cannot even spare a sigh—much less a merry-thought. What will you have in the way of wine? Here is Burgundy, for which I sent a man express into the heart of France; and here is the juice of the Rhinegau, with some drops from the bishop of Bamberg's cellar, of which he was plundered when last the quarrelsome men of this country fought about they knew not what."

Algernon Grey sat down, and after musing for a minute or two, joined his companion in his meal. The conversation went on in the same tone in which it had begun; Lovet evading, under cover of his habitual jesting replies, any direct answer to unpleasant questions. Upon some points, however, Algernon Grey

pressed him somewhat hard, asking if the Electress had made any change in her arrangements; and, when he said, laughing, "I am not one of her counsel, cousin mine," pursuing the inquiry by demanding, "Has she made any that you know of, William?"

"Oh, a hundred," answered Lovet; "she goes in a carriage instead of on horseback, they tell me: her gown is to be green instead of pink—but, good faith! I must away. I shall see you, doubtless, ere you go to sleep, though strong repose to-night will be needful; for we shall have busy days before us; and, if the devil has not grown old and lazy, there is work ready carved out to occupy every minute of the next two years. What a happy thing it is, Algernon, that there is a devil; were it not for him the waters of the world would stagnate and get all over duck-weed, like a standing pool. Nay, do not look grave, grim cousin; adieu! adieu!" and away he went, leaving Algernon Grey to make his arrangements for the following morning as best he could.

Habituated, however, as the young Englishman had been from his very boyhood to command and direct, no great difficulties attended his course. He found that the great court of the castle was appointed for the assembling of all gentlemen of noble birth, who were to accompany the Elector towards Prague; and that all who brought military retainers to his aid were to direct their followers to assemble in the market-place, and to join the royal party in order, as it descended from the palace. All his commands were soon given. Three of his servants were, by this time, well acquainted with the town of Heidelberg. Everything was prepared over night; and, after waiting for the return of his cousin till the clock had struck eleven, Algernon Grey retired to rest.

He had ordered himself to be called at half-past five on the following morning; but, somewhat before that hour, picking his way through the anti-chamber, Lovet knocked hard at his door, shouting, "Up, Algernon, up! The people are swarming to the castle, like bees to a hive. Let us go with them, or we may get stung;" and away he went again to finish his own preparations. In about three quarters of an hour more, the two cousins were riding up the hill, followed only by the servants necessary to hold their horses; and, passing a number of gentlemen not so well mounted as themselves, they reached the gates, where their names were demanded and compared with a list in the porter's hands. On giving those which they had assumed, instant admission was afforded to the two gentlemen themselves; their servants and horses being left with a crowd of others without. In the court some forty or fifty gentlemen were found assembled; and, assuredly, no want of enthusiastic hope appeared amongst them. All were cheerful, all were full of busy activity; each man encouraged his neighbor, each man strove to excite in others the same glad expectations that were sporting wildly in his own bosom.

Lovet seemed, during his cousin's absence, to have made a very general acquaintance amongst the principal personages of the electoral court. Hardly a face presented itself in the grey light of the early morning, of which he did not seem to have some knowledge; and to every third or fourth man he spoke, or gave some sign of recognition. He appeared, indeed, to have become extremely popular, his jests, whether delivered in exceedingly bad German, or good French, were laughed at and enjoyed; and, as the two cousins passed on, it was evident, as so frequently occurs in life, that the worthy and the high minded was regarded with cold doubt; while the one certainly the least estimable was met with pleasure and regard. It must not be denied that Algernon Grey in some degree felt this difference, not very painfully, it is true; but still he thought, "This is, in some degree, my own fault. I have suffered circumstances with which the world has nothing to do to affect my demeanour to the world, —I must change this and be myself again. The time was when I could be as gay as Lovet, though in a different way. I will see whether those days cannot come again."

As he thus thought, he saw the powerful form of the Baron of Oberntraut crossing the court-yard towards them; and, instantly advancing to meet him, he grasped him warmly by the hand.

"Ah, my good friend," said the young Englishman, "I rejoice to see you well enough to ride with us."

But Oberntraut shook his head. "Alas!" he said, "I am not to be one of the party. It is judged dangerous for me to undertake so long a journey; and, if I am not summoned to Bohemia, it would seem the intention of my Prince to confer upon me a charge here, honourable, but somewhat inactive, I fear; and yet, when I consider what is likely, what dark clouds are gathering in the horizon, and what the policy, though not the honour, of the Catholic league may induce them to do, I think I may find work for myself yet; nevertheless I envy you, who are going at once to busy scenes, and trust I shall be permitted to follow soon; but still, before you go, let me make you known to one or two of those you may most esteem amongst your companions. Follow me for a moment; there stands Christian of Anhalt, and with him one or two others of the best."

The young baron's tone had, as the reader may have perceived, undergone a complete change. The quick and fiery spirit, the daring and energetic character, remained unaltered, as the whole of the rest of his life proved; but the first check he had received in life had worked most beneficially in subduing the arrogance which had been generated by long-continued success, and a sense of superiority to most of those around him. With a generous heart and an intelligent mind, even towards Algernon Grey himself, he felt very different sensations from those which any ordinary man would have experienced. He entertained a sense of gratitude towards him for the better sensations which he had been the means of producing; and he felt a noble anxiety to show, that so far from regarding the young Englishman's conduct with any lingering rancour, he looked upon it rather with admiration and respect.

Following him across the court-yard, Algernon was soon introduced to several of the most distinguished of the friends of the young king

of Bohemia ; but, while speaking with the elder prince of Anhalt, a voice from the steps summoned two or three of the principal noblemen by name to the presence of the Elector ; and, in a few minutes after, the same tongue called upon Lord Craven, Master Algernon Grey, and several other foreign gentlemen, to present themselves for a moment.

Conversing with his friend Lord Craven, Algernon was conducted to one of the great halls in the building of Ottho Henry, where, in the midst of much bustle and some confusion, he found Frederic the Fifth booted and spurred for his departure, with a number of gentlemen standing round, and the Electress-Mother, with one or two ladies of the court, at a little distance. Elizabeth of England was not present ; and over the group around Louisa Juliana, the young Englishman's eye roamed in vain, seeking the form of Agnes Herbert. At that parting moment his heart longed for a few words more, for one last sight of that fair face, for the sound, if but for an instant, of that melodious voice.

As he approached, Frederic was turning as if to speak with his mother, but, his eye lighting upon Lord Craven and the rest, he paused to speak with them, separately, for a moment or two. His principal object in calling them to his presence seemed but to conciliate regard by an act of courtesy ; and to each he had something kind and graceful to say, with that winning manner which is always powerful to obtain regard, but not always to command obedience.

" Ah, my unknown friend," he said, when Algernen's turn came, " I was sure you would not fail me ; and, when I heard of your arrival last night, it gave me great pleasure, but no surprise. What men can you count upon from England ?"

" I have only fifteen with me at present, sir," answered Algernon Grey ; " but I think I can promise that the number in Prague, ere a month, will be fifty ; and those not only men fit to bear arms, but to train others, should need be ; for they have been taught in a good school, and practised in some sharp encounters."

" Thanks, thanks," replied the king of Bohemia ; " that is a most serviceable addition to our force—wait, and we will go down with you. You will ride near us, that we may have some conversation with you as we go."

He then turned to his mother, and, taking her in his arms, embraced her with every mark of strong affection. " Farewell, my dearest mother !" he said, while the tears rose in his eyes : " God protect you and me ! Under Him, it is to you I look for the safety of this fair land I am leaving."

The Electress did not reply, but pressed her son warmly to her heart, and then, wringing his hand hard, pressed her overflowing eyes upon his shoulder. After a few moments, Frederic gently disengaged himself, and took a step away, turned for another embrace, and then, bursting from her, strode across the hall, followed by the crowd of gentlemen around.

The Electress gazed after him with a sad and solemn look, then clasped her hands without lifting her bended head, and exclaimed, " There goes the Palatinate into Bohemia."

The Elector paused not to listen, for he felt his emotions overpowering him ; and, doubtless, the sound of many feet drowned the words ere they reached his ears. As soon as he appeared in the court, a shout, not like an English cheer, but sufficiently expressive of gratulation, welcomed his approach ; and a number of voices exclaimed, " Long live Frederic, King of Bohemia !"

The Emperor raised his plumed hat and bowed, exclaiming the next moment, — " To horse, gentlemen, to horse ! There are too many sweet ties and dear memories here. We must break away ;" and, crossing the court on foot, he passed for the last time through the deep archway of his hereditary castle, followed by the crowd of noble and enthusiastic gentlemen who had assembled to accompany him, and sprang upon the back of a magnificent horse, which two grooms, running in haste, led up to the farther side of the drawbridge.

His followers hurried to mount ; and in a moment after, the cavalcade was descending the hill. The fresh and fiery chargers were eager to dash on ; some reared and plunged ; some pulled hard at the rein ; but, strange to say, the horse of the young King, though unquestionably the finest and most powerful animal of the whole group, full of life, vigour, and activity, stumbled at the first step and well nigh fell. Never, even in the augury-loving days of the old Romans, was there a time when omens of any kind were more eagerly watched, or produced a deeper impression on the minds of men ; and it was easy to see a grave and distressed look spread over the countenances of many of the young monarch's followers, as they marked this untoward accident.

" That is unfortunate," said the younger Christian of Anhalt, who was riding near Algernon Grey.

" Nay, rather fortunate that the horse did not fall," replied the Englishman ; " but do you really put any faith in such indications ?"

" Not I," answered the Prince ; " but omens often make misfortunes, though they don't predict them. The courage of half a score among us is already cooled by that horse's stumble ; and I have heard of a battle lost by the first look of a comet's tail. Heaven send us no more such auguries, or we shall reach Prague with cold hearts."

" Mine is cold enough already," answered Algernon Grey, who had determined, on the expedition before him, to throw away the reserve which had so long overshadowed him, and cultivate, by frankness, the regard of those who were to be his companions for many months ; " mine is cold enough already, though Heaven knows, not cold in the cause of your noble Prince."

" Ay, and what has chilled it ?" asked Christian of Anhalt.

" Many things," answered Algernon Grey, with a faint smile ; " some treachery, some disappointment, some burdensome bonds, formed by good, misjudging friends, which can neither be broken nor shaken off."

" A bad case," answered Christian of Anhalt ; " but, methinks, were I you, I would never suffer things that cannot be mended to weigh down my light free heart, but would rather throw them

back upon fate's hands, and be merry in spite of fortune."

"A good philosophy," answered Algernon Grey; "and I am resolved to try it; but yet you may one day find it difficult to practise what you teach."

"Nay, not a whit," replied his companion. "We may learn philosophy even from the brute beasts; they sigh not over the morrow or the yesterday. It is only because we make curses of powers that were given for blessings, and use our memory and our foresight, not for warning and precaution, but for regret and despair."

"Excellent good," cried Lovet, who was riding but a step behind. "The same doctrine I have been preaching to him for the last two months! Me he would never listen to; now he will be all docility; for a prophet is no prophet in his own country, and a cousin's counsels, like the ale of the servants' hall, always taste pickled to the master of the house."

"There is some difference between your sage advice, William, and our noble comrade's," answered Algernon Grey.

"Not a bit," cried Lovet. "Enjoy the present: forget the past; let the future take care of itself. Such is the cream of the morality of each; and you only think otherwise because a stale pie tastes fresh upon a clean napkin. But here we are coming to the square. On my life, a mighty fine body of men, and in good order, too. There must have been a shrewd head to marshal them."

CHAPTER XXII.

The morning was fair, but sultry; the pace at which the cavalcade proceeded was, for several miles, very quick; and the exhilarating effect of rapid motion would probably again have raised the spirits of all, had it not been for a certain oppressive feeling in the air, which rendered the application of the spur necessary, even to strong and high-blooded horses, at the end of five miles. Algernon Grey felt the influence of the atmosphere as much as any one. In vain he endeavoured to shake off the gloom that hung over him, to laugh and talk with those around, to give back to Lovet jest for jest; the thoughts which he wished to banish would return and struggle to possess him wholly. We all know we must all have felt the influence of particular states of air, not alone upon our corporeal frame, but also upon the very energies of the mind; when, without losing in the slightest degree our power over the intellect, we cannot command that finer and more supple element in our complicated nature—whatever it be called—which gives birth to the feelings of the moment. Reason is vain against it; resolution is useless; we may govern the external display, but we cannot avoid the internal sensation; and a lustrous brightness, or a dim cloud, spreads over every subject of contemplation from some hidden source of light and shadow within us. Who can say, "I will be merry to-day!" The man who does so is a fool; for not the brightest gifts of fortune, not the sunshine of all external things, not every effort of a strong determination, not the exercise of wit, wisdom, and philosophy, will enable him to succeed, unless the spirit of cheerfulness be in his own heart. He may say, "I will be calm;" and many a man has been so, in the midst of intense sufferings, to the eye of the world. Many a man, perhaps, has been so in his own opinion; but I much doubt whether some one of the many modifications of vanity was not, even then, putting a cheat upon himself.

With Algernon Grey the effort was vain; he felt depressed, and he struggled against the depression; but the enemy conquered, and, foot by foot, gained ground upon him. First, he gave way so far as to think of Agnes Herbert, to dwell upon the recollection of her beauty and her excellence. Then he strove to cast his eyes forward into the future, and to think alone of the coming events; but what a sad contrast did they present to the images just banished! war, and strife, and the fiery turbulence of ambition, and the low, mean intrigues of courts, and cold pageantry, and idle revelling; instead of beauty, and love, and hope, and sweet domestic peace! It was too painful to rest upon; and his mind turned to her he loved again; but the same bright visions, in which he had indulged for a moment, would not come back at his bidding. He thought of Agnes, it is true; but at the same time he remembered that he was leaving her for ever; that he was voluntarily casting away the early joy of first love, the only refuge in which his heart could now find peace, the sweetest light that had ever dawned upon existence, all that imagination could have pictured of happiness and contentment. And deep, deep, to his very heart, he felt the sacrifice; and his spirit writhed in the torture which he inflicted on himself. "Should he really never see her more?" he asked himself; "or should he see her again, but as the wife of another?" There was agony and despair in the very thought; and yet, what could he do? how could he act to prevent it? how could he shut out that terrible but too certain conviction? It was impossible to change his hard fate. It was impossible even to dream that it would be changed; and in the end he gave himself up to dull and heavy despondency. His feelings had been grave and sad even when he came to Heidelberg. He had believed that he was destined to go through life unloving and unbeloved, linked to one whose reported conduct was, to say the least, light; whom he only remembered as a proud, haughty child; whom he only knew by the evil rumours which had reached him. But since that time a light had arisen on the darkness of such feelings, to go out as suddenly as it had been kindled, and leave the night tenfold more gloomy than before. He had learned to love, but without hope; and what state can be more terrible to a young and passionate heart?

On such things he pondered as they rode along, and they soon absorbed his whole attention. He marked not with any degree of accuracy the road they took; he hardly saw the houses, or the trees, or the mountains as they passed. He marked not the passing hours, or the changes of the light and sky. But there were others in the train whose eyes were

more busily employed; and amongst them were those of his own servants, who, with less to occupy their thoughts, felt, or seemed to feel, the fatigues of the way and the oppression of the sultry atmosphere far more than their lord.

"It is mighty hot, Tony," said Frill, the page, wiping his brow with a delicate kerchief; "and methinks the folks are riding exceedingly fast, considering the sultriness of the temperature, and the capability of their quadrupeds."

"Ay, good lack, it is hot," answered the servant; "but the quadrupeds, as you call them, Master Frill, can bear it quite as well as the two-legged beasts perched upon them. There thou art now thyself, mounted upon the tall roan, with thy red-heeled riding boots sticking out from under thy cloak, like a small Cornish crow upon the back of a big sheep; and losing much moisture from thy brow and temples, while the good beast has hardly turned a hair. Now, I will warrant thee, Frill, thou art thinking in a miserly spirit of the world of essences and perfumed soap it will cost to cleanse thee of all this dust; but I will console thee, Frill; I will relieve thy mind. Thy conscience shall be spared the small sin of pilfering odours out of our lord's saddle-bags."

"I have no need to pilfer, Tony," answered the boy; "I leave that to you. I have got all I want in my own saddle-bags, and ask nothing but a little fair water."

"That thou shalt have in abundance, Frill," replied his companion; "and sooner, perchance, than thou thinkest; for, if yon great leaden cloud lie not, thou shalt have water enough, within an hour, as to spare thee all future washing for the day, and make thee forswear all such liquids for a month to come."

"It looks marvellous like it," answered Frill, eyeing the heavens, with a somewhat rueful look.

"Like it, but not marvellous, friend Frill," answered Tony; "thunderstorms will come in most countries of the world; and rain will fall; and wind will blow; and grass will spring up with its universal evergreen; and pages will say flat things in pleasant tones, and think themselves mighty wise in their estate."

"Do you think it will thunder, Tony?" asked the youth, in a tone which made the older servant fancy he was somewhat apprehensive.

"Ay, that it will," replied Tony; "it will thunder to your heart's content. I should not wonder if we saw half a dozen of those gay lords struck with the lightning. I have seldom seen so great a bellyful of thunderbolts as that one up there."

"If it do, Tony, there's a good creature, just catch the bridle of my horse; for I doubt if I have strength to hold him. Saw you not how he plunged and passaged just as we were setting out? I wrung my two arms nearly off to keep him in."

"Oh, I will put to a stronger arm in case of need," answered Tony. "I thought your horse and all would have been over into the valley, at which I should have rejoiced with sincere friendship, as an honourable and distinguished death for one so young. But here I must take care that you do not die in a by-road like a pilgrim's donkey, and so I'll stop your beast's capering if he should be riotous. But mark you, master Frill, how our friend with the hawk's eyes is plying our lord and his cousin with sweet talk. Now I will not give the value of a goose's egg for anything that he says; but yet be you certain, good friend Frill, that he says nothing without an object. It would be worth something to know what that object is; for then one could watch his working for it."

"Can he be wishing to get our lord killed," asked Frill, "if he puts him upon such expeditions as these?"

"Not so, master page," answered Tony; "first, because he did not put him upon this expedition. I heard him arguing reasonably enough one day against his going."

"Ay," answered Frill; "but I saw a boy in the street of Heidelberg, driving a large old bear, and when he wanted him to go on, he pulled him back by a string round his hind leg."

"A savoury comparison for our noble master," said Tony; "but yet there may be some truth in it;" and, scratching his head, with one finger thrust under his broad hat, he meditated for a moment or two. "No, no," he continued, at length, "he could gain nothing by it; that's not his object. He is but his cousin by the side of the woman. The title dies with our lord, if he has no children; and the estates go to the Howards. It would be worse for him, rather than better, if he died; for I know he borrows money from time to time. It can't be that, Master Frill."

"I'll tell you what, Tony," replied the boy; "I think you might get something from old Paul Watson, who joined us with the rest at Mannheim. He was bred up in the Lady Susan's household, and Sir William is always down there, I hear."

"Get something from Paul Watson!" cried Tony. "Get juice out of a stone! Why, I do not believe he has ten words to give to any man; but I'll try, notwithstanding. He knows, I dare say, if he would but speak; for these silent fellows use their eyes, if not their tongues. Let us ride up to him and hear what he will say. On my life, I wish the storm would come down, for this heat is unbearable."

Thus saying, he pushed on his horse at the side of the cavalcade, till he reached the spot where a well-equipped body of armed men was moving along in the Elector's train. The difference of their accoutrements and the figures of their horses, combining great bone and strength with agility, marked them out for English soldiers; and, drawing in his rein by the side of a man some fifty years of age, with grey hair and moustache, Tony commenced a conversation, saying, "Well, Paul, I have not seen you for more than nine months; how has it gone with you since?"

"Well," answered the man, scarcely looking round.

"And what have you been about ever since?" asked Tony.

"Many things," replied Paul Watson.

"You have been down at the Lady Susan's, I hear," continued Tony, "in your old haunts, Master Watson. I dare say you enjoyed yourself mightily."

"Yes," answered his companion.

"Was Sir William down there then?" continued Tony, in a careless manner.

Paul Watson nodded his head.

"I wonder what is his object in going about with our lord here, after letting him wander so many years by himself," said Tony, musingly.

"Don't know," replied Paul Watson.

"What was he about so long down there?" was Tony's next question; and to this he got the only satisfactory answer he had yet received.

"Making love to the lady," answered his companion, with a grin and a sort of gasp, as if the number of words, though they would be spoken, half choked him in the utterance.

"Oh, oh!" cried Tony, his eyes lighting up with intelligence; but he had no opportunity of inquiring farther; for one of the Elector's officers, riding along the line, motioned him to fall back, saying, "Keep the order, keep the order!"

Tony obeyed; for although he might have liked to inquire farther, yet those few words gave him the key to many a secret. Frill, who, notwithstanding a certain portion of page-like affectation, was a shrewd, clever youth, had remained in his place, thinking it much better that Tony should go on alone, trusting to obtain from him any information he might acquire by one means or another, after his return.

"I would not come with you, Tony," he said; "for if Paul will but speak little before one, he will speak nothing before two. What has he told you?"

"Little enough," answered Tony; "but now take care of your beast, Master Frill; for here comes down the storm."

A large heavy drop or two fell, as he spoke, spotting the dust upon their horses' coats; and, the next instant, a broad flash of lightning shot across the whole sky, changing the lurid mass of cloud, which by this time had crept up over the zenith, into one wide expanse of flame. At first the thunder followed slowly after the flash, leaving a long interval between; but, ere many minutes were over, the roar was almost incessant; the sky, scarcely for an instant free from lightning, echoed from mountains to woods; the crash of the thunder was really terrific; and that storm, which accompanied Frederic on his way to claim the crown of Bohemia, is recorded by all annalists as the most tremendous that ever visited the Palatinate. To describe it is impossible; but we may comprehend what was its intensity, when we learn that men accustomed to every kind of danger felt overawed by the strange and terrible phenomena they witnessed; and, to use the words of the chronicler, "thought that the end of the world had come." The fierce flame of lightning half blinded both horses and men; the fierce livid streaks of fire shot incessantly down from the sky; and, darting amidst the forests, rent many of the strongest trees to atoms. Balls of flame passed hissing through the air, and exploded with a sound like the discharge of large ordnance; while the continued roll of the thunder deafened the ear; and every now and then a crash, as if mighty rocks had been cast down into an echoing vault, broke through the less intense sounds and seemed to shake the very earth. The rain, too, came down in torrents, now and then mingled with hail; but, far from mitigating the fury of the storm, it seemed only to aggravate its rage.

At first the horses plunged, and darted hither and thither, and a scene of indescribable confusion took place in the cavalcade; but, after a time, they seemed cowed into tranquillity, and, with drooping heads and hanging ears, plodded on, with torrents of rain streaming off their coats.

For seven hours—from nine till four—the war of elements continued, without the slightest abatement; and then another hour was passed, with the thunder roaring at a greater distance, and the lightning streaming more faintly, after which succeeded dull heavy rain. Still, throughout the whole, the young King of Bohemia pursued his way; spurring on wherever it was possible, as fast as the weary and discouraged horses would go. Once only he paused, in a small town, to take some refreshment and rest; but in three-quarters of an hour he was on the way again, and drew not a rein till, just as night was falling, and a faint streak of yellow light was seen to the westward under the dull canopy of cloud, some towers and steeples were seen, at the distance of about two miles; and Christian of Anhalt, pointing on as he rode by Algernon Grey, exclaimed, "Thank God! there is our resting-place. This has, indeed, all been very unfortunate."

"It has, truly," answered the young Englishman; "and the more so, if you have formed a right judgment of the superstitious feelings of your countrymen."

"It is of that, alone, I speak," answered the Prince. "Who minds a heavy shower of rain, or a thunder-storm, as far as he is personally concerned? But yet half of the people here are already drawing evil prognostications from a stumbling horse and the usual result of a month of hot weather. When the priests and the ladies arrive, too, it will be worse; for, if men are too much given to superstition, women and clergymen know no end of it — always excepting our fair Queen, whose own high soul is her omen of success. I wonder where our quarters are marked out. You are in the same inn with me, I hear. My father lodges with the King in the town-house. Where they are to put us all, in this small place, I know not—especially after the Queen and the rest have arrived."

"Does she come hither to-night?" asked Algernon Grey, in some surprise.

"Yes; but it will be late," replied his companion. "She comes by the other road; it is further round, but less hilly, and relays of horses are prepared for her. Here! Herr von Alfeld," he continued, addressing a gentleman who was riding by, "know you where my quarters lie?"

"One of the inns in the market-place," replied the officer to whom he spoke, "is marked for you, the Lord Craven, and two other English gentlemen, with your trains. I will tell you the name;" and he looked at the paper in his hand, but the light was too faint to enable him to see; and, after a moment's thought, he said, "It is the Star excellent, sir—I remem-

; it is the Star, on the left hand of the

—en rode on; and in a few minutes began the scene of hurry and confusion inevitably produced by the entrance of a large and long expected party into a small town, notwithstanding every precautionary measure to provide for their accommodation. The rain had just ceased; all the inhabitants were at their doors or windows; the innumerable signs which hung from house to house across the narrow streets—for the most part crowned with garlands—shook showers of large drops upon all who passed below; boys and girls ran beside the horses, shouting and screaming; horse-boys and drawers rushed out of inns and taverns; torches and lanterns flashed here and there; and the young king's harbingers, who had been sent on the preceding day, coming forth to conduct the different parties to the quarters prepared for them, aided to banish everything like order from the cavalcade. Frederic himself, and the part of the train immediately attached to his person, of course found no difficulty; but all the other gentlemen dispersed, eagerly seeking their lodging, and calling loudly to their men to follow; while every innkeeper who had a single chamber unappropriated strove to mislead some of the stragglers into his house, assuring them that there was the place engaged for them.

"Come on, Grey, with me," said Christian of Anhalt, between whom and Algernon had sprung up a feeling of friendship, which went on increasing to the end of their lives. "Call your men together, as they are strangers, and bid them follow close, with your cousin. My people can take care of themselves, as they have good broad German tongues in their heads. I can find my way to this Star, for I have been here before. The market-place is straight on, where the King is going."

Algernon's orders were soon given; Lovet rode up to his side, the servants and his little band of soldiers came up close behind, pushing through the crowd with a quiet regularity which excited the admiration of the young Prince of Anhalt, and in a few minutes they were in the midst of the market-place, which was large and commodious considering the smallness of the town. The town-house was directly opposite, and innumerable lights were running along the front from window to window, showing that the Prince was already within; but as Christian of Anhalt was looking from side to side to discover the sign of the Star, a man in a citizen's dress, with a long grey beard came up to the side of his horse, saying, "This way, Highness. Here are your quarters at my inn."

"What is it called?" asked the Prince. "Is it the Star?"

"No, sir, the Golden Cup," answered the landlord.

"That will not do, then," replied Christian: "ours is the Star. It must be there, Grey, on the right—come on;" and without waiting for the remonstrances of the host of the Golden Cup, he pushed his horse forward, and soon saw a golden star hanging from the face of a large house apparently covered all over with grotesque paintings in fresco.

"Now, noble lords, now, what is your pleasure?" asked the landlord, who was standing at his door with two serving boys.

"Meat, drink, lodging, and a fire to dry our wet cloaks," answered Christian of Anhalt, springing from his horse, and walking into the passage, followed by Algernon Grey and Lovet.

"Meat, and drink, and fire, you shall have, noble gentlemen," replied the good man; "but lodging I cannot give, for the whole house is taken by the king's harbingers for—"

"For us," added the young Prince, interrupting him, and entering a hall on the right, from which a cheerful blaze broke forth. "Quick, my good host, set what you can before us, and especially good wine; and send out one of your boys to take care of our men without. Here, Grey, let us dry what Scultetus calls the outer man, while they bring us something to warm the inner man.—What, in the devil's name, do you stand for, host? Do you want us to use cold iron that you stay gaping there?"

The host ran out alarmed, and, after a moment or two, some of the servants brought in several dishes of smoking viands, with three flasks of wine. But, as the party of travellers sat down, Algernon Grey, judging by the scared looks of the attendants, whispered to the Prince, "I think there must be some mistake here. Are you sure that Herr Von Alfeld is to be depended upon?"

"By my life, I know not," replied Christian of Anhalt; "but, right or wrong, I sup before I move. Ho! drawer, where is your master? Send him here!"

"He is gone, noble sir, to seek one of the harbingers," replied the lad, in a humble tone. "he thinks there is some mistake."

"There can be no mistake about this stewed hare," cried Lovet, "unless it be a cat disguised, and even then it smells too savoury to be inquired into. Shall I help your Highness?"

"With all my heart," replied Christian of Anhalt: "cat or devil, I will eat it, if it be tender. Out with those corks, knaves! Now, success to our expedition, and long live Frederic, King of Bohemia. This inn is mighty quiet, it must be confessed. I thought to find the hall tenanted by a score. I fear we have got into some reserved chase, and are poaching upon a private larder; but no matter, so that hunger be satisfied and the wet kept out."

With such light talk passed away about half an hour, at the end of which time the landlord reappeared with a tall personage whom the prince of Anhalt recognised as one of Frederic's attendants; and saluting him with a gay laugh, he exclaimed, "Well, William of Waldhof, if we are in a wrong nest, it is all Alfeld's fault: he told me that the Star was to be our quarters, as my English friend can witness."

"He mistook, noble sir," answered the other; "he should have said the Golden Cup. But it matters not, my prince, for the present. This inn is for the Queen's ladies, who cannot lodge in the town-house; but they are not expected for some hours, so finish your supper, in Heaven's name, and then at your convenience betake yourself to the inn just opposite. I will go and see that all is ready for you, and put your men in possession; for I passed, I think, some forty of them at the door."

"Thunder and devils!" cried Christian of

Anhalt, turning to the host, "what left you them at the doors for?"

"I had no place for them, your Highness," answered the man, in a humble tone; and William of Waldof stepping in to quiet the prince's anger, the latter sat down again to the table, from which he had started up, and recommenced his meal with a degree of hunger which was not easily satisfied. Wine, and meat, and game disappeared with wonderful celerity; for neither Lovet nor Algernon Grey had tasted anything since they left Heidelberg, and the distance was considerably more than fifty miles: a long journey, in those days of evil roads and tortuous paths. Christian of Anhalt drank deep, and Lovet did not fear to follow his example, for he loved the wine-cup, though, to say the truth, it had little effect upon him. On the young Prince it worked more potently, not that he got drunk, for he could talk and reason sensibly enough; and not even his corporeal faculties, which usually give way sooner than the mental in men accustomed to deep potations, were at all weakened. He crossed the room steadily, to fetch something that he wanted from a small pocket in his cloak; and though he showed, towards the end of the meal, an inclination to fall asleep, yet by no other sign did he betray that he had been drinking. At length, however, as he finished the second bottle of strong old wine which had gone to his own share, he rose, saying, "I must have a nap before I go farther. Any man who is awake rouse me in an hour. If we all go to the land of dreams together, doubtless some one will come to turn us out when the ladies arrive. So, good night for the present;" and, lying down on a bench at the farther side of the hall, he was soon deep in slumber.

Had Algernon Grey given way to the strong temptation of drowning the memory of many cares in the sparkling juice, that but raises the spirits to depress them more terribly afterwards, he might perhaps have found the same thoughtless repose; but he had avoided the wine, as was his custom; and, after seeing the young Prince sinking to sleep, he turned to Lovet, saying, "We must see for these horses you sent on, William. Doubtless they will be needed early to-morrow. Know you where they are to be found?"

"Not I," answered William Lovet; "how could I tell the names of inns in a place which seems to consist of little else? I told the German fellow you sent with them to do the best he could for them; and, on my life, I think you had better stay till we get to the other place, and then send out some of the men to hunt. Here is a bottle and a half of wine still to be drunk, and I shall take my share, lest we do not find anything so good where we are going."

"No, no," answered Algernon Grey; "I like to be prepared. You stay and watch our young friend there, drinking the wine meanwhile, and I will go and see what can be done to find the means of mounting us all to-morrow. My charger will not hold out much longer over such roads."

Thus saying, he turned and quitted the inn, leaving his cloak to dry before the great fire; and, wandering out into the streets, had, in about three-quarters of an hour, discovered the small public-house, with its long range of stabling, where his fresh horses had been put up; and, giving what orders he thought necessary, returned slowly towards the Star. The whole town was still full of bustle; people passing about in all directions, torches and lanterns flitting from door to door; and, as Algernon Grey came forth from the doors of the stables, he thought he heard a rolling sound, something like the beat of a distant drum. On approaching the town-house, however, he saw several large heavy carriages drawn up before it, a number of horses; and ten or fifteen servants busily unloading a quantity of luggage. Concluding at once that the Queen had arrived, he hurried into the Star, the passage of which was deserted, and, turning to the right, opened the door of the eating-hall, and went in. The large room had now only one tenant, and that was a lady, who, standing with her back towards him, gazed into the fire, with her left hand leaning on his own cloak, cast over the tall back of a chair to dry. Algernon Grey's heart beat; for, although wrapped up in mantles, and with a veil over the head, the lines of the figure were difficult to discern, yet there was something in the graceful attitude into which it had fallen, with the one small foot crossed over the other, and the hand resting so lightly on the chair for support that it seemed scarcely to touch it, which impressed him at once with the certainty of who it was. At the first sound of his step in the room, Agnes turned round; and, with irrepressible joy in his heart and in his face—joy against which reason had no power—her lover sprang forward and took her hand.

There was equal pleasure in the countenance of Agnes Herbert, and she thanked him with bright smiles for coming to see her so soon; so that it was hard for Algernon to explain that he did not know she was to form one of the train to the young Queen.

"I thought you must have known that long ago," replied the lady. "There was a doubt at one time whether I should accompany her or not, and as my uncle expressed no wish for me to stay, the Electress mother urged me to go, and, of course, I could not refuse."

"It is fated," thought Algernon Grey; "it is fated! What use of struggling against such events? I will do naught that I can regret or be ashamed of, but I will make myself miserable no more by a constant war with my own heart."

He remained with Agnes for more than an hour, for half an hour nearly alone; and, when the Countess of Löwenstein and two other ladies joined them, he still lingered, giving aid in all their arrangements, listening to the details, of which they were full, of the perils and discomforts of the way, and cheering them with gay and lively conversation full of hope and expectation for the future. Only one of the four ladies there present had ever spoken with him before; but to her his present demeanour and conversation were altogether new and strange; it was different from anything she had seen or heard in him before, but not less pleasing. Her mind required soothing and cheering; it sought to revive hope and kindle expectation, but found within itself no resources to effect such an object; and as with graceful

ease and varied powers he painted the coming times in the brightest colours, and showed the future prospect on the fairest side, she listened, half convinced that her uncle's dark apprehensions were vain, and that, with such men as the one before her to aid, direct, and support a noble and a holy cause, success could not fail to follow, and all would end in victory and peace.

At length, it was announced that the rooms above were ready; for, with a somewhat national spirit of delay, but few preparations had been made, under the idea that the Queen would not arrive till midnight; and Algernon Grey threw his cloak over his shoulder to depart, saying, "Rest must be very needful to you all, fair ladies; for it must have been a weary journey to you."

"Far more tiresome," answered Agnes, "to all, than if we had come on horseback, as we should have done some five or ten years ago. I hate these carriages for travelling; they are well enough in a procession, or to go through a town; but, for a road, I think the old way is best."

"Had we come in the old fashion," said the Countess of Löwenstein, "we should have been melted, like sugar-candy, with all the rain that has fallen."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Algernon Grey, laughing; "for then there would have been a world of sweetness wasted on the high road;" and, seeing them to the foot of the stairs, he retired, leaving no unfavourable impression upon the minds of all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I must now, for one brief chapter, quit the course of narrative I have been hitherto pursuing, and, instead of detailing, day by day, the actions and feelings of the personages in whom I have endeavoured to interest the reader, give a short sketch of the events of one whole year, dwelling principally upon the facts of general history; but, in the end, endeavouring to sum up, in a very few words, all those changes which have taken place in the relative position of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert.

As is well known to every one acquainted with German history, Frederic, King of Bohemia, pursued his journey on horseback on the following morning to the small town of Altdorf, riding but one horse from Heidelberg to that place;* thence he went to Amberg, and thence again to Waldsachsen, joined on the road by many friends, and was met at the latter town, which was then the last of the Upper Palatinate, by the deputies of the States of Bohemia. At Waldsachsen and Amberg some days were passed; but at length, in the middle of October, the young King, with a train almost swelled to the amount of an army, crossed the Bohemian frontier, and entered the town of Egra; from Egra he was conducted in triumphal procession, amidst the shouts and gratulations of the people, the boisterous joy of the rude nobility of the realm, and the wild enthusiasm of the Protestant party, to the gates of the fine old town of Prague. In the immediate vicinity of the city rises a hill, called the Weissenberg, or White-mountain; and beneath it is a splendid promenade, named the Star. At the foot of that mountain, which was destined to be the field where all the bright hopes then entertained were destroyed; and on the beautiful walk of the Star, soon to be drenched with the blood of many that then surrounded him in joy, and health, and high-souled expectation, the train of the young monarch halted, and was met by an immense concourse of the citizens, with the states and magistrates at their head. Two thousand horse escorted Frederic into the town; ambassadors from many other states were present; the nobility of the whole land assembled to do honour to their sovereign; and four hundred of the ancient Hussites, armed, after the fashion of the times of old, with hauberks of chained mail, with lances, and double-handed swords at their back, formed a sort of body-guard, bearing in the midst the enormous banner of the unconquerable Ziska, emblazoned with a cup, soiled and dusty from the many fields in which he had led on his fierce followers to the slaughter, but raising high hopes of conquest and success by the memory of past victories, and invincible resistance. The air rang with shouts; drums and trumpets sounded around; confidence, resolution, enthusiasm, were in every heart; and thus, in the midst of *lætitia publicæ*, as Camerarius calls it, was Frederic conducted into the capital of his new kingdom, over which he was to reign but one short year.

The coronation of the King and the Queen shortly followed; and for a brief period all was joy, and pageantry, and success; but the reverse was speedily coming; the day-dream was quickly to be dispelled; and all the evils that the monarch's mother had foreseen, gathered, like thunder-clouds, around him.

At first, nothing could equal the popularity both of the King and Queen; her beauty, her grace, her kindness won all hearts; and the population, from high to low, almost worshipped her as she passed. The gentle demeanour of the King, too, conciliated regard. His light and happy spirit shed sunshine around; his dignified air and handsome person concealed the weakness of a character irresolute, though personally brave; and his happy language and easy eloquence covered, as is so frequently the case, the want of more important powers, judgment, and foresight, and discretion. Gradually, however, as events of great delicacy called for just and immediate action, the showy qualities were reduced to their right value in the minds of men; the great deficiency of more sterling abilities became apparent. Then followed doubt and regret at the choice that had been made. Selfish interests raised themselves up to struggle for temporary advantages under a weak and facile prince. Gloomy discontent followed disappointment; and apathy succeeded enthusiasm in his cause. When-

* Some letters, from a person who pretended to be an eye-witness, state that Frederic accompanied the Queen and the rest of the court from Heidelberg to Amberg, in a train of eighteen carriages; but it is beyond all doubt that he, and the gentlemen who accompanied him, rode the whole way. The King himself performed the journey to Altdorf, near two hundred miles, on one horse; there the poor beast fell dead, and the stuffed skin was to be seen for many years in the library of that place.

ever such is the case, treason is not far behind. Still, all might have gone well, had a weak king been surrounded by wise friends; had his counsellors, firm with his enemies, moderate with his supporters, imparted that vigour and that discretion to his actions which his own character could not supply. Unfortunately, the exact reverse was the case. Camerarius was weak, though subtle, selfish, and interested; Christian of Anhalt the elder, though a brave and skilful soldier, was little more than a soldier; Dohna was suffered to take but little share in the management of affairs; and the Prince of Lolms was not equal to the great emergencies of the time. The man, however, who contributed more than all the rest to the ruin of his sovereign's prospects, was he who had urged him most strongly to accept the perilous position which he occupied. Filled with the wildest spirit of fanaticism, fancying himself the prophet of a new reformation, Abraham Scultetus came with the King into Bohemia; utterly ignorant of the manners and customs of the people; unacquainted even with the relations of the different religious parties into which the population was divided. The oppression of the Austrian princes had caused the Roman Catholics of the kingdom to join with their Protestant brethren in snatching the crown from the head of a prince, whose own acts justified the States, under the express conditions which were made on receiving the sceptre, in declaring him fallen from the throne of Bohemia. But still there lingered a natural fondness in their minds for a sovereign of their own faith. These Roman Catholics formed a large part of the population, especially at Prague; the rest of the people were divided between the ancient Hussites, who were now comparatively few, and Lutherans, who were many. Of Calvinists, the number was exceedingly small. But Scultetus was one of the fiercest followers of the fierce and intolerant apostle of Geneva. Possessed with the blindest spirit of religious bigotry, he had done much evil, even in the Palatinate, where his sect was predominant; and he carried the same fiery elements of strife and confusion with him into the new kingdom which had fallen under his master's sway. His sermons were insults to the faith of almost all who surrounded him; his counsels were pernicious to the prince he served; and, after familiarizing himself, in some degree, with the habits of the citizens of Prague, he proceeded to open acts of intolerance, which bore bitter fruits ere long. The cathedral was stripped of its pictures and its statues; the great altar itself was removed; and relics and images—which many of the citizens of Prague revered, not alone as mementos of holy men, but as part of the possessions of their city—were destroyed in the night, at his instigation. The great crucifix upon the bridge of Prague was also marked out for destruction; but several of the most eminent Bohemian nobles interfered, to prevent this rash act on the part of the King; and the cross and statue were spared accordingly. The report, however, of the intention spread far and wide through Prague. It unfortunately happened that the young Queen had some time previously expressed her determination never to pass over that bridge again, till the indecent practice of both sexes bathing indiscriminately in the river near was done away. The real motives, which she had frankly expressed, were supposed, by an angry and rude people, to be a mere excuse; the Jesuits dexterously contrived to point out the crucifix as the real object of her dislike; and an outcry was raised against the unhappy Princess, which spread far and wide amongst the Roman Catholic population of the town.

Having once obtained cause of complaint, the Jesuits never ceased to decry the monarch and his queen, to pervert all his actions in the public ear, and to attribute the basest motives, and even the most licentious conduct, to one who had openly confessed himself an enemy of their church. With the serpent-like subtlety of their order, they spread poisonous rumours and calumnious assertions through a thousand different channels amongst the people of Bohemia. Sometimes it was an open and daring, but perverted statement in point; such as the "Description of the spoiling of the Cathedral Church at Prague, by the Calvinistic king;" sometimes it was a mere whisper, such as that which spread amongst the Lutherans, that it was the determination of the King and Queen to abolish every form of worship in Bohemia, but that which they themselves followed. Doubts, fears, and enmities took possession of the minds of the populace; and when the storms of war began to arise, and the young monarch required all the support of an united people, he found little but discord, disaffection, and suspicion.

In the mean while the relations of the new monarch of Bohemia with all foreign powers were anything but satisfactory. True, indeed, his wife's uncle, the King of Denmark, the warlike King of Sweden, the Venetian Republic, and many princes of Germany recognised him at once as King of Bohemia. True, Bethlem Gabor, the Prince of Transylvania, promised the aid of his half savage hordes, in case of war; but James the First of England, on whose power to serve him much of his hopes had been founded, refused him even the title of king, treated him as a usurper, and would give no aid whatever in the preservation of the kingdom of Bohemia. He promised, indeed, to interfere in case the Palatinate should be attacked; but Frederic had soon occasion to learn that his father-in-law was as false and fickle, as he was vain and pusillanimous; and the only assistance he ever received from England, was afforded by the gallant enthusiasm of her young nobility, in the cause of a princess whom they loved with chivalrous devotion. France, on the other side, temporized; for it was her policy to persecute the Protestants amongst her own people, and to foment the divisions of Germany; and thus, in almost all instances, her interference in the affairs of the empire tended to weaken the Protestant League, and to give every facility to the Roman Catholics. Day by day, and hour by hour, the storm approached nearer and nearer, menacing, on the one hand, Bohemia; and on the other, the Palatinate. Large bodies of troops were raised in the Spanish Netherlands, in Burgundy, and Lorraine, under the banners of the King of

Spain; and at their head was placed the veteran, resolute and skilful, but merciless Spinola; and, on the side of Austria, several generals of renown gathered together armies, ready to fall on Bohemia at the first sound of the drum.

In the mean time, in his court at Prague, Frederic gave himself up alternately to revelry and devotion. The gallant manners of a refined court, the romantic tone which it had acquired in the Palatinate, totally discordant with the rough plainness of Bohemia, were certainly reported, and perhaps believed, to touch upon gross licentiousness; and, undoubtedly, in merriment—though there is no proof of its having been vicious, and in devout exercises—though they are not shown to have been hypocritical, Frederic passed much time which would have been more wisely expended in preparation for defence or in active attack upon an enemy who no longer preserved even the semblance of amity. His acts, also, were weak and ill timed; his negotiations tedious and unskilful. From France, Denmark, and Venice, he received nothing but vague assurances of amity. From the King of Great Britain he obtained naught but the reproofs of a pedagogue, rather than the kind support of a father; and his embassy to Turkey only served to give his enemies a pretext for accusing him of leaguing with the infidel against the Catholic emperor. Bethlem Gabor, indeed, not only promised, but prepared to espouse his cause; but history shows that so ill combined were the operations of the Transylvanians and Bohemians, that the Austrian troops had the opportunity of dealing with each separately, and paralyzing the one force before it could be supported by the other. On only one occasion, after the accession of Frederic to the throne, did the Bohemians and Transylvanians act in co-operation; and then, had perseverance and resolution been united to vehemence and activity, the imperial crown would, in all probability, have been snatched from the House of Austria; and the Emperor would have remained a prisoner in the hands of his enemies. The star of Frederic was not destined to rise high, however. He possessed, it is true, more amiable qualities than his rival; but Ferdinand not only displayed consummate skill, prudence, and activity himself; but had agents and counsellors all equally shrewd, unscrupulous, and diligent. The Elector of Bavaria, nearly allied to the Elector Palatine, had, beyond all doubt, given his cousin reason to believe, that his acceptance of the crown of Bohemia would not be followed by any act of hostility on his part; but he had been educated in the same school as Ferdinand, was a bigoted follower of the Roman Catholic religion, the chief of the German Roman Catholic League, and the politic claimant, under old and baseless titles, of a great part of the young king's Rhenish dominions. These were fearful odds against gratitude and kindred, in the mind of a prince educated by the Jesuits. He was soon engaged, heart and soul, in the cause of the Emperor, and used every means, just and unjust, to move the princes of the League to act against Bohemia and the Palatinate. Again, George Frederic, the Elector of Saxony, affected for a time to hold himself neutral, but that unworthy prince, it would seem, from the first leaned to the House of Austria, and was soon won over completely to the interests of Ferdinand. In all probability, jealousy at the Elector Palatine's elevation to the throne of Bohemia, had a considerable share in this decision; but at the same time it would appear that other means were employed to remove any hesitation from his course. Like many men of dissolute manners, he was greatly under the rule of fanatic preachers, who tolerated his vices upon the condition of governing his policy.

The chief of these interested men was Matthew of Hoenegg, born an Austrian subject, the virulent rival and jealous enemy of Abraham Scultetus, of poor parentage and craving ambition. How he obtained it is not known; but a very large sum of money crowned his labours in some cause, and the Elector of Saxony pronounced in favour of the House of Austria. The Pope furnished considerable pecuniary means; the King of Spain ceased not his warlike preparations; the Elector Palatine was put under ban; and the princes of the Protestant Union acted in behalf of Frederic no farther than to give the Roman Catholic League a fair pretext for declaring war. The armies of the two rival religions were assembled at Donawerth and Ulm, when France interfered to promote a peace which left Bohemia defenceless. The Protestant princes agreed to confine their operations in support of Frederic to the Palatinate, while the war was to be fought out in Bohemia and Lower Austria; and the unfortunate Frederic found himself suddenly exposed to the attack of the imperial troops and the army of the League, while his new kingdom was disaffected, Moravia and lower Austria overawed, and Lusatia, from which he expected strong reinforcements, invaded by the Elector of Saxony. The Danes remained neuter; Bethlem Gabor was inactive; the Swedes were engaged in war with Poland; James of England gave no assistance, and France had just consummated the ruin of the young monarch's best hopes by the disgraceful treaty of Ulm.

The money, which was necessary to raise and maintain armies, had been squandered in revelry and unreasonable liberality. The affections of the people were estranged by the incapacity and the indiscreet fanaticism of the King and his court. The anger of the great nobility of Bohemia was excited by the sight of foreigners raised to the highest authority in the army and the state. Apprehensions and rumours were busy in the city of Prague. Treason was not inactive. No army sufficient to defend the capital was at hand; and the small force under the command of the gallant Christian of Anhalt, which was intended to impede the enemy's advance, was at a distance from Prague, and totally incapable of contending with the immense body advancing upon Bohemia, under Maximilian of Bavaria, and the Austrian general Bucquoi. With haste and great apprehension, Frederic collected troops from every quarter that could furnish them, as soon as he heard that the armies of the empire and the League had entered lower Austria, and that town after town was submitting to the enemy; while Christian of Anhalt, with less than ten thousand men at his disposition, was retreating before a force of nearly sixty thousand. A consid-

erable body of men was raised sooner than might have been expected, considering the state of the country; but Counts Thurn and Schlick exerted themselves in this emergency in support of their young king, notwithstanding some mortification at seeing the Prince of Hohenloe placed in command above them. Count Mansfeld, however, who was already actively engaged in opposition to Austria, would not submit to that indignity, and he remained with his forces inactive at Pilsen, even while the fate of Bohemia was being decided under the walls of Prague. Messengers were sent off with all speed to Transylvania urging Bethlem Gabor to advance to the support of his ally, and assurances were received that he would hasten with a large force to the aid of Frederic; while that monarch was yet ignorant of the rapid advance of the Austrian and Bavarian troops. At the end of October, however, the despatches of the old Prince of Anhalt roused Frederic to a sense of his really perilous position. He heard now that no towns resisted, however strong were their fortifications; that the severities exercised in all places taken by assault had spread consternation every where, and that instant submission followed the appearance of the Bavarian banners under the walls of the Bohemian cities. Pilsen, indeed, promised to resist; and the works, strengthened by Mansfeld, were likely to set the enemy at defiance. Christian of Anhalt, with his small force, manœuvred in retreat before the victorious armies; and, by the most skilful movements, secured his own force, and kept the enemy in some degree at bay, affording time to the court of Prague for preparation. One small body of Hungarians, too, were approaching rapidly towards the capital; and some appearance of union and zeal, though it was but a hollow semblance, showed itself amongst the citizens of Prague.

It was under these circumstances, that Frederic, on the 2nd of November, left his capital to see, with his own eyes, the state of his army under the Prince of Anhalt; and, no sooner had he arrived, than the General took advantage of a temporary enthusiasm, created by his presence, to defend the post of Rakonitz against the Austrian forces under Bucquoi. The appearance of the sovereign on the field, and the dauntless courage he displayed in the moment of danger, inspired his forces with fresh ardour, and raised him high in the opinions of the soldiery. Several times it became necessary to beseech him not to expose his person so rashly; but Frederic remained in the hottest fire, notwithstanding all remonstrance, and undoubtedly greatly contributed to give the Imperialists that check which they received at Rakonitz. Christian of Anhalt was well aware that no results of importance could ensue from this skirmish. But Frederic vainly flattered himself that it might afford a favourable opportunity for specific negotiations; and, having sent envoys to treat with the Duke of Bavaria, he returned to his capital, trusting that time, at all events, would be gained, and that, with an offer of peace before him, and Pilsen, with Mansfeld's strong army, on the left, Maximilian at all events would delay to consider his position, if not absolutely retreat.

The Elector treated the proposal with scorn, however. Anhalt was obliged to retreat as soon as the Bavarians could co-operate with the Austrians; and the only advantage obtained by the combat of Rakonitz was the gain of a march or two upon the allied force; so that the Bohemian army arrived under the walls of Prague, and took up its position on the Weissenberg in time to have strengthened itself by entrenchments if the discipline of the soldiery had been equal to the skill and devotion of their commander. A turbulent multitude were already in possession of the Weissenberg, when Christian of Anhalt took up his position there likewise. Provisions were procured with difficulty. No subordination could be maintained. The citizens were murmuring at the unruly manners of the soldiery. Nobody in the town seemed aware that the enemy was so near the gates; and in vain Christian of Anhalt endeavoured to rouse either the monarch's court, the magistrates of the town, or the officers of the army, to a knowledge of their true danger, and the necessity of providing every means of resistance. Such was still the case on the evening of the 19th of November; and here I will conclude this brief sketch of the political events which have necessarily interrupted the general course of my narrative.

It may be asked, what had become of Algernon Grey and Agnes Herbert during all this time. That question can be answered in very few words. Algernon had accompanied the court to Prague—had witnessed all the pageantry of the young monarch's triumphal entrance into his capital—had taken part in the early festivities of the time—and had been thrown by a thousand circumstances into the society of her he loved. Nor had it been possible for him to conceal from Agnes the passion which she had inspired. He had said nothing,—no, not a word,—he had done nothing, as far as he himself could judge, to show her that he loved her: and yet she did not doubt it. It was no longer a question with her,—she saw it, she felt it; and when at last she was obliged to confess to herself that she loved in return, a strange and agitating strife took place in her bosom for some time. But Agnes judged and acted differently from most women; and one bright autumn evening she sat down to consider the character and conduct of Algernon Grey, and to draw deductions from that which she knew regarding that of which she was doubtful. I will only tell the result. "He loves me," she said, "and he knows that I love him. But there is some obstacle, some difficulty—perhaps insurmountable. He is too honourable to trifle with my heart; he has not sought to mislead me. I cannot say that he has even sought to win affection, as some men do, to neglect it afterwards. Oh, no!—he has acted honestly; he has struggled with himself. I can see it all now; but I will trust in his honour still, and while I veil my own feelings as much as may be, will believe that whatever he does is just and noble."

Ere many days were past, Algernon Grey took leave of Agnes Herbert, to accompany the younger Prince Christian into Moravia, and never set his foot in Prague again till, after winning high renown in every skirmish and

combat that took place, he accompanied Christain of Anhalt from Rakonitz in his retreat to the Weissenberg.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a dark and stormy night, that of the 19th of November, 1620, the eve of the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity; and clouds were rolling heavily over the sky, carried on by a keen and piercing wind which howled and whistled round the old battlements of Prague, and shook the lozenges in the long casements. Not a star was to be seen: the moon afforded not even that pale and uncertain light which she sometimes spreads over the general face of heaven, though her orb itself be hid beneath the vapoury canopy; and the only thing that chequered the darkness of the scene, was a light here and there in the windows of the straggling and irregular city—or a lantern, moving up from the lower to the higher town, caught through a break in the narrow and tortuous streets.

Such was the aspect on the side of Prague; but, upon the Weissenberg, a different scene was displayed: there, crowning the summit, was the camp of the Bohemian army, and, between the tents and waggons, glowed many a watch-fire, to warm such of the soldiery as had no shelter provided for them; and lanterns, hung up before particular pavilions, at some distance from each other, marked the quarters of the leaders of that inharmonious and disjointed force. Thus the whole crest of the hill was in a blaze of light, and a long line of fires ran down from the summit to the wide and beautiful promenade of the Star, marking the ground occupied by the wild Transylvanian horsemen. On the opposite side, towards Pilsen, a dark, black void extended; Christian of Anhalt having strictly prohibited any of the parties to pitch their tents beyond the brow on that side. This order, at least, had been obeyed, though not so with any other he had given; and, indeed, the whole afternoon had passed in wrangling insubordination, which required the utmost exercise of his authority to repress it, and restore order ere nightfall. About six in the evening, indeed, an event had happened which in some degree seconded his exertions. The troops had previously been left nearly without food, and totally without wine; but the strong remonstrances of the General to the court of Prague, and the liberal use of his own purse amongst the suttlers of the town, had at length procured a liberal supply of meat and bread, and a moderate quantity of wine. The distribution was immediately made, and, while the soldiery were engaged in eating and drinking, measures were taken by their officers for restoring discipline; so that, by nine of the clock, a greater degree of order was to be seen in the camp, and this night promised to pass over quietly.

It was about that hour that Algernon Grey gazed forth from his tent for a moment over the impressive scene always afforded by the night encampment of an army. As he looked out, his eye ran over the several groups—rested upon the watch-fires—sped on, again, towards the Hungarian quarters, and then turned to the tent behind, and rolled over the different lines, with a watchful and marking expression. From time to time he turned his head, and spoke a few words to some one within the tent, in broken and disjointed sentences—something after the following form:—

"There must be twenty thousand, I think; that is to say without counting the Hungarians. How many do they count?"

"Twelve thousand," said a deep voice from within.

"Not so many, I should imagine," continued Algernon Grey. "Let me see—reckon ten men to a fire—there cannot be more than eight thousand, at the most. With such an army, one could do much, if there were but some bond between them, and we had something like discipline; and yet, and yet, I very much doubt the result."

"Where's your cousin? where's Lovet?" asked the voice again.

"He is gone into the town," answered Algernon Grey, turning back into the tent, and seating himself at a small rude table, by the side of the young Prince of Anhalt. "To tell the truth," he continued, "I am not sorry to be free from his presence: Lovet's spirit is too light to accord with mine in such moments as these. I must and do feel these things deeply, Christian. I cannot forget the scene that we witnessed here just twelve months ago, nor avoid comparing them with that which Prague presents even now; menaced by a superior army, with no proper preparations for defence, with your father's vast military skill fruitless to remedy faults of others, and the daring courage of yourself, and many like you, all cast away in the service of a prince unequal to the task he has assumed, and, I must add, little worthy of the crown which has been bestowed upon him."

"There has been a sad change, indeed," said the young Prince of Anhalt, in a gloomy tone; "and Frederic, I must own, has not shown himself worthy of the crown he wears; but still he has not many serious faults, and there is one, at least, worthy of every chivalrous exertion which noble-hearted man can make. I speak of your own fair Princess: faultless as beautiful, and brave as good. Would to God that she were our king! but yet we must all confess that Frederic has had a difficult game to play."

"True," answered Algernon Grey; "and he has played it badly. There never was, perhaps, a more united nation than these Bohemians when they raised the Elector Palatine to their throne. I mean, united heart and hand in that great act. Frederic owed his elevation not to a party in the State: the whole country was his party. You recollect the enthusiasm that awaited him wherever he appeared; in the castle of the noble, in the streets of the city, amongst the cottages of the village. There was not a man to be found unwilling and unprepared to draw the sword in his cause. But now, in one short year, how changed has everything become: the bond of union is broken; the united people is scattered into a thousand parties; and to what are we to attribute this? to his own weakness, I fear, and his own mistakes. It is a curious thing to

consider how the destruction of great parties is effected, and I fear that it is a question on which Frederic never meditated, though it was that on which depended the stability of his power. The man who yields to the mere prejudices of the body which raised him to high station, will not maintain it long, it is true; but the man who resists the legitimate claims of that body is sure to fall very soon, for the disappointment of reasonable hopes is the seed of animosity, producing a bitter harvest. If it be dangerous to disappoint friends in their just demands, it is ten times more dangerous to encourage enemies, by endeavouring to conciliate them by any sacrifice of principle. Now Frederic has more or less incurred all these perils; in many respects he has yielded to the prejudices of the Bohemian people, and yet disappointed the reasonable hopes of many; he has given encouragement to enemies, by weak efforts to pacify and conciliate them; in short, he has forgotten the maxim or the motto of an old leader in this very land, 'A friend to my friends, an enemy to my enemies, a lover of peace, but no fearer of war.'"

"Ay, there has been his mistake, indeed. His should have been the aggressive policy, as soon as a single sword was drawn against him; it was no time for temporizing when he had taken a crown from an emperor's head, and an emperor armed to recover it. At the head of the whole Bohemian people, who would then have followed him like a pack of wolves, he should have marched straight to the gates of Vienna, and dictated the terms of peace in the halls of the Imperial Palace to him who has grown strong by impunity, and whose only rights are in tyranny. Then, when Ferdinand of Gratz was quelled, should have come the turn of Maximilian of Bavaria; and, ere the treaty of Ulm had time to get dry, the Catholic League might have been annihilated. The greatest mistake that men make is when they do not discover whether it be the time for energy or repose. But yet, I see not how it is that he has disappointed the reasonable hopes and claims of the Bohemian people."

Algernon Grey smiled as the young Prince raised his eyes for a reply.

"We are friends, Christian," he said; "now old and tried friends, or I would not venture to say to you what I am about to utter. The Bohemians had a right to expect that the highest posts in the State and army should be bestowed upon themselves instead of upon foreigners; but the reverse has been the case here. In the army what do you see!"

"Why, in Heaven's name!" cried Christian of Anhalt, "that there is not one man amongst them so well qualified to lead a host as my father."

"Undoubtedly no," answered Algernon Grey; "but still the Bohemians have a right to complain that one of their own nobles was not selected for the task. Thurn and Schlick are both old and tried soldiers, with a high renown amongst their countrymen, and although as inferior to your father in every quality of a general as the meanest soldier is to them, yet, depend upon it, they themselves, and the whole Bohemian people have felt it a slight not alone to the two counts, but to the whole of Bohemia."

"Very true," said a voice at the entrance of the tent; "quite just and right, my young friend;" and an elderly man, of strong and powerful frame, with a grey peaked beard, and a broad-brimmed hat upon his head, entered and grasped Algernon Grey familiarly by the shoulder. "The placing me over these men has been one of the King's greatest faults. Heaven knows, I did not seek it; had he given me but a corps of ten thousand men raised in the Palatinate, I could have done him better service than leading the whole rabble of Bohemia. But I have come to seek you upon other matters—faults that can be mended, which this cannot."

"I hope none on my part, my noble Prince!"

"No, no," said the old soldier; "you do your duty well, and I shall beg you this night to let me have ten of your stout fellows to throw out a little way upon the high road. There is no knowing how soon the Bavarian may be upon us; he will let no grass grow beneath his horse's hoofs, for he knows as well as I do that if he do not fight a battle very soon, and win a victory, his men must starve. Could we but have stopped him at Pilsen, the game would have been in our hands; but it could not be done without Mansfeld, and Mansfeld was jealous and would not act—but three days, but three days—it is all I could desire." And the old general leaned his head upon his hand, and fell into deep thought.

"He cannot be here till Monday," said Algernon Grey; "we gained two marches on him."

"To-morrow's sun will not set," answered the Prince, "without seeing him under this hill, and if I could but get the men to work, we might yet set him at defiance, and let his host famish at our feet till they vanished away like the spring snow. But these people will do nothing; all this afternoon has been wasted, so will to-morrow; not a redoubt will be ready, nor a line. However, we must not blame them so much; they are disheartened; they hear of nothing but disaster; they have little food themselves, and want their Prince's presence amongst them. Here he is scarcely ever with the army; his time is passed in revelry, devotion, pleasure, and preaching, turn by turn: now listening to the ravings of Scultetus, or looking into the eyes of Emilia of Solms, or tripping it in the dance, or listening to the drivelling of a jester. We must have him amongst us, my young friend, this very night, if it be possible; if not, very early to-morrow. I say not we shall lose the battle—God forbid!—but I say the only way to make them even stand to their colours is to give them their Prince's presence. Things look dark enough, and we must lose no chance. Frederic is fighting for a crown, and he must not mind the labours of a bloody day."

"He does not want courage, assuredly," replied Algernon Grey; "and I doubt not he will be here in the hour of danger."

"Nor I," answered the old Prince; "but for any moral effect he must be here before. He must show the men that he will live or die with them: then there is no fear; for, if he once shows energy, the disaffected in yon town will fear to show their heads; and should we be driven from our position on this hill, the guns from Prague will still protect us, or the walls

of Prague shelter us. But, now, to what brings me hither. I have thought to-night that we must move the Queen to send her husband hither, and I have considered how this can best be done. The task must fall upon you, my young friend; you are her countryman, of high rank and station in your own land, have highly distinguished yourself in her husband's service, and for twelve months have exposed your person and employed your means in upholding his throne, without any reward but honour. You must go to her—must see her—must urge upon her the necessity of the case. He is now revelling, and will be so employed till twelve; get on your horse then at once, and see what can be done."

"But, indeed, General," said Algernon Grey, "I must have some authority for this; otherwise, in the first place, I may not obtain admission to the Queen, and if I do she may look upon my interference as gross impertinence."

"Authority!" said the bluff old Prince, "here it is. I knew what you would say, and therefore wrote these few words, namely, 'Your Majesty will credit all that is said to you by Algernon Grey, on the part of your devoted servant, Christian of Anhalt.' The rest I must leave to your eloquence; and now, if you would save the army, away with all speed and use your best endeavours."

Algernon Grey cast down his eyes and meditated for several moments. "It is a delicate task," he said at length, "a very delicate task, General; first, to speak to a wife on the conduct of her husband; next, to speak to a subject on the conduct of her King; for, though she is Queen, still she is his subject; and, more than all, to talk to one so placed as she is, of the faults of him whom she is bound to honour, and does love. My noble Prince, I would fain not undertake it. If there be any one in all your camp whom you can trust with this same sad and perilous errand, I do beseech you put it not upon me."

The old Prince of Anhalt took him by both hands and grasped them hard: "Your very sense," he said, "of the difficulty and importance of the bitter task is proof enough that there is no one so fitted for it as yourself. I do beseech you, my friend, to undertake it. If you would save this realm; if you would preserve the crown for the Elector Frederic; if you would save from ruin that sweet lady whom we all love and serve; if you would avert evils innumerable, massacre, torture, persecution, the overthrow of the pure faith in this kingdom, go about the task at once; make one last effort for our only hope of victory; and then, let the result be what it may, lay down your head in peace, knowing that you, at least, have done your best."

Algernon Grey wrung his hand hard. "I will go, noble old man," he said, "I will go; though it cost me one of the bitterest pangs that my heart has ever felt; though it may be the cause of much after-sorrow, I will go. It shall not be said that anything was wanting on my side, to support the part I have espoused."

"Thanks, thanks!" cried the old Prince of Anhalt. "Ho, without there! Bring up Master Algernon Grey's horse, quick! My lord," he continued, "God knows whether any of us here will see the end of to-morrow. Ere you return I shall have lain down to take one sort of sleep, which, ere the next day's sunset, may be changed for another kind. If we never meet again, remember I die grateful to you for this act and many others. A better soldier never lived than you have shown yourself under me; and old Christian of Anhalt, having seen some fields in his days, may be as good a judge of such scenes as many men. But, above all, I thank you for that which you are now going to do. I know how bitter it is, and that you would rather meet a hundred enemies with lance in hand, than this fair lady, on such an errand as that which you go upon. But it is for the advancement of the cause—for its salvation, I might say; and I know that is enough for you. Do not bring me any message back. I should be sorry to be refused with courtly words; and if he comes that will be sufficient."

"What is the pass-word at the gates, my lord?" asked Algernon Grey, as he heard a horse trotting up.

"The crown," answered the old General. "Now, away, away! What do you keep him for, boy?"

"Tell the Queen," said young Christian of Anhalt, who had caught his friend by the arm, "that if there be a battle to-morrow, I will carry her glove into the midst of the enemy's host, and bring her back news of victory or not return at all."

"She will believe you, Christian," replied Algernon Grey. "Farewell for the present: I shall see you again;" and, turning away, he quitted the tent and mounted his horse.

"I and Frill will run beside you, noble sir," said the young gentleman's servant, Tony, as he held the stirrup; "I would not have any more horses out, for the poor beasts are tired, and I have a shrewd notion that they may be wanted to-morrow. Whither do you speed, sir?"

"To the town and to the palace," answered his master, briefly; and, riding on with the old servant on one side of his horse, and the page on the other, he reached the gates of Prague in about a quarter of an hour.

Dull and gloomy was the scene under the archway, where, with naught but a wicket open, some half-dozen men armed with corslet, sallet, and partisan, kept guard by a large fire, which threw a lurid glare over the heavy masses of stonework. The towers of the gate rose high on either side; the dark arch frowned above, and through the aperture beyond appeared naught but a faint glimpse of a small irregular place d'arms, and a long, black-looking street leading into the town.

"Who comes here?" cried a soldier, as Algernon Grey approached; and at the same time a partisan was dropped to his horse's poitrel.

"A friend," replied the young gentleman—"the crown!"

"Welcome, friend! pass the crown," answered the soldier; and the gates were instantly thrown open to give him admission.

Taking his way slowly along the dim streets Algernon Grey mounted towards the palace, and at length reached the open space before the vast old building called the Hradschin, where the court of Bohemia was then lodged. In

many of the windows there was a light; but from one long line of casements a broad glare poured forth upon the night, and he could not but feel some bitterness of spirit as he thought that there Frederic was holding a senseless revel, when his friends and his soldiers were encamped without, waiting in privation and hardship the attack of a superior enemy. Giving his horse to the servant, with orders to wait there till he returned, and his sword to the page, with directions to follow him, the young cavalier approached the gates of the palace, entered the first court, and mounted the steps on the left. Some guards before the gates demanded the pass-word; and the attendants within made many difficulties when they heard that he sought an audience of the Queen. One of them said at length, however, shrugging his shoulders and turning away, that the Queen was ill in bed. Algernon Grey, without losing temper, demanded to see any of her ladies. "The Princess Amelia of Solms," he said, "the Countess of Löwenstein, or any of them."

"I will go and see," answered the man, who, it seemed, did not know the visitor; and the young Englishman was detained in the entrance-hall fully ten minutes before he received any reply to his application. During that time a number of richly dressed servants passed and repassed, carrying large silver dishes, gilt flagons of wine, and plates of sweetmeats; but at length the attendant to whom he had spoken returned, and, in a much more deferential tone, requested him to follow. Leaving the page below, he accompanied his guide up one of the many staircases of the building, through a long corridor, down two or three steps, along another narrow passage, and then through a large sort of vestibule supported by heavy stone pillars. At the farther side of this hall the servant threw open a door, desiring Algernon Grey to enter, and saying, "One of the ladies will come to you in a moment, sir."

Algernon Grey gazed around. The aspect of the chamber was certainly not fitted to raise any very cheerful thoughts. There were splendid draperies and hangings, it is true, but of dull and cheerless colours; and the rest of the furniture, though richly gilt, was rude in its forms, and antique in its fashion. One solitary sconce was lighted, projecting through the arras from a long limb of gilded iron; and as he marked the faint light striving to penetrate the gloom, and with the rays losing themselves in the deep hues of the drapery, he thought, "Thus shine the hopes of Bohemia."

The moment after, he heard a door creak on the right hand side of the room, and, turning round, saw the tapestry quickly pushed back.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Agnes!" exclaimed Algernon Grey, advancing to meet her, whom he had not seen for so many months; "this is, indeed, a pleasure."

The colour varied in the fair girl's cheek, spreading wide and fading away again, like the light of a summer sunset; but, without reserve or coolness, she came forward towards him, holding out her hand with a glad smile:—"How long it is since we met!" she cried; "and now we meet at a strange moment."

"A strange moment, indeed, and a terrible one, I fear; for we are on the eve of a great battle, Agnes. The result is with God alone; but yet, as far as human foresight can calculate upon things always most uncertain, there is much reason to fear that the event will not be a happy one."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Agnes, gazing at him with a sad, but deeply interested look; "it is terrible enough to think of so many of our fellow-creatures meeting to shed their blood, without having, too, to anticipate the disaster of defeat. But they told me there were five-and-thirty thousand men, protected by the guns of Prague — a powerful artillery — a great and skilful general."

"The numbers I cannot justly estimate," replied Algernon Grey; "the guns of Prague can be of no service, Agnes, except as protection in case of defeat. The general, it is true, is most skilful; but his soldiers are insubordinate; his army full of incoherent parts; his officers divided in counsel, and each thinking he can judge better than his commander; the troops themselves depressed in spirits by want and fatigue, and a long, harassing retreat; the small force that has fought the enemy having no confidence in, and no bond of union with, the new levies, which seem to me but heterogeneous masses, different in discipline and in character, and very often not understanding each other's language. It is all this that makes me dread the result. But I am sent to the Queen, dear Agnes, to urge her strongly upon some points of great interest to the welfare of her husband and herself. Good old Prince Christian of Anhalt chose me for this task, as her countryman; and, though it is a painful one to perform, yet it must be done."

"She knows there is some one here from the Prince of Anhalt," replied Agnes Herbert; "but she is ill, and in bed. She sent me down to say that she could see no one, were it not on business of life and death; and I came, not knowing who it was I should find."

"This is business of life and death, sweet friend," replied Algernon Grey; "and, if it be possible, I must see her. The King, I fear, is revelling; and, besides, the appeal must now be made to the Queen herself."

"He has a great banquet to-night," replied Agnes Herbert, with the colour somewhat mounting in her cheek. "I do not think he believes the peril so imminent."

"He is wrong," answered Algernon Grey; "for he has had warning enough; — but speed back to the Queen, dear lady; tell her that I come on matters of deep moment; show her this letter from the Prince, and, if possible, obtain me an audience. At all events, return to me for a moment yourself, Agnes, for there is a word or two that I would fain speak before an event occurs that may change the whole face of every one's destiny in the army and in the court."

"Oh, yes! I will return," replied Agnes Herbert, with a quivering lip and drooping eyelids; "but I will go now and do my best to gain what you desire."

He took her hand and kissed it; then let

her go; and, in a moment, he was once more alone. She was not long absent, however; for in two or three minutes the tapestry again moved back, and Agnes re-appeared, with a glad smile, saying, "The Queen will rise and see you. As soon as she is up she will send some one to tell us."

"Then let me not lose the present moment," said Algernon Grey. "In some things, my conduct must have seemed strange to you, Agnes,—I am sure it has."

Agnes looked down, with a pale cheek, and made no reply.

"There are secrets in most men's history," continued Algernon Grey; "and there are some sad ones in mine, sweet friend. Events have taken place which shackle my spirit and heart more heavily than fetters of iron could my limbs. There is not time, at present, to tell you the whole tale; but, if I live beyond this next battle, all shall be explained."

"Indeed, I seek no explanation," said Agnes Herbert, laying her hand gently on his arm; "I have seen much of you; I know you, I think, Algernon, to the heart. My trust in your honour and your honesty is unbounded; and nothing shall ever make me believe that you are in the wrong, though you may be unfortunate. I am contented with this conviction, and ask no more."

"Nevertheless," answered Algernon Grey, pressing his lips again and again upon her hand, "if I live, I will tell you all, whatever be the result. But there is one thing you must promise me, dear Agnes, if you have in me that confidence you say."

"I have, I have," she answered eagerly; "and I will do anything that is right to prove it to you. Only say what it is you would have."

Her lover held her by the hand, and gazed into her eyes with a look of deep and tender interest, mournfully, yet not without happiness; for there is a bright consolation in mutual trust, which lights up the darkest hour of life with a gleam like the sunshine on a cloud. "What I would have you to do, is this, dear Agnes," he said: "the event of the battle is, of course, doubtful, and the consequences may be such as I dread to think of. The army, or a part of it, may be driven to retreat into Prague, there to be besieged by a superior force. What will follow then it is difficult to foresee. The town, at all events, will be in a state of turbulence and misrule. It may have to capitulate; it may even be taken by assault; but you must promise that, if I survive the battle, which I somehow have a presentiment will be the case, you will trust in me entirely, as if I were a brother; you will follow my counsels, be ready to answer to my call at any moment, when I judge your escape practicable. I ask you to trust in me fully, totally, and entirely; and, on my word of honour as a man, a gentleman, and a Christian, I assure you, you may do so without any doubt or hesitation, whatever be the circumstances into which your compliance may throw us towards each other. In the hour of peril and of difficulty, Agnes—my duty done as a soldier—my only thought will be of you."

"I will, Algernon, I will," answered Agnes Herbert. "Under such circumstances our poor Princess will have enough to think of and do, without caring for me; and I will not only trust to you, but will show you how I trust, by seeking your counsel, your aid, or your protection, whenever I find it needful. But yet do not suppose that I shall give way weakly to fear. What you say certainly alarms me! I know that such views of imminent peril are not entertained here; and this is the first time that I have heard it clearly stated that danger is at the doors. It takes me, therefore, by surprise; but yet it does not terrify me as much as might be expected. I have a confidence that can not be shaken; a rock of trust, whose foundations are sure; and, although I speak not about such things as much as many in the court, yet my reliance on the mercy and goodness of God keeps me calm even now, and will, I trust, do so should the evils fall on me that we anticipate. I am not so light and thoughtless as people have believed—perhaps, as I have believed myself; for I feel my courage rise against what sometime ago I should have thought would overwhelm me, I can endure if I cannot resist; and I feel full confidence that help will come when it is needed; that resolution will not fail; and that, if I have to depend upon you for support and guidance, no vain terrors, on my part, will shackle your energies; no weak hesitation or delay impede your actions, or frustrate your views."

"Noble—noble girl," cried Algernon Grey, pressing her hand in his: "methinks, with you on my side, I could dare and defy a world."

As he spoke, the same door by which Agnes had entered opened again, and a woman appeared, in the dress of a superior servant. She addressed herself to Agnes at once, saying, "Her Majesty sent me, Madam, to tell you that she is ready now to receive the gentleman you mentioned."

"Come, then," said Agnes, turning to Algernon Grey, "I will show you the way;" and, leading him through the same door, she passed a little antechamber, and then mounted a flight of ten narrow steps, which conducted to a small room with a door half open, entering into a larger one. All was perfectly still, but a bright light came from the inner chamber; and, making Algernon Grey a sign to stay there for a moment, Agnes advanced and went in. The next instant she appeared at the door again, beckoning him to come forward, and three steps brought him into a large room, containing a bed beneath a canopy of crimson and gold, and various other articles of rich furniture, on which the arms of Bohemia were frequently emblazoned. A large fire was burning on the wide hearth, and a single lamp on a table shed a faint light through the chamber, showing a large velvet chair before the chimney, with the form of Elizabeth of Bohemia seated therein, wrapped in a loose dressing-gown of satin trimmed with fur.

Algernon Grey advanced to the side of the young Queen, behind whose seat two German women were standing; and, bowing the head reverently, took the hand she extended towards him, and bent his head over it.

A few moments passed in the ceremonious courtesies of the day, Elizabeth asking news of his health, and how he had fared in the camp,

bd the young Englishman answering, with many professions of devotion to her cause and erson. But then began the more difficult, but nore important portion of their conversation, he Queen breaking off at length somewhat bruptly, as if impatient curiosity mastered her, nd inquiring, "Well, what message has our ood cousin, Prince Christian of Anhalt, sent s, my lord?—something of importance, doubtless, or he would have chosen another hour and less distinguished messenger!"

"It is for your Majesty's private ear," answered Algernon Grey; "and we have here many to listen."

"None but our sweet Agnes understands our English tongue, my lord," replied the Queen; "and I have no secrets from her, nor, perhaps, have you either."

"This is none of mine, your Majesty," he said; "but still I doubt not she may well be a partaker thereof, if you are certain that these two other ladies are not likely to gather the substance."

"Not a word of it," cried the Queen; "speak, speak freely."

Algernon would have felt great relief if the royal lady had but uttered one word which could lead naturally to the painful subject he had to discuss. Elizabeth, however, whose high courage with difficulty grasped the idea of danger, even when it was presented to her, was not one to foresee it when it was all remote and uncertain; and, as she said naught which could fairly open the subject, he was obliged to plunge into it at once abruptly. "Your Majesty has read the letter of the Prince of Anhalt," he said (Elizabeth nodded her head). "From that you must be satisfied that nothing but the most immediate necessity," continued the young Englishman; "nothing but the most imminent danger, I might say, would have induced him to send me hither at such a time. But, madam, the peril is imminent, the necessity is great; and though with deep pain I undertook the task, yet I would not refuse anything that might be serviceable to your Majesty."

When first he began to speak, Elizabeth had remained with her head somewhat [illegible] her eyes fixed upon the fire; but, as he uttered the last words, she turned quickly round, and gazed at him with a flushed cheek and quivering lip. "What is this that you tell me, my lord!" she cried, in a tone of great surprise, "I must have been kept in ignorance—and yet I cannot believe that there is such danger as your words imply, or that it is near. By looking far forward for perils, we often make them, and always needlessly disturb and agitate ourselves. The mariner who gazes at every distant wave, and strives to avoid it, thinking it will overwhelm him, will hold the helm with no steady hand, and, very likely, run his boat upon a rock, to avoid that evil which God's good will and a thousand accidents may carry wide away and never bring it near."

"Let me represent to your Majesty, firmly, though humbly," said Algernon Grey, "that this peril is not distant; this wave, this dark and terrible wave, is already rearing its crest over the prow of your royal bark. It is near at hand, and the only thing for those who love and serve you *is to consider how* it may be met or avoided. The enemy are marching rapidly on Prague, and immediate battle must ensue, and——"

"Have we not troops!" exclaimed Elizabeth; "is there not a royal army encamped on yon hill!—are there no walls, no cannon, around Prague!" And then, suddenly bending down her head, she pressed her hand upon her eyes for an instant, but continued, before Algernon Grey could answer, "What is it you would say, my lord! I do believe you love me; I know that there is not a bolder heart in Europe. Something must have gone strangely amiss to bring you here with such auguries of mischance. Surely the enemy is not near! When last I heard he was at six days' march. Or could the troops be unfaithful! Brave they have always shown themselves. Can the pestilential treasons that have been hatching in this town have spread beyond the gates to them!"

"No, madam, I trust not," answered Algernon Grey; "but you are deceived as to the enemy's distance. By the most skilful strategy the Prince of Anhalt has gained one march, or, at most, two, upon the enemy; the last tidings, however, show the Austrians and Bavarians in full march for Prague; to-morrow will certainly see them beneath its walls. A battle cannot be delayed beyond one day more—perhaps not so long. Now, let us see what we have to count upon in this battle. Under Buguois and Maximilian of Bavaria march fifty thousand men, all veteran, subordinate, well-disciplined soldiers; without counting the force detached under Wallenstein and others to keep Pilsen in check. Forty heavy pieces of artillery accompany this force, and the cavalry is strong and numerous. Under the walls of Prague now lie for its defence some five-and-thirty thousand men, at the utmost computation, with ten small guns. This in itself is a sad disparity; but yet, under ordinary circumstances, it would by no means render the case a hopeless one. A handful of men has often defeated a host, but then that spirit must be with them which is better than all the ordnance that ever poured death upon the foe. Is that spirit amongst your Majesty's troops!"

He paused for a moment, for Elizabeth made a motion with her hand, as if begging him to cease and let her think; but, after a brief space, she said, in a low voice, "Go on, go on! I must hear all—spare nothing, my lord; say every word!"

"It grieves me, madam, but it is my duty to your Majesty," answered Algernon Grey. "The disparity, then, between the numbers of the two armies is rendered greater by the moral state of each. Your troops are faithful, I do believe; but see what a difference exists between them and the enemy: the latter are coming up with the force and energy of attack, and the prestige of victory; yours have, in great part, been waiting long, hearing of defeat, troubled with rumours of towns taken and their fellows butchered; receiving retreating troops amongst them, learning to look with apprehension for attack, rather than to rush with ardour to assail. Thus their courage has been lowered, their enthusiasm drowned, their resolution shaken."

"But how could this have been avoided!"

exclaimed the Queen. "You seem to blame the measures that have been taken."

"I would reply, madam, that it is with the future, not the past, we have to do," answered Algernon Grey; "but that from the past we may judge what is necessary for the present moment. I will, then, blame the measures that have been taken; for they have been suggested to his Majesty by civilians as ignorant of what is needful for the defence of a kingdom as any priest in a country parish. The defensive policy which has been assumed was not the policy for Bohemia. That policy was to attack as soon as the Emperor began the war—to prevent the concentration of his forces—to cut through his alliances—to gain friends and daunt adversaries by winning the first successes of the strife. The true policy of Bohemia was to attack as soon as the Emperor began the war. That time has passed by: yet much may be retrieved if we can but win this battle; and the first means of so doing is to restore some moral tone to the soldiery. The army is faithful; but there is a great difference between being faithful and being zealous. The troops are not zealous. Time—delay—reverses—neglect—fatigue—privation—have all cooled them. His Majesty's own continued absence from the army has cooled them also. Forgive me, Madam, if I have seemed to speak irreverently, and even unfeelingly; but I will show you a reason for it presently. These men, fighting continually against superior forces, driven from camp to camp, and only making a stand where the ground greatly favoured them, subjected to all sorts of privations, and wearied to death with marches, have heard of feasting and pageantry at Prague, but no preparations for their support; have heard of preaching and long prayers, but not of levies and trainings, and forces in the field to aid them. They have seen the enemy every day—their King only once."

"Oh, cease! cease!" cried Elizabeth, clasping her hands together. "I have seen it; I have felt it. I have known right well that this is not the way to win or keep a crown. It is sad; it is—But, no, no; I must not speak such things; I must not even think them. He is my husband—good, noble, brave; but too lightly, too easily persuaded. I have been ill, too, myself—am little fitted for active exertion even now; but yet, tell me what you desire—tell me what Christian of Anhalt judges needful for the security of the present moment."

"The immediate presence of the King in the camp," answered Algernon Grey. "Let him show himself to the soldiery—let him take part in their labours and their dangers—let him command, lead, encourage, as he did at Rakonitz. Their enthusiasm in his cause will revive; their courage and their zeal will mount together. With that hill for our position, and these cannon for our support, we will win the victory, or die to the last man."

Elizabeth started up, and grasped his hand in hers. "He shall come," she said: "if I am a king's daughter and a king's wife, he shall come. Early in the morning he shall be with his troops, if my voice have not lost all power over him. And now go, my friend. Agnes, you lead him down. Yet, stay one moment. There is never knowing what may happen in this life of change. Should the terrible disasters which our worst fears paint befall us, all will be confusion here. My lord, I tremble for some of these poor things who have accompanied me to Prague. Let me provide defence for one of them. You will take care of my poor Agnes!—is it not so? You are her father's friend. You love her well, I know. You will protect her in the hour of need!"

"If I survive, I will protect her as a brother," answered Algernon Grey, "till I give up the charge to her good uncle at Heidelberg."

"Enough, enough," said the Queen. "Now go. You have spoken hardly, my lord, but kindly, I do believe; and I thank you from my heart for opening eyes that have been closed too long. Lead him down, my Agnes."

Algernon Grey bowed low, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THERE were a few murmured words at the door of that large room where Algernon Grey had waited to know the pleasure of the Queen of Bohemia; there was a soft pressure of the hand; and then, by an irresistible impulse, which mastered forethought, reason, and resolution, he drew the sweet girl, who stood beside him, gently towards him, and pressed his lips upon hers. No human form was seen in the corridor; it was dim, nearly dark, lighted by one faint lamp; but yet, though none saw, his heart smote him; and he said, "Forgive me, Agnes, forgive me, dear one! such a moment, such events, may well excuse one token of eternal tenderness towards you who are so dear."

"I do forgive you, Algernon," said Agnes, very pale; "but oh, do not, do not."

"I will ask your forgiveness hereafter," answered Algernon; "when my whole heart shall be laid before you. Then, I think, you will forgive me, when you see the terrible struggle which has agitated me so long."

"Yes—I am sure I shall find nothing to forgive," she replied; "but yet you must not do this again; for, if you do, I shall doubt—I shall fear."

"Fear not," answered Algernon Grey, raising her hand to his lips; "on my honor, on my truth, I will give you no cause to doubt or fear—No, no, Agnes, you cannot doubt me."

"Nor do I, nor do I," she said, laying her other hand upon his; "oh no, I am sure you are all that is noble and good. Farewell, farewell!—we part in a terrible moment. Do not expose yourself rashly; but come back with victory if it be possible, and if not, still come back to protect poor Agnes Herbert in the moment of danger and need."

He did not answer; but again and again he kissed her hand; and, then turning away, he strode along the wide corridor towards the head of the great stairs.

He thought he heard a low laugh from the farther end of the passage, but his mind was in no state to attend to trifles; and, descending rapidly, he found himself the next moment in the wide vestibule below. All the servants and attendants were absent. The two large chairs, in which the chief porters sat, were

vacant; the broad table, at which the pages and daily waiters played at different games, displayed not a single figure learning the shortest road to vice and folly. Algernon Grey was walking quickly across, when he heard, proceeding from a door at the side, a well-known voice pronounce his name.

"What, Algernon!" cried William Lovet; and the young Englishman, as he turned round, could see the foot of a narrow staircase faintly marked beyond the doorway where Lovet stood; "what, Algernon, you here? You, a man of feuds and battle-fields, contemner of love and all self-delights—you within the silky precincts of a court, where the star of beauty reigns supreme; and Eros holds one side of the house, while Bacchus holds the other! Wonders will never cease! I shall expect to see old Christian of Anhalt tripping it gaily with Amelia of Lolms in some gay ball, or the Prince of Hohenloe twirling round upon his toes, with heels unspurred, and a soft simper on his bellicose lip. In fortune's name! what has brought you hither?"

"Business, my good cousin," answered Algernon Grey; "and that business none of mine. The secret is another's; therefore it must rest where it is—in my own bosom."

"Good," answered Lovet, "exceeding good. I would not add an ounce weight to my camp-equipage for all the secrets that ever yet were kittened. I am neither a great general nor a great diplomatist, thank heaven and the stars that are therein. I can fight and make love, play a shrewd game at cards with a knavish adversary, rattle the dice-box hard and yet throw sixes; but I know naught of the trade of negotiation, thanks be unto God! Your taciturn virtue, with the hat over the left ear, the moustachio turned up at the corner, and the feather half hiding the right eye, tawny leather boots, a sober doublet, and a sword long enough for Don Pedro of Spain, give you all the qualities requisite for a profound ambassador; and the gods forfend, that I should meddle with the puddle, or stir the duck-weed of your stagnant diplomacy. But whither away? You seem in haste, when every man this night is idling out his moments, what with cups of wine, what with huge sirloins, what with bright eyes and sweet smiles, thinking that that same perishable commodity called time may be but scanty in the purse of the future; and that it is but wise to get the money's worth, ere it is all expended."

"I am back to the camp with all speed," answered Algernon Grey. "Matters are not going there as I could wish; and, moreover, it is late."

"Not too late to take a walk round the ramparts," said Lovet, in a graver tone than he had used. "It is well worth our while, my noble cousin, to look at what is going on there."

"It will occupy much time," answered his companion, somewhat struck by the change in his manner; "and, in the present state of affairs, we shall be challenged and stopped by every sentry that we meet with."

"Fear not," answered Lovet, with a slight smile; "I am profoundly intimate with every guard you will meet upon the walls; and I repeat, good cousin, that it is well worth while, for you, at least, who can report to your friend, the general, to see with a soldier's eye the preparations of the what they call the klein seite of the city of Prague; for, as we shall have a battle to-morrow or the next day, and as Christian of Anhalt, in case of reverse, may think fit to retreat into the town, it is quite right he should know what the city is like. It is a marvellous place, Prague, and mighty tranquil. But come, tell your horses to go to the gate, mine are there already."

While he had been speaking, his cousin and himself had descended a second flight of steps, and entered the hall close to the great door of the first court. All was still emptiness; and the two gentlemen were left to open the wicket for themselves, without any one to assist them.

"'Tis a pity," said William Lovet, "that Maximilian of Bavaria does not know what is going on here; otherwise he might end the war at once, and might take the Elector himself in the midst of his banquet, like a fat carp in a stew feeding upon groundbait."

There was too much truth, as Algernon Grey felt, in what his cousin said; and, not at all unwilling to obtain some indication of the state of the popular mind in Prague, the young Englishman, when they issued out into the open air, called his servant Tony to his side, and told him to lead his horse down the hill to the gate by which he had entered, and to wait for his coming there.

"Take care where you go, my lord," said the man; "for the people are all as drunk as swine, and mighty quarrelsome to boot. Here is Frill, who has got into three disputes since you went in, and one regular quarrel, in which he would have got his costard broken had I not interferred and spoken them fair in a language of which they did not understand a word; so that the poor people were convinced, and had nothing to reply. I showed them how tall he was with my hand, and how tall they were, and I patted my stomach and shrugged my shoulders, and clapped one gentleman on the back till his leathern jerkin fumed like a dusty road; and, seeing that I was not a German, who are the bullies here in Bohemia, they walked away and left Frill in a whole skin, and me very glad to be quit of their company. So I beseech you, my good lord, to be careful where you go."

"I will take care," answered Algernon Grey, briefly. "Go down, as I have told you;" and taking Lovet's arm he proceeded through two or three narrow streets, till they came to a low stony lane, which ran at the fot of the inner wall. After pacing on for about a hundred yards, they found a flight of rude stone steps leading up to the platform above, without railing or balustrade; and mounting, they walked on looking over the parapet upon the low ground underneath. From time to time they came upon a heavy piece of ordnance, but no soldier appeared beside it; they passed several flanking towers, but no sentry was seen on guard; they gazed forth upon the outworks of the place, but from the Hradschin to the Moldau neither fire, nor light, nor moving form showed any sign of praparation against attack.

"Now, let men say what they will," said

Lovet, in his usual keen sarcastic tone, "this city of Prague is a strong and well-defended place; and so watched and guarded as it is, so harmonious and faithful within, and with a united and an enthusiastic army without, keen must be the courage, and overpowering the force, that will subdue it to an enemy. You can do what you like, Algernon, but if you would take my advice, you would do either one of two things; go to old Christian of Anhalt, tell him that Prague is in the most perfect state of defence, well provisioned, well watched, and well garrisoned, and, that in case of defeat, he may retreat into it in all security; or else, bring your men and horses to the gate, walk back to the palace, tell fair Agnes Herbert that you have come to conduct her in safety to Heidelberg, mount and away. You understand what I mean; as for myself, my course is taken."

Algernon Grey grasped him by the arm, and gazed in his face by the light of the moon. "You do not mean to say," he exclaimed, "that such is the course you intend to pursue?"

"Oh no, cousin mine," answered Lovet, "two or three causes combine to prevent me; first, you know I have an old fondness for fighting, merely for fighting's sake, and I would just as soon think of leaving a good dinner untouched, as of going away when a battle is in preparation. Next, you see I have no one to take with me, for dear, sweet, insipid, tiresome Madame de Laussitz has gone back with her fat husband to set up virtue and dignity in their own patrimonial halls. Then thirdly, and lastly, having no object anywhere, I may just as well be here as in another place. Life is getting wonderfully dull to me, Algernon, and I do not even find the same pleasure in a battle that I used to do. However, it is a little more amusing than anything else, and therefore I shall stay and see it. If I am killed, the matter of the future is settled to my hand. If I survive, and the Austrians beat, which I suppose they certainly will, I shall set spurs to my horse, and give him such a gallop as he has not had since he was bitted. If the Bohemians, by any chance, win the victory, I shall go on with them and help them to sack Vienna. I never saw a capital city pillaged, and it must be very amusing."

He spoke in the most ordinary tone possible; in which, perhaps, there was a slight touch of habitual affectation; but Algernon Grey, who could not view things so lightly, nor treat them so when he regarded them otherwise, pondered upon his words, and after a moment's silence, asked, "What makes you think it so positively certain that the Austrians will be successful? We have often known a battle won with a much greater disparity of numbers."

"Come with me and I will show you, Algernon," answered William Lovet; and, walking on till they came to the third tower from the gate, they passed the only sentinel they had seen, giving the word in answer to his challenge, and then issuing forth from the town, mounted their horses and rode on to the Star.

"Now let us send the beasts back," said Lovet, when they reached the foot of the Weissenberg; "and mounting by this little path on foot, we shall have a full view of the grand army, which is to do such mighty things to-morrow.

Algernon Grey followed in silence, after ordering the page to inform young Christian of Anhalt that he would be back in half an hour. For about three or four hundred yards, as they ascended, the army was hidden from their sight by some tall trees and bushes; but they could see the glare of the watch-fires spreading out into the sky, and hear the murmuring roar of many voices; for the wine and provisions had raised the spirits of the soldiery for a time, and they were wearing away the night in laughter and in song. No sentinel barred their path; no guard demanded the word; for, although strict orders had been issued by the general for extraordinary precautions to be taken, the demoralization of the soldiery, which had been collected on the Weissenberg to support the force under Christian of Anhalt, had become so great before his arrival, that no command was obeyed, except by the force immediately under his own orders; and the sentries, after having been placed, quietly retired to rejoin their comrades round the watch-fires, as soon as the eyes of the officers were withdrawn.

Turning the little patch of underwood, Algernon Grey and Lovet came suddenly upon a group of eight men, stretched out around a pile of blazing wood, singing, jesting, wrangling, with their wild countenances, long shaggy beards and hair, strange apparel, and various kinds of arms designating them as some of the Transylvanian hordes of Bethlem Gabor. They started up at the two fine, handsome-looking men who approached, with a look of savage curiosity, but took no further notice, and the man who was singing even did not interrupt his music. It was a wild, rude air, but not without much plaintive melody; for, though the song seemed to be a bacchanalian one, yet the general tone was melancholy, or seemed so to the ear of Algernon Grey.

"Speak to them, Algernon, speak to them," said Lovet, after they had watched them for a moment or two.

"They will not understand a word I say," answered his cousin. "Do you not see? These are the Transylvanians."

"Oh," answered Lovet, and walked on.

Without saying another word, he led the way along the rise of the hill, on which was spread out the force of the auxiliaries, and at length came to a small open space kept by a sentinel or two of Christian of Anhalt's own force, to prevent any tumult, or quarrelling between the Bohemians and Transylvanians. Here the two gentlemen were challenged; but, giving the word, they passed on through the Bohemian bivouacs, where, in some degree, more order and discipline was observable. From time to time, indeed, a scene of great noise and confusion presented itself; and once or twice blows were given, and even knives drawn, so that the constant interference of the officers was required to keep peace amongst a violent and easily excited people. In other places, however, the men were stretched out around their fires asleep; and here and there they were talking quietly, though with somewhat gloomy and discontented looks.

"Now, ask some of these fellows, Algernon," said Lovet, "how they like the prospect of to-morrow?"

"I do not speak Bohemian," answered Algernon Grey.

"But do not they understand German?" asked his cousin.

"Not a word," said Algernon, gazing in his face; "you would not persuade me, Lovet, that you have been so long amongst them without discovering that fact."

"No," replied Lovet; "but I have discovered something more, Algernon, that the discord is not only in the tongues of this host, though Babel could scarcely match it in confusion of languages, but in the spirit, character, customs, views, and feelings, of those who compose it. It is, in fact, a mere mob of different nations, English, Scotch, Germans, Bohemians, Transylvanians, Silesians, Moravians, and Dutch, without one common bond between them, not understanding each other's tongues, no man having a fellow-feeling for his neighbour, no zeal, no esprit de corps, and one-half of them not knowing what they are brought here for at all. Now I say, that if this corps beats the regular and well-disciplined Austrians and Bavarians, it must be by a miracle from heaven; for no human means will ever produce such a result—so now good-night, cousin; I shall go to my tent and sleep; for as there is a chance of this being the last evening of my life, I have taken care to make it a merry one, and I am tired of amusement of different kinds."

"Good-night," said Algernon Grey; and shaking hands, they parted.

At the door of his tent the young English nobleman found his servant, Tony, and the page, Frill, conversing together in low tones; and, on asking if they had delivered his message to the young Prince of Anhalt, he was informed that Christian had gone forth to make a round through the camp, and had not yet returned. Algernon Grey perceived that there was a sort of hesitation in the manner of both his attendants; that Frill gazed at the elder servant, and the old man turned his eyes to the page; but, suspecting that both might entertain some apprehensions regarding the ensuing day, he did not choose to encourage any questions, and walked at once into the tent.

"Give it yourself, Frill, give it yourself," said Tony, loud enough for his lord to hear; "has the devil of impudence abandoned you that you dare not do what it is your duty to do, when you dare do so much that you ought not?"

Algernon Grey had seated himself before the little table, and the next instant Frill entered the tent, and approached with a paper in his hand, saying, "This dropped from you, my lord, as you were dismounting at the foot of the hill. I found it under the horse's feet."

Algernon Grey took the paper from his hand, and looked at it for a moment before he opened it. He did not recollect its shape and appearance at all. It was folded as if it had been placed in a cover, in form like an ordinary letter, but without seal or address; there was the mark of a horse's shoe across it, so that the boy's story of where he had found it was thus far confirmed; and Algernon Grey unfolded it and held it to the lamp. The handwriting was not unfamiliar to him, for he had twice in his life received a letter in the same; but the tone was very different from that in which he had ever himself been addressed, although his relation with the writer might have justified the warmest language that woman can use towards man.

"A whole year and more has passed," so ran the letter, "and yet you have not returned, nor accomplished that which you undertook. I thirst to see you, to cast myself into your arms again. I thirst in the midst of all these people, barren and insignificant to me, for the sight of him I love, as the traveller in the desert thirsts for the cool well. Yet come not till it is accomplished; but strive, if you do love me, to accomplish it soon. Take any means,—take all means. Tell him that I hate him; that I shall ever hate him; that his cold and precise nature can never assimilate with my fiery and impetuous disposition; that those who linked us to one another, tried to bind flame and ice together. Tell him, that I say that I hate him. Tell him, if you will, that I love you. Require him to break this bond, as has been often done before; and let him know, if he persists, it shall be for his own wretchedness; that every hour of his union with me shall be an hour of misery; that every minute shall have its grief, or woman's wit shall fail me. If all this does not decide him, you must seek some other means. I leave them to you, but the man's life cannot be charmed; at all events, do what you have to do speedily, my William, and then fly to my arms. I will not put my name, but there will be no need of guessing twice. Farewell!"

Algernon Grey laid down the letter on the table, and gazed at it sternly for a moment, then raised his eyes to the page, who had retired to the other side of the tent near the entrance.

"Come hither, boy," he said, and as the youth, with a slow and faltering step, advanced towards him, his lord added, "you have read this letter?"

"A part, my lord," replied Frill, with his knees shaking. "Tony thought I had better read it to find out whom it belonged to."

"You do not pretend to say," continued Algernon Grey, "that when you had read it, you believed it belonged to me."

The boy hesitated and turned crimson, and then murmured, "Tony thought it ought to belong to you, whoever it was sent to."

"Call him hither, and return yourself," said Algernon Grey; but the boy had not far to go, for the old servant was still waiting without. When he appeared, however, his air and manner was different from that of the page; he seemed very grave indeed, but calm and firm, and while the boy slunk behind him, he advanced boldly to the table by which his lord sat.

"How is it," said Algernon Grey, "that you, an old and faithful servant of my house, I might say almost a friend, have induced this boy to deceive me into reading a letter which was never intended for my eye?"

"Because, my lord," replied Tony, "that there were things never intended for your eye, which it is right and necessary you should see; a great many things, never intended for your ear, that it is only just you should hear."

"Indeed!" said Algernon Grey. "In this, however, you have done wrong, though I doubt not that your intention was good. You should never attempt to deceive. You should have spoken to me boldly and straightforwardly, and I might have thanked you then for information which now is burdensome to me."

"Why, you forbade me, my lord, ever to say anything to you against your cousin, Sir William, again; you thought I was prejudiced about him, that I had some hatred towards him, and so, when a means came of opening your eyes, I determined I would take it at any risk, otherwise I could have told you a great deal about this long ago."

"From what source came your information?" asked Algernon Grey.

"First from old Paul Watson," answered Tony, "who was killed at Rakonitz. When we were coming out of Heidelberg, just before the thunderstorm, he told me that your cousin had been spending all his time, before he came abroad hither, in making love to the lady Catherine, though he knew her to be your affianced wife. Then, my good lord, when we first came to this place, and the king's courier went over to England, I got him to take a letter for me to my brother, who soon sent me plenty more intelligence, which I will show you, if we live over to-morrow."

"To what effect!" asked his master, in a low deep tone.

"To the effect that this has been going on for years," answered Tony; "and that there is many a strange and scandalous story in the country which makes this woman no wife for you, my lord."

"And yet she is my wife," muttered Algernon Grey to himself; then waving his hand to the servant, he said, "Leave me."

The page instantly withdrew; but Tony lingered for a moment or two, and then said, "I hope you will forgive me, my lord; for I see that this has made you very unhappy. I can't help thinking, however, that it is little worth while to vex one's self about such a woman, when there is more than one of the sweetest and the best, who would be happy enough to be your wife."

A faint smile crossed Algernon's Grey's countenance. "It is not her conduct makes me unhappy, my good friend," he answered; "it is long since any thing that she could do has had such an effect. I have known her thoroughly for some time; but that a man, my near relation, my pretended friend and old companion, should take part in bringing disgrace upon my name, and enter into such black schemes as these"—and he laid his hand upon the letter—"does grieve and astonish me; does shake my confidence in human virtue and honour, and makes me doubt whether friendship is anything but a mere shadow, honesty but an idle name."

"No, my lord, no," cried the servant; "it all comes of your shutting your eyes to your cousin's behaviour, even from your boyhood. You thought everybody was prejudiced against him; that we hated him without cause; but, bless you, my good lord, we knew him from his youth, and had plenty of opportunities of seeing what you never saw. You great noblemen are, doubtless, clever and more learned than we are; but we poor people have got our eyes and can't help making use of them. I never saw Sir William do anything from a good motive; I never saw him do anything straightforwardly; I never heard of any act of kindness; and you may judge what we think, when we have watched for the whole of the last year, day and night, I may say, for fear you should have a shot in the head, or a blade in the heart, that did not come from the hands of a fair enemy."

"No, no," cried Algernon Grey, waving his hand, warmly; "there, at least, you do him wrong. Passion may mislead, but he is incapable of such acts as that; and, had he been so inclined, he has had plenty of opportunities."

"Not so many as your lordship thinks," answered Tony; "for there has been always some one near at hand. However, I think, that is all nonsense, too; for it seemed to me there was more to lose than to gain by killing you; but the other men would fancy it, and there is never any harm in being too careful. He will be in a fine fright when he finds the letter is gone; for I do not doubt that it dropped from him, although it was under your horse's feet that the boy found it."

"Give me some paper from that roll," said Algernon Grey, "and the yellow wax there—nay, it matters not. Here are persons coming. Begone now, my good friend; and remember, not one word of this to any other being, till I have myself well considered how to act."

As he spoke Christian of Anhalt entered the tent, and the old servant bowed and retired.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Before daybreak, Algernon Grey was up and dressed, and, to say the truth, it was no pain to him to rise, for he had not closed an eye all night, and he was more weary of tossing to and fro on the sleepless couch, than if he had passed the hours by the the side of the watch-fire. As soon as his buff coat had been cast on and looped, and his sword-belt thrown over his shoulders, he lighted his lamp, and read over again the letter that had been placed in his hands the night before. A smile of some bitterness came upon his countenance, and, folding it carefully up, he walked out of his tent, and, ascending the highest part of the hill, gazed over the scene below. The stars were growing somewhat faint in the heaven, but the diminution of their lustre was the only sign yet visible of approaching day. All below was still. The wearied troops were sleeping by the nearly extinguished watch-fires; and the tread of a distant sentry, as he paced up and down, could just be heard, marking, rather than breaking, the silence. The murmur of the river, too, reached the ear, but with a stilly sound, full of repose and quiet. Folding his arms upon his breast, Algernon Grey continued to gaze over the shadowy lines of tents and waggons down to the valley below, where lay a light morning mist, giving a white gleam soft and pleasant to the eye, and then he turned his look towards the heavens, and his lips murmured with prayer. A minute or two after, a faint grey streak was seen in the east: it then

acquired an orange hue; and one or two light-grey clouds overhead began to glow with spots of a lurid red. Soon after, the orange turned to a fiery crimson, and floods of rose-coloured rays came pouring over the sky; while the grey air between the tents was mingled with a dim mysterious purple. A solitary figure passing here and there was seen. The neighing of a horse broke the silence. A dull hum gradually succeeded; then brisk and lively sounds. A drum beat in a distant part of the camp; and, just when the broad sun showed half his disc above the horizon, red and fiery, as if ominous of the bloody strife about to take place, the boom of a single cannon shook the air, and all became life and activity.

With a quick step, the young Englishman descended from the spot where he had been standing, paused for a moment or two, some twenty paces down the hill, and gazing out towards a distant point, shading his eyes with his hand; then resumed his course, and bent his steps direct towards the tent of William Lovet. He found one of his cousin's servants at the entrance; and, asking the man whether his master were up, was informed that he had just gone forth.

"There he goes, my lord, along that path," said the man, pointing still farther down the hill; and, instantly advancing with a quick step, Algernon Grey cut him off just as he reached a little open space, which divided the tents of the English and Scotch volunteers from the ground occupied by a small party of Palatinate troops.

"Ah, Algernon!" exclaimed Lovet, turning round at the sound of a quick step; "is that you? I was going to seek you; for there is a rumour that Bavarian foragers are in sight."

"I have seen them," answered Algernon Grey, in a tone peculiarly calm and gentle; "at least I have seen what I consider to be reconnoitring parties of the enemy. A battle is, therefore, certain, ere the day be over; and as no one knows who may come out of this field alive, it is as well we should have a private word or two before we enter it."

"Ah, my grave cousin," cried Lovet with a laugh, "are you preparing against the worst? Good faith! I never think it worth while to fancy that the ball has yet been cast which is destined to take my life."

"Nor do I dwell upon such thoughts," answered Algernon Grey; "but still there are particular events, my good cousin, which form epochs in the life of man, as others form epochs in the histories of states, and it is as well to take those moments to wind up old accounts, and leave the coming time clear and free for a different course of action."

There was something peculiar, firm, almost stern, in Algernon Grey's tone, which struck William Lovet a good deal, for he had rarely heard that tone employed towards himself, and he knew well that it was an indication of his cousin's mind being strongly moved. Nevertheless he could not restrain his ordinary jesting spirit, or else he judged that light merriment was the best means of covering deeper thoughts. "On my life, Algernon," he said, "if you wish to wind up our accounts, I cannot agree, for I have not the ledger about me. It is a large book and the roll of long standing—I do not carry it about me."

"I do," answered Algernon Grey; "there is the last item," and he put into his cousin's hand the letter which I have already laid before the reader.

William Lovet took it and opened it. The moment his eye fell upon the writing, in spite of habitual self-command, the colour slightly mounted into his cheek, and his lip turned somewhat white. The next instant, however, he looked up with a clear eye and a curling lip, saying, "You have read it?"

"Every word," answered Algernon Grey, calmly. "It was given to me as a paper belonging to myself, and I read it throughout: not finding a name which could lead me to the right owner, till the last few lines met my eye."

"It is a precious epistle," said Lovet, holding it with the coolest air imaginable, and then placing it in his pocket; "not quite so eloquent as one of St. Paul's, nor so edifying, cousin mine. But yet, she is a glorious creature, and, as you must have long perceived, I am over head and ears in love with her."

"I have not long perceived it," answered Algernon Grey, bitterly; "had I long perceived, William, my conduct might have been different. You have mistaken me, sir. It would seem that you cannot comprehend straightforward conduct and direct dealing; for, had you done so, you would have told me all this when first we met after so long a parting. Instead of that, by crooked means and side-long instigations, you have been urging me to steps tending to the gratification of your own wishes. I will not pause to recapitulate all those acts and words, the true meaning of which is now as clear to me as day. Suffice it, that you love this woman, or her great wealth, and that you have used every sort of artifice to induce me to take these steps, which must necessarily tend to the annulling of my incomplete marriage with herself. Is it not so?"

"Perfectly," answered William Lovet, with the coolest possible assurance; "I have done so most deliberately and considerately; and I trust that you are duly grateful for it. My dear Algernon, do not look so fierce. Recollect that I am not one on whom frowning brows have any effect; but listen to a little quiet reason; though, I must say, you are the most unreasonable man I ever met with. Now, if a poor man has an oyster in his hand and wants to eat the delicate fish, he must open it with whatever instrument happens to be nearest to him. Would you have him wait till he can go to a cutler's, or an ironmonger's, to buy himself an oyster-knife? If he has a dagger, he uses the dagger; if not, he takes a stone and hammers it open; if no stone is at hand, he dashes it on the ground and breaks it so. Then must he wait for vinegar and pepper, a soft manchet-roll, and a glass of sack? Oh, no, he scoops it out and swallows it whole, licks his lips, and thanks the gods for the good gift of oysters. Such is my case: I took the means nearest at hand to obtain my object, and, thinking it much better for your honour and credit, that you should be the person to decline the fulfilment of a contract passed upon you by a couple of grey-

headed grandsires, than that the lady should curtsey low and say, I won't, I prompted you to all things that I thought conducive to your happiness, and, at the same time, to my little schemes. But see what an ungrateful thing is man! Here you set yourself upon the pedestal of injured innocence, and look stout and stalwart, as if you would cut the throat of the man who has done you the greatest possible service."

"Service!" exclaimed Algernon Grey. "Do you call this service?"

"To be sure," answered Lovet, laughing. "A pretty life you would have led with this fair lady. There, read her epistle over again;" and he took it from his pocket. "You cannot have perused it carefully. Not only would you have had a sweet and comfortable companion, full of matrimonial tenderness and domestic duty, but, possibly, a tranquil passage to another state. somewhat more speedy than the ordinary course of nature, unless you had a special taster of your food, and kept all sharp instruments under lock and key."

"And can you really dream of wedding such a thing as you describe?" asked his cousin.

"Oh, yes, as soon as she is wedable," answered William Lovet. "I am a very fearless animal, fond of riding wild horses, and know, moreover, how to manage them; but in this matter do as you like, kind cousin Algernon. Go back, if it so please you, and ratify your boy's marriage. The lady will soon be a widow, I will warrant; or, if you are wise, do as I have always urged you, take some step to break this boyish union—any step you please; you will find her right ready to second your wishes; and a little interest at court, a good word to the bishops, and humble petition to the King will settle the matter in six weeks. However, you may look upon it now, I shall expect your deep gratitude for all that I have done; and when you are wedded to the lady that you love, and I to her I seek, we will each rule our household in different ways; and we will meet at Christmastide and Easter, and, like a couple of pair of cooing doves, congratulate ourselves in soft murmurs on our separate happiness."

"My gratitude will be limited to the occasion, William," cried his cousin; "for my part I'll never seek to see you more. I find that from the time I left my native land, you have been seeking to withhold, if not to withdraw from me, the affections of one bound to me by ties she should have thought indissoluble."

"Affection that you never sought to cultivate yourself," said Lovet, tartly.

"I was bound, as you well know, by a solemn pledge not to return till five years," said Algernon Grey; "but, at all events, it was not a cousin's part nor a friend's to strive to poison my domestic peace—nay, nor even to put it in peril, for who can say whether this marriage can be dissolved?—nay, let me speak out, for time wears,—if we both survive this battle, I beseech you to return to England with all possible speed, tell your fair paramour, that I am aware of all, and that I will take instant means to do my best that her kind wishes shall be gratified, that the contract between her and me shall come to an end; and, at the same time, entreat her to use all those keen measures which her shrewd wit can suggest, and her bold courage execute, to second my endeavours. Between you both, doubtless you will find the matter easy. So farewell!"

He turned upon his heel, and walked a few steps away, but ere he had gone far, he heard Lovet's voice exclaiming, "Algernon, Algernon!"

"Were you ever at a wedding," asked his cousin coming up, as he paused, "where a harsh old father, taken in by a coaxing girl, gave his daughter away to the very man she loved!—have you not seen how she came back to kiss the dear old man's hand, and seemed reluctant to go, and talked of the sweet delights of her domestic home, and a world of courting tenderness taught men and women from their childhood, about infant joys and early pleasures; while, in her heart, she felt like a freed bird with the door of its cage just open? Get thee gone, my noble cousin! Thou art like this same bride; and, say what you will, this letter has taken a load of care from your shoulders; and, on my life! so much do I love you, that, had I known how balmy and peaceful would be its effects, I would have shown it to you long ago. There, take it and keep it as a tender memorial of your dear and devoted Catharine; and, whenever you think of her large, flashing black eyes, her Juno brow, and curling lip, read some passages from that tender epistle, and, falling down upon your knees, thank Heaven for having given you such a cousin as myself."

"I will keep it," said Algernon Grey, taking the letter from his hand; "but there is one thing, my good cousin, which, for your own sake, you should know. This is not the first intimation that I have had of my so-called wife's infidelity to her engagements with me, though it is the first that you, my kinsman and companion, had a share, alas! in her breach of faith. Perhaps you do not understand my meaning; but you must be of a different wit from that I think, if you so softly believe the woman who would thus act towards me will treat you better."

"Oh, you speak of sundry small amours with which the sweet lady has consoled the weary hours of my long absence," answered Lovet, with his cheek a little heated; "that will be easily pardoned, and my presence will set all right again. I am no jealous fool, as Algernon, and can pardon a reasonable amount of coquetry in a lovely woman, left with no one to keep her thoughts from stagnating." And Lovet, turning away with a laugh, took his way back to his own tent.

There are some minds upon which the discovery of baseness and treachery in those who have been trusted, is so painful as to counterbalance, and even more than counterbalance, any portion of relief and happiness that is sometimes obtained under the over-ruling hand of fate, from the very means employed to thwart, to grieve, and to disappoint us. Such was the case with Algernon Grey in the present instance. It must not be denied that it was a relief to him to feel that he had reason of a motive and a just cause for striving, by every means, to annul a contract which had been en-

tered into rather by his parents than himself, long ere he had the power of judging, or acting, on his own behalf; but yet the character of his cousin now stood before him in all its naked deformity, and it offered a painful subject of contemplation, that no prospect of happiness could banish.

He would fain have had a few moments for thought; and was turning his steps towards his own tent, when a large party of young men advancing towards him impeded his way, and the next moment the voice of the younger Prince of Anhalt calling him by name made him turn towards the slope above. As soon as he perceived that the young Englishman heard him, he waved him up; and as soon as Algernon was by his side, he exclaimed, "Come hither, come hither, I have something to show you."

"I think I know what you would say, my Prince; I have already seen some parties in that wood towards Pilsen. They are Bavarians, I should think."

"Then the battle is certain," said Christian of Anhalt. "You will charge with me, will you not?"

"Assuredly," cried Algernon Grey; "but I think we had better communicate the news to your father, as there may be yet time, if we can get the men to work, to strengthen our position here a little."

"Come then, come," said the young Prince; "he will be glad to see you. I told him half an hour ago of the news you brought last night from Prague; and he said, 'God send the Queen have power enough to make her husband come; but I doubt it.' I doubt too, to tell you the truth, my friend; and his presence at this moment were worth ten thousand men. Will your cousin be of our band? I saw you speaking with him just now."

"We spoke together for the last time, perhaps, in life," answered Algernon Grey; "he has done me wrong—has been doing so for years—"

"And you have found him out at length," said Christian of Anhalt, interrupting him with a smile. "We have understood him better. There is not a man in the camp who would trust him."

"And yet," answered Algernon Grey, "he is a good soldier, and a brave man. You had better have him and his people with you."

"Not I," answered Christian of Anhalt. "True it is, my friend, we cannot unveil the bosoms of those who surround us, and see the thoughts and purposes within; but, on my life! were it possible, I would not take one man along with me, when I go to fall upon the enemy's ranks, whose heart is not pure and high, whose thoughts and purposes, as they lie open to the eye of God, might not lie open to the eye of man. And shall I have the company of one whom I know to be a villain? I always fancy that it is such men as this who bring the bullets most thick amongst us."

Algernon Grey shook his head with a sigh, for he was well aware that in the wise but mysterious ways of Heaven, the lead and the steel as often seem to seek out the noble and the good as the mean and the wicked.

As they had been thus conversing, they had walked on towards the tent of the general, whom they found seated with several other officers taking a hasty meal. The intelligence they gave soon brought that meal to a conclusion; and for several hours every effort was made to induce the men to strengthen the position of the Bohemian army on the hill. The spirit of insubordination, however, was too strong for authority. Some would not work at all, saying that they were soldiers and not grave-diggers. Some slunk away after having begun; and none but a few English and Germans exerted themselves with anything like energy and perseverance.

Little, very little was effected; and, in the mean while, news came from the various reconnoitering parties that had been thrown out, of the rapid approach of the Austrian and Bavarian army. Some had caught sight of one body, some of another; but still the day wore on ere they appeared in sight; and the Prince of Hohenloe, and several others of the commanders, began to doubt that a battle would take place that day.

Old Christian of Anhalt shook his head: "Maximilian of Bavaria," he said, "will fight as soon as he comes up, depend upon it; he must either fight or starve; and one night to him is of more consequence than even to us."

All that the individual exertions of a man could effect, was done by the old Prince himself. He strove to the best of his power to array and encourage the forces. He told them that the King would be with them in an hour. He pointed to the walls and guns of Prague, and said, that with such support as that, with strong hands and brave hearts, they had no need to fear any army were it of ten times their own numbers. His countenance was gay and cheerful, as he rode from rank to rank, whatever doubts might be in his heart; but he failed in raising the spirits of the greater part of the troops; and by all, with the exception of the cavalry under the command of his son, he was listened to with dull and heavy brows, and an aspect of doubt and uncertainty.

When he and his little train had reached the middle of the line, a horseman rode up to him from Prague, and spoke a few words in a low tone. The old man's cheek grew red; and he muttered between his teeth: "In the church! sin and death! What does he in the church? Why does he not pray here in the eye of the God of battles, and in the presence of his soldiers?"

"I shall have to go and cut Scultetus's throat, to stop his long-winded preaching," said the Prince's son, who was close by.

"Hush!" cried the old general; and, raising his voice, he added in a loud tone, "the King will be here immediately, my friends; and under his eye you will fight for his crown and your own rights."

"The heads of the columns are appearing on the right, your Highness," cried Algernon Grey, in a whisper.

"I am glad of it," answered Christian of Anhalt. "The sooner this is over, the better—some one ride down to those Hungarians; tell them to bend back upon the hill; so far advanced, they show our flank to the enemy. Let their right rest upon your little summer-house; it is quite far enough advanced. You go, Le-

nepp;" and, riding on, he continued on his exhortations to the men, every now and then sending off an officer with orders to one part or another of the line; after having reached the end, he turned his horse, and, accompanied by the Prince of Hohenloe and the rest, rode up at a quick pace to the highest part on the hill, beckoning to the man who had brought him news from Prague to follow. His first attention was directed to the movements of the enemy, whose regiments were now gathering thick in the plain below.

A cloud of light troops, manœuvring hither and thither, almost as if in sport, concealed, in some degree, what was taking place in the main body of the army; but the experienced eye of the old commander was not to be deceived; and once or twice he murmured to himself, "If he does that, and we are wise, he is ruined. We shall soon see—now, sir, what is going on in Prague!" and he turned to the officer who had brought him news from the city: "Praying, you say, and preaching too, I suppose. What more!"

"Why, feasting, your Highness," answered the young man, drily; "there is a great banquet prepared for the court after the morning service."

"A banquet!" exclaimed the old Prince furiously; "God's life! who will there be to eat it?—Yes, he will try to cross—No, he is coming farther on.—Praying, and preaching, and feasting, with fifty thousand men at the gates! Has any one got a Bible here?"

"I have," answered a young pale man, standing by on foot; and he handed a small volume to the old commander.

"Let me see," continued Christian of Anhalt, "this is the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity, is it not? and the gospel is the twenty-second of St. Matthew; let me see;" and he sought out the chapter he spoke of, and ran his eye over it in silence for a minute or two: "Ah!" he said, at length, reading from the book; "'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's'—but, by my grey hair! here comes Cæsar to take them; ay, and to take more than his own too; so we must try and prevent him. Now, my good cousin of Hohenloe, see if you can make out what Maximilian of Bavaria and that damned Walloon, Bucquoi, are doing."

"Methinks they are going to attack the city on the other side," answered the Prince of Hohenloe, who was in command of the troops which had been gathered on the Weissenberg during old Anhalt's retreat.

"No," answered the other, "no; they are looking for a bridge. They will not show us their flank, depend upon it. That would be a greater fault than that which they are going to commit. Ride down to your men, Christian, my boy; wheel them a little upon their right, about the eighth of a circle; and be ready at a moment's notice. I will send down the Englishmen to you, when I see more."

About a quarter of an hour passed, during which the movements of the enemy seemed wavering and uncertain; at the end of that time, however, clouds of skirmishers, Croats and Albanians, as they were called, began to appear on the nearer side of the river. "It may yet be a feint," said Christian of Anhalt; "it may yet be a feint—they are getting up on that swampy ground. Five minutes more and they cannot help themselves. By heavens! their columns are broken. What is Maximilian of Bavaria about?—he is trying to turn the march—The Austrians still come on—look, look, they are separating; they will never get their artillery over that little bridge! Now, cousin of Hohenloe, now, noble lords and gentlemen, the moment of victory is before us, if we choose to take it. In a quarter of an hour, the marsh, the stream, and a bridge of a span wide will be between Bucquoi and the Duke. Let us sweep down upon the Bavarian, who is already in confusion. We are more than double his numbers; he can receive no support from the Austrians; and if there be a thousand gallant men in our army, he is irretrievably ruined. The same movement brings us on the flank of Bucquoi; and he is between us and the guns of Prague. I say, let us charge at once as one man, and the day is ours."

"But you do not consider, Anhalt," said the Prince of Hohenloe, "that we should so lose the advantage of our position; here, upon a high hill, they must climb to attack us, and undergo our whole fire as they advance."

"God of Heaven!" cried Christian of Anhalt.

"I think," said another general officer, close by, "that it would be a pity to give up the great advantage of this ground, which we have taken such pains to obtain."

"Besides," said another, "if we should be repulsed there, we lose the support of Prague, and are totally cut off from the city; we should fight to a disadvantage, and have no place of retreat."

"If we could count upon the zeal and steadiness of our men," cried another, "I should join my voice to the Prince of Anhalt's; but I very much doubt them. I believe that one-half would disperse ere we met the enemy."

The old commander sat upon his horse in silence, with his teeth set, and his bare hands clasped so tight together, that a part of the brown fingers became quite white. "You are losing the only opportunity of victory," he said, at length. "Nay, it is already lost. The Bavarians have turned the march; the Austrians are passing the bridge. Ere we could reach them, they will be once more united. Now, naught is to be thought of, but to make as good a fight here as we can. You, Hohenloe, take the left; I command upon the right. Let our artillery open their fire upon the enemy now. We may do something to break them as they advance. Let us each to our post; and, in God's name, do our best!"

Thus saying, he turned his horse to ride away; but, after having gone some twenty or thirty yards, he called up one of his train, and said in a low voice, "Ride to the commanders of regiments, and tell them in private, that in case of a disaster, which God forfend, they are to rally their men upon Brandeis. The campaign is not at an end, though a battle may be lost; and, if Prague does its duty, with the help of Mansfeld, we may still defeat the enemy, and save the crown. Here, my young friend," he continued, beckoning to Algernon Grey, "go to my son and tell him to fly back

to his former ground with the cavalry. Let him know that I have been overruled; and, therefore, that movement was vain. He will now, as far as I see, have the Bavarian cavalry in front. We must try early, what a charge upon them will do; but bid him, if successful, not pursue too far, but turn upon the flank of the infantry and charge again. I will send him an order when it is time."

Thus saying, he proceeded on his way; and Algernon Grey, galloping down to the cavalry under the younger Prince Christian, delivered his father's message.

"See what it is to join fools with wise men," said young Christian of Anhalt, in a low bitter tone. "They have ruined us."

"Indubitably," answered Algernon Grey; "and the same timid spirit, if it acts here, will render the battle but a short one. I will just give some orders to my people, in case of the worst, and then take my place; for they are coming on fast."

Thus saying, he turned his horse and cantered quickly round to a spot just over the brow of the hill, where the baggage had been collected and left under the charge of the ordinary servants of the officers, and a small guard. "Here, Frill," he cried, as soon as he could find his own people, "tell the men to keep the horses saddled, and the lighter baggage charged; lead the grey and the roan down towards the gate of the town, with one of the sumpter-horses, and have the barb brought up behind that tree, in case this should be killed. Keep yourself just over the edge of the hill, to be out of the fire. There is no use of risking your life, my poor boy."

"I should like to see the battle, my lord," said the lad; "no harm happened to me at Rakonitz, though I had my beaver shot through."

"Nonsense," answered his master, "do as I have ordered, and let me not see you above the hill. You have money with you, I think, in case of need?"

The boy answered in the affirmative, and Algernon Grey, turning his horse, rode back to the cavalry under Prince Christian of Anhalt, and took his place at the head of his own men. The Austrians were by this time within three hundred yards from the foot of the hill, upon the troops ranged along the edge of which their artillery was playing with but very little effect. The guns of the Bohemian army, however, though only ten in number, were better placed and better served; and at the moment when Algernon Grey returned to the scene of the commencing strife, the balls from a battery of four large pieces were ploughing through the ranks of a large body of the enemy's cavalry just in front, creating tremendous confusion and disarray. He had not been three minutes with his troop, when, looking to the left, he saw a German officer galloping furiously along towards the young Prince of Anhalt, and seeming to call aloud to him as he advanced, though the roar of the artillery prevented his words from being heard. The next moment, however, the young Prince waved his sword high in the air, and shouted "Charge!" The word passed along from mouth to mouth; and at once the spurs were driven into the horses' sides; the animals sprang forward, and down the slope of the hill, the whole of the cavalry of the left was hurled like a thunderbolt upon the right wing of the enemy. Everything gave way before them. Men and horses rolled over in the shock; the standard of the Walloon fell; the cavalry was driven back upon the infantry; the infantry was thrown into confusion. A force of Austrian horse, brought up to the support of the Walloons, was broken in a moment; and in that part of the field, for some ten or fifteen minutes, the victory was decided in favour of the Bohemians; but, when all seemed favourable, a thin hard-featured man, on a black horse, wheeled a large body of Bavarian pike-men, supported by a regiment of arquebussiers upon the young Prince's triumphant cavalry. A fierce volley of small arms instantly followed. As Christian of Anhalt was plunging his horse among the pikes, the young leader fell at once almost at the feet of Tilly. Algernon Grey's horse went down at the same moment, but, starting up, he endeavoured to drag his friend from amongst the pikes, receiving a slight wound on the shoulder as he did so; and, as the blow forced him to let go his hold for a moment, two strong Bavarians grasped the Prince by the bucklings of the cuirass and dragged him within the line. Another strove to seize the young Englishman; but striking him fiercely over the head with his sword, Algernon freed himself from his grasp, and springing back, caught a masterless horse that was running near, and vaulted into the saddle.

The trumpets of the Bohemian cavalry were sounding a retreat; and spurring after them with two of his own men, who had hastened to his aid, Algernon Grey reascended the hill, and rallied his troops into something like order. All the rest of the field, however, was one wild scene of confusion. Clouds of smoke and dust rolled between the various masses of the army, hardly permitting the eye to distinguish which bodies were keeping their ground, which were flying; but one thing was clear; the enemy were advancing steadily up the hill, and the Bavarian cavalry rallied, and, in good order, outflanking the Bohemian line, were preparing to charge their lately victorious foes. The German infantry, towards the centre of the Bohemian line, seemed firm enough; but the Transylvanians, who had been seen upon the right at the commencement of the fight, were no longer to be perceived; and regiment after regiment of the Austrian troops pouring on in that direction, showed that the ground there was clear of opposition.

"My lord, my lord," said a youthful voice, as Algernon Grey was gazing around him, "the day is lost. All the savages have fled; and the whole right is in confusion and disarray; the men scampering hither and thither, and drowning themselves in the Moldau."

"Go back, go back to the place I told you; wait there for me; but tell the men to get all the baggage as near the gate as they can. My lord, the count," he continued, riding up to an old officer, who was advancing, "one more charge for the honour of our arms."

"With all my heart," said old Count Schlick.

"where's the boy, Christian? He did that charge right gallantly."

"He is wounded and taken, my lord," answered Algernon Grey.

"Then I will head the men," said the Count; "they will follow grey hair as well as brown, I will warrant. Let us away."

Riding on to the body of cavalry which had rallied, the old Bohemian nobleman put himself at their head; the word was given to charge; and once more, though with less spirit and in diminished numbers, they swept down to meet the advancing enemy. The right of their horse encountered a body of Walloon cavalry, and forced them to recoil; and there the Bohemian horsemen were soon mingled with the foe hand to hand. But on the left they found the way opposed by a steady regiment of Bavarian pikemen, flanked with arquebussiers. The first line hesitated, and drew on the rein at the sight of the forest of pikes before them. A discharge of musketry took them in the flank, and in an instant all was confusion, disarray, and flight. About four hundred horse, with the old Count and Algernon Grey, were left in the midst of the imperial army, no longer united as a single mass, but broken into small parties of combatants; and it soon became evident that the strife could not be maintained any longer.

"Away, away!" cried the Count, riding past the young Englishman; "I have ordered the trumpets to sound a retreat,—but, in Heaven's name, let us save our standard." As he spoke, he pointed to a spot where a banner was floating still, in the midst of a large party of the enemy; and gathering together as many of his own men as he could, Algernon Grey made a charge with the old Bohemian at his side, in order, if possible, to recover it. But the effort was in vain; as they poured down upon the enemy, a pistol shot struck the standard-bearer from his horse, and, closing round the little troop of English and Bohemians, the Walloons soon brought many a brave heart to the ground. Algernon Grey thought of Agnes Herbert, there was nothing but death or captivity if he staid to strike another stroke; all was evidently lost; no object was to be obtained, and, turning his horse, he cleared the way with his sword and galloped up the hill, passing under a furious fire from the musketeers, who were already in his rear.

When he reached the summit, he perceived how vain had been even the last effort. Cavalry and infantry of the Bohemian army were all flying together. The field presented a complete rout, except where, at various points, appeared an Austrian or Bavarian regiment, already in possession of the hill. The artillery, the greater part of the baggage, and all the tents, were in the hands of the enemy; and, spurring on like lightning through the perils that surrounded him, the young Englishman at length reached the tree where the page was waiting, with his own horse and a fresh one for his master. Springing to the ground, Algernon snatched his pistols from the saddle-bow, and leaped upon the back of the other charger.

"Mount and follow, mount and follow," he cried to the page, and then dashed on towards the gates of Prague.

As he approached, he looked eagerly round for his servants and baggage, at the spot where he had appointed them to be; but they were not to be seen; though, as compared with the rest of the field, the ground and the road in front of the gates were nearly solitary; for the stream of fugitives had taken another direction. As he gazed forward, however, he saw some of the soldiers of the tower in the very act of unlocking the chain of the portcullis, and judging rightly what was about to take place, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides and dashed over the drawbridge. A guard presented a partisan to his breast, calling, "Stand back! We have orders—"

But Algernon Grey turned the weapon aside with his sword; the horse in its furious career dashed the man to the ground; and ere any one else could oppose, the young cavalier and the page were both within the walls of Prague.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

In the fine old Dome church of Prague, sat Frederic, king of Bohemia, and many of the principal personages of his court. The faint sunshine of a cold November day shone through the tall windows, and one of the pale chilly beams lighted on the bald head and white hair of an old man raised above the rest in a high pulpit, who, with outstretched arm and vehement gesticulation, was declaiming violently against "the woman of the seven hills, and all who bore about with them the mark of the Beast." His piety, indeed, was somewhat blasphemous, and his illustrations exaggerated in character and homely in language, till they became almost ludicrous; but still there was a fierce rude eloquence about him, which captivated his hearers and enchained their attention. Every eye was turned towards him, every ear was bent to hear, when suddenly a dull heavy sound shook the building, and made the casements rattle in their frames.

The preacher paused, the congregation turned round and gazed in each other's faces, and then, roar after roar, came the peal of the artillery from the field where all Frederic's hopes were to find their final overthrow. The young monarch started up with a look of consternation; the congregation followed; and all seemed taken by surprise, and thunderstruck at an event which might have been foreseen by themselves, and had been foreseen by others for weeks before. But there are states of moral apathy—lethargies as it were of the mind, which seem sent by fate to prevent the near impending destruction from giving to the doomed a warning to fly from its approach. Remonstrances had often reached Frederic's ear; urgent appeals had been made to his judgment; every intelligence of the enemy's movements had been communicated to him—but, sunk in listless idleness, or carried away by the pursuit of pleasure, or wrapt in the visions of a fanatical religion, he would not listen, or he would not believe, till the cannon of the field of Prague roused him thus at once in horror and wonder from the long torpor in which he had lain.

The battle had begun, and he was absent; his subjects and his friends were shedding their blood in his defence, and he was not there to share their peril and direct their efforts. But it was still not too late, he thought. He would fly to the field; he would encourage his soldiers by his presence; he would put himself in the front of his host; he would perish or preserve the crown he had gained. He listened not to the preacher, though Scultetus in a loud voice called on all to wait and listen to a concluding prayer. He heard not the eager but reasonless questions of his surrounding courtiers; he did not even mark the pale face of Camerarius, but, waving his right hand, and grasping his sword scabbard with the left, he exclaimed aloud, "To the field! To the field! Our friends and brethren are dying in arms in our cause! To the field! To the field; and God defend the right!"

Thus saying, he strode at once out of the church, and hurried back towards the palace, calling loudly for his horse. A page ran on to bring out a charger; and many others followed in search of arms, they said; but few were ever seen again by the young monarch's side.

"Where is my horse?" cried Frederic vehemently, as he reached the gates of his residence; "quick, quick! Lose not an instant. Tell the Queen I have gone to lead the troops; tell her—"

"Which horse will your Majesty ride?" demanded an officer of the stables, running forth.

"Any one, fool!" exclaimed the King—"hear you not the cannon? Aught which will carry me to my friends without. Away! Stay not to talk! Have it here in a moment!"

"Will you not arm, sire?" said an old officer, in a persuasive tone.

"No!" cried Frederic, sternly; "as I am with my bare breast, will I face them. Speed is the only armor I would use—but they will drive me mad. Where is my charger? In the name of pity—in the name of Heaven, see, some one, what they are doing! Men will call me coward—my name will be a by-word. They will say, for centuries to come, that, while his brave soldiers were bleeding before Prague, Frederic of Bohemia shunned the field where his crown was to be lost or won."

"Here comes your royal charger," cried a voice; and, springing forward, the monarch put his foot in the stirrup and vaulted on the horse's back.

"Follow, follow! All that love me, follow!" he cried; and without waiting for any one, dashed down at headlong speed towards the gates. The way was long, the streets narrow and steep; but on, on went the unhappy prince till the small triangular space of open ground before the inner ward lay within sight. Then ran up a half-armed guard; and approaching close to his horse's side, said in a low voice,

"They fly, they fly, your Majesty."

His look, his tone, were ominous; for he spoke as if he were afraid lest his words might be heard by any one near; but still Frederic asked with a sinking heart, "Who fly?"

"Our men, sire," answered the soldier.

"Then I go to rally them," cried the King, 'or to die with those who stand."

"That might have done an hour ago," said the soldier, bluntly; "but it is now too late."

It is the fate of misfortune to hear hard truths; and this was the first bitter sting of many that Frederic was yet to feel. He stopped not to answer, however, but pushed on past the man, catching at the same time of several of his attendants spurring down after him. The soldiers of the guard-house scarcely saw his approach; for they were all gazing eagerly forth from the outer gate; but, just beyond the drawbridge, he saw a rude Bohemian bleeding from several wounds, and leaning for support against the masonry.

"Ah, sir, the day is lost," cried the man, as the monarch rode past; "the troops are all flying towards Brandeis; half the Hungarians drowned in the river; the infantry all in rout; the cannon taken—" Frederic listened to no more, but still spurred on, dashing his horse through the guards at the outer gate, and gazing eagerly towards the hill.

Who was it coming so rapidly towards him, followed by half a dozen troopers and a single banner? Old Christian of Anhalt, bloody and dusty from the fight, where he had fought hand to hand; no hat upon his head, his grey hair streaming in the wind, his head bent sadly down almost to his horse's neck, and his hands grasping tightly the reins with a bitter and convulsive clasp.

"Anhalt!" cried the King.

"It is all lost, my lord, as I knew it would be," said the old soldier, in a low deep voice. "Back with us into Prague as fast as may be. The Bavarian is at our heels. Let the walls be well manned, and the cannon pour forth their shot upon the enemy, if they come too near. Let the gates be closed, too; the fugitives are taking another way. Your safety and the defence of Prague are now all we have to think of. We must have counsel with all speed. You, gentlemen," he continued, turning to those who followed, "away to the Rath-house in the old town, as fast as you can ride; take measures with the magistrates for the sure guarding of the walls; and, hark you, Dilluigen, gather every information you can of the temper of the people, and let the king hear at the Hradschin. You will find me there, in case of need. Come, my lord, come; it is vain thinking of what cannot be remedied. The future, the future! still the future! We may make a good fight yet, if Mansfeld will but help—not serve under me! Why, I will be his horseboy, if he will fight like a man. Come, my lord. Nay, nay, be not so cast down! 'Tis but a battle lost, after all. I trust we shall see many such before we die, and win many a one to boot;" and grasping Frederic's hand kindly, he led, rather than followed the Monarch back into the city, giving orders, as they passed the gates, that they should be closed and defended.

The news had spread through Prague that the royal army had been defeated. There were men who had seen the rout from one of the church steeples; the tale had been carried from mouth to mouth, and from house to house; there was scarce a babbling child who did not know it, and repeat it; and, as Frederic and his train passed by, almost every door had its group of men and women, who eyed him—

some sadly, some sullenly—but few, if any, showed a mark of reverence. Some, especially where there was a cross over the door, suffered a half-suppressed grin to appear, as the unfortunate prince rode by; and then went and talked in low tones to their neighbours, pointing significantly over the shoulder to the royal group. All that he saw made the young Monarch's heart more sad; and, when he reached the palace, he led the way straight to the anteroom of his wife's apartments.

The first person whom he met there was Agnes Herbert; but she saw that disaster and ruin were in his eyes, and she dared not ask any questions. Not a servant had been found in the court on the staircase, or in the hall below; and Frederic, turning to her, said in a sad but gentle tone, "I beseech you, lady, seek some of the people, and tell them to send us what counsellors they can find; above all Dohna and Camerarius."

"Camerarius!" cried Christian of Anhalt, warmly; "we want counsel with men, not with weak and doubting subtle-wits like that. Give us the Princess and Dohna. Old Schlick, I fancy, is dead; for I saw him charge desperately to rescue my poor boy, who is wounded and taken, I hear."

"Well, well," said Frederic; "send some one for Dohna, dear lady; and I will call the Queen. Is your gallant son a prisoner, then, indeed!" he continued, grasping old Anhalt's hand.

"Never mind him," replied the soldier, "God will take care of him. Let us have the Queen, my lord. Her courage and her wisdom now are worth a dozen other counsellors."

In the mean while Agnes left the anteroom with her cheek deadly pale, and her heart feeling as cold as ice. There was a question she would fain have asked, but she dared not breathe it—a question which made her bosom feel heavy, and her limbs shake, even when she put it to herself, "Where was Algernon Grey?" Oh, when she thought of him in that hour, how deep, how strong, how overpowering did she feel that love which she had so long concealed from her own eyes. She grasped the balustrade of the staircase for support; and, though she knew that each moment was precious, she paused at every step. Had she gone forward, she would have fallen.

Suddenly, as she descended, she heard a clang as of an armed man springing to the ground, at the door of the second court which opened below. Then came a step in the stone hall at the foot of the stairs. Oh, how her heart beat; for the quick, sure ear of love recognised the tread at once. She darted down the remaining steps. The next instant he was before her; she sprang forward, and, ere they knew what they did, she was clasped to his armed bosom.

"I have come to keep my promise, dearest," said Algernon Grey; "to aid, to protect, to defend you with my life, if need should be. Where is the Queen? where is the King? I must speak with them both, if possible."

"The King is above," answered Agnes, withdrawing herself from his embrace. "He is with the Prince of Anhalt in the Queen's anteroom, just above the court of St. George. He sent me for one of the attendants to call the Viscount of Dohna; but I can find no one. Good Heaven! they surely cannot all have abandoned their King and their master already!"

"No, no," answered Algernon Grey; "they have gone up on the roofs to see what they can see, or out to gather news. Speed back again, dear Agnes, and tell him I am here; I will seek Dohna, if he lodges where he used. At all events, I will find some one who can call him. Away, dear girl, for I would fain see the King speedily."

Agnes hurried away, with her heart all joyful; for the relief of his coming had swept away the bitterness of all other disasters than that which he had anticipated. What was to her a battle lost, if Algernon Grey was safe! When she entered the antechamber, she found the Queen seated between her husband and Christian of Anhalt; her face raised and turned alternately from one to the other; her look, eager and grave, but not at all depressed.

"'Tis the best way," she said, as Agnes entered; "so shall we, at least, gain time for intelligence, for preparation, and for action—doubtless he will grant it. He is our cousin."

"And his troops have had enough to do," answered Christian of Anhalt; "that is the best security. He has as much need of repose as we have. Prague is a hard bone to pick."

"But whom shall we send?" said Frederic. "It must be some man of rank; and there is an old grudge between him and Dohna. Is the Viscount coming, fair lady?"

"I can find none of your attendants, your Majesty," answered Agnes; "but I met Master Algernon Grey in the hall, just alighted, and he undertook to find the Viscount, begging me to tell your Majesties that he wished to speak with you immediately."

"Then he is safe," cried the Queen; "thank God for that!"

"If he is safe, it is not his own fault," exclaimed Christian of Anhalt, "for he fought like a madman when all hope was over. I never saw so cool a head in counsel, and so hot a one in battle. Let us have him here by all means."

"Can we not send the Earl, Frederic!" asked the Queen, laying her hand gently on her husband's arm, and calling him, in the hour of his distress, by the dear familiar name which she never used but in private. "He must throw off this foolish incognito now, and will go, I am sure, in his own name and character, as our envoy, to this proud victor. See for him, my sweet cousin, see for him; and bring him hither with all speed."

Agnes hastened away without reply, and found Algernon Grey already mounting the stairs. He followed her quickly, without even pausing for the words of tenderness that were in his heart; and in a moment after he stood before the King and Queen, who were still nearly in the same position in which Agnes had left them, only that Elizabeth was writing with a rapid hand from her husband's dictation.

"Say four and twenty hours, my lord, the King," exclaimed Christian of Anhalt, interrupting him; "he won't grant more, if so much."

"Well, four and twenty hours be it," answered Frederic. "We can gather force enough in that time to make head."

Elizabeth quickly finished writing, and then pushed the paper over to her husband, who took the pen and signed his name.

"This fair lady tells me you wish to speak with me, my lord," said Frederic, as soon as he had done.

"I wish to represent to your Majesty," replied Algernon Grey, "that the gates of the city being closed so soon before any parties of the enemy are near, may prevent many gallant men, who have already fought well, and will do so again, from finding refuge within these walls, where they might do good service. I myself was nearly excluded, and much of the baggage will, doubtless, be lost which might be saved."

"It was an order given by me in haste, my young friend," replied Christian of Anhalt, "not rightly understood by the frightened people there, and to be amended immediately. I meant them to shut out our enemies, not our friends. But now listen to what his Majesty has to say to you."

"It is simply this, my Lord of Hillingdon," said Frederic; "Will you, in a moment of our need like this, take a flag of truce from the gates, to our cousin, Maximilian of Bavaria, and deliver to him this letter, demanding a suspension of arms for four and twenty hours? You must go in your own character, however; for we cannot send any inferior man to such a Prince in the hour of victory."

"I will be your Majesty's envoy with pleasure," answered Algernon Grey; "and for this night will resume my name and title; but I will beg all here to forget it afterwards, as, for reasons of my own, now more strong than ever, I wish not to have my coming and going bruited about in every part of Europe."

"Be it as you will," answered Frederic; "and many thanks, my lord, for this and all other services. Write on the superscription, dearest lady, 'By the hands of our cousin, the Earl of Hillingdon.'"

Elizabeth wrote, gave Algernon Grey the letter, and raised her eyes to his face, saying, "On your return, whatever be the answer you bring, I must see you for a few moments, my lord. You made me a promise, which I am sure you will fulfil with chivalry and devotion."

"I did not forget it, your Majesty," answered Algernon Grey, looking round with a faint smile towards Agnes; "and I will return to accomplish it as soon as this task is ended. I shall, doubtless, find a flag at the gates; and so I take my leave."

"Stay, I go with you to give better orders," said Christian of Anhalt, "and to furnish a new pass-word to the guards, for I have some fears of these good citizens. Ha! here comes Dohna—I will return immediately;" and thus saying, he withdrew with Algernon Grey.

CHAPTER XXIX.

All was confusion and disorder in the streets of Kleinseite (or smaller side) of the city of Prague, as old Christian of Anhalt returned from the gates. The lower classes of citizens were hurrying hither and thither, or collected into crowds wherever a more open space was to be found, and eagerly and vociferously discussing past events and future contingencies. Lowering brows, angry looks, and vehement gestures were seen everywhere; but no one ventured in any way to insult the old commander as he rode along, for not alone did his frank and straightforward bearing, and gallant conduct in the field command respect, but at the gates of the town he had found some thirty or forty cavaliers who, amongst the last to quit the field, had sought shelter under the guns of the fortress, and now accompanied him on his way to the palace. There all the servants and officers were once more reassembled, and affecting to perform their several duties; but the scared look, the eager haste, the abstracted manner, all showed consternation; and on mounting to the apartments of the Queen, the Prince found that terror was not confined to the inferior inhabitants of the residence.

A number of Frederic's counsellors had by this time assembled, and, with the exception of Dohna, each seemed more terrified than his neighbour. The presence of their sovereign, the importance of calm discussion, not even the heroic courage displayed by the Queen herself, could restrain them from talking all at once. Some urged instant flight, some unconditional surrender, and the boldest of them only ventured to suggest an attempt to gain time by cunning negotiations with the enemy. Frederic himself was tranquil and resolute in his air and tone; but in opinion he seemed wavering and uncertain.

The authority of the old soldier, his plain rough speech, sound sense, and stern firmness in the hour of danger, made some impression; but Christian of Anhalt soon saw that as usual with the weak and crafty, where stratagem is out of time, and presence of mind does not exist, the greater part of those present were still confusing counsel with vain speculations, with idle repetitions, and suggestions utterly inapplicable to the circumstances of the moment.

"We must get rid of these men, your Majesty," he said, drawing Frederic aside; "half of them are cowards, and almost all the rest are fools only fit for the monkey tricks of diplomacy. We want men of energy and action. Let us keep Dohna as a skilful and firm counsellor, and send for young Thurn. Where his father is, I know not. I saw him very late in the field."

"He is at his own house," said Frederic; "he sent word he would dine, and then come hither."

"'Tis so like him!" cried Anhalt; "he has fought himself into an appetite. But have I your permission to send these men away?"

"Yes, but courteously, my friend, courteously," replied Frederic.

"Oh, courteously, of course," answered the old man, with a smile. "Gentlemen," he continued, "an envoy has been sent to the enemy's head quarters. In less than an hour we shall hear more, and till then can decide upon nothing. It may be that we shall have to quit Prague to-morrow; so I would advise all — as every man has some private papers, and most men some little property—to employ the next few minutes in preparing for whatever may be the result. His Majesty will excuse your attendance for an hour—stay Dohna, stay!" he

added in a low voice, "we shall want you. We are going to send for the two Thurms, and have calm counsel instead of frightened bubble."

The other counsellors hastened away, eager to save their papers and effects; and the moment they were gone a messenger was despatched to old Count Thurm and his son Count Bertrnad; but ere he had quitted the room two minutes, there was heard a knock at the door, and the younger count entered in haste with the Baron of Dillenghen, who had been sent to the town hall.

"What is it, gentlemen?" exclaimed the Queen, as soon as she saw them; "there is alarm in both your faces. Has any new disaster happened?"

"No, madam," replied the young count; "but Dillenghen has some news of importance, which I fear I must confirm."

"Speak! speak!" cried Frederic, turning to the baron. "What tidings bring you, sir? Is the enemy advancing?"

"No, sire," answered the Baron of Dillenghen; "but my lord of Anhalt here bade me collect what tidings I could of the temper of the people and the magistrates. I grieve to say it is not good. They show no willingness to defend the lower town—declare it is untenable, and there is much murmuring amongst them at the very thought."

"What is to be done?" cried Frederic, turning to the Prince of Anhalt with a look of consternation.

"Go up to the Wyschehrad," answered Anhalt; "we can make it good for a long while, till we are able to draw men enough together to overawe these burghers and take the defence out of their hands."

"My lord, I fear they are not to be overawed," rejoined Dillenghen; "in a word, there is treason amongst them."

"Ay, and even in your Majesty's very court and palace," added Bertrand of Thurm.

"That I know," answered Frederic, in a sad and bitter tone; "do you recollect, Elizabeth, my letter from Rakonitz? But still I thought the citizens were true."

"So far from it, sire," said Bertrand of Thurm, "and so pressing is the danger, that I was bold enough, ere I came up, to order the Queen's carriage to be made ready with all speed. When you are both safe on the other side of the water, where I can rely upon my garrison, these turbulent burghers may be brought to reason. Now I would lose no time, but depart instantly. Your attendants can follow, with all that may be necessary to bring from the palace. I would not lose a moment, for to know that you are in their power gives the traitors a bold front."

"I must take some of my poor girls with me," cried Elizabeth—"poor Ann Dudley, and Amelia of Solms, and my sweet Agnes; but I will be back directly."

As the Queen opened the door to retire into her bed-chamber, a voice of bitter lamentation was heard from within; and Christian of Anhalt exclaimed, "Would to God that these women would learn a lesson of fortitude from their high-souled mistress. What will howling do to avert peril?"

"Be not harsh, my friend," said Frederic; "that is poor Ann Dudley's voice. Her husband's body lies on that bloody field without. The tidings came just ere you returned. But here is the Queen again. Now let us go, I will send orders afterwards for all that may be needed. Come, sweet friend—methinks with you beside me, I can never know despair;" and taking Elizabeth's hand, he drew it through his arm and led her down slowly, for she was great with child.

The splendid carriage of blue velvet embroidered with silver stood ready in the court; and, as Elizabeth's eyes fell upon its gorgeous decorations, a faint sad smile came upon her lip, and she shook her head mournfully. Oh, how the emptiness of pomp and pageantry, and lordly state, is felt by the heart in the bitter hours of sorrow and adversity, and while the riches of the soul, the love, the friendship, the trust, the tenderness, rise high in value, sink low the more sordid objects of earthly ambition and pride.

A weeping train followed the Queen to the carriage; some entered with her; some followed in other vehicles, or on foot; and but two, of all the fair and sparkling train which had shared Elizabeth's days of joy and splendour, seemed now in a condition to give her comfort and support. Amelia of Solms was sad, but she wept not; Agnes Herbert grave, but firm, though gentle in her whole demeanour. With kindly care, she whispered from time to time some words of consolation in the ear of poor Ann Dudley, and though her beautiful eyes were full of melancholy when she gazed at the Queen, yet there was a hopefulness in her words which added to the strength of mind with which Elizabeth bore up under the griefs and perils of the hour.

It seemed a long and weary way to the old citadel of Prague, as with slow steps the horses dragged the carriages up the ascent; but the gates at length were reached, and Frederic took his fair wife in his arms and carried her into the wide hall; but he could not forbear saying with a sigh, "I now know where I am. Princes seldom learn the truth till they are taught it by adversity."

An hour went by; and many a messenger came up from the lower town, each burdened with gloomy tidings. The horses and carriages were all brought up from the stables of the Hradschin, and some small sums of money, clothes, and papers; but it was soon found that the council of citizens had taken possession of the building, and though they did not exactly prevent the King's servants from removing his own property, yet there were questions asked and objections made, which rendered the task slow and difficult. Night fell, and the confusion in the town increased. The light of numerous torches created a glare which was seen red and portentous from the Wyschehrad; and a loud murmur like the roar of a distant sea rose up and filled the watching hearts above with vague and gloomy apprehensions.

Old Count Thurm had speedily joined the royal party, and a number of devoted friends surrounded Frederic and his Queen; but those who knew the Bohemian capital best did not contribute, by their warnings, to raise hopes or to still anxieties.

They represented the probability of tumult and violence as great, and all seemed convinced that treason had long been preparing the way for the state of mind the people now displayed.

At length loud but distant shouts, and then the sound of horses' feet clattering quickly over the paved road were heard, and in a few minutes Algernon Grey was introduced into the chamber where the King and Queen were seated, surrounded by most of those who had accompanied them to the citadel.

"What are those shouts, my lord?" was Frederic's first question.

"I trust good auguries, your Majesty," replied the young Englishman; "the crowds surrounded me and my people as I returned, calling out loudly for the tidings I bore. I answered briefly that a truce was concluded to negotiate a peace. Those who understood German translated it to the rest, and then they tossed up their hats and shouted joyfully. So I trust that they will now return to their own homes; for they seemed in a sadly disturbed state. There my lord, the King, is the convention signed by the Elector and Bucquoi. It was all that by any arguments I could obtain, though I disputed with them for an hour."

"But eight hours' suspension of arms!" exclaimed Frederic, looking at the paper, and then gazing at Christian of Anhalt, and at Thurm. Our decision must be made speedily."

"If we were but sure of Mansfeld," said Anhalt, thoughtfully, "and had but two thousand men more within the walls."

"It is vain, old friend," cried Count Thurm. "I know these people better than any one; and I take upon myself to say to the King—fly at once. Lose not the precious moments. There are traitors in town, and court, and army. The people are not with us; we have no force to hold out; no hope of succour. You have eight hours, my lord, to save yourself from worse than perhaps you dream of; and, what is far more, to save this dear lady, our Queen. Lose not an instant; but go."

"It were well, my royal friend," said Christian of Anhalt. "Had we the people with us; had we troops to secure the place without their aid; could we even rally the remains of the army within Prague, I would say, 'Stay; fight it out here to the last; and play the game to an end, however desperate.' But all things at this moment are against us. The only thing in our power is eight hours of time. I see naught to which they can be applied, but to your speedy escape. If you stay with an army of fifty thousand men at your gates, with a turbulent and discontented population within, with a force not sufficient to man the whole walls, with provisions that will not last ten days, and not ammunition enough to resist a regular siege, a thousand to one the population throw open the gates to-morrow, and deliver you as a prisoner into the hands of the enemy."

"That, too, with the ban of the empire hanging over your head," cried Count Thurm; "and two inveterate enemies ready to execute it."

"Let us go," cried Elizabeth, rising from the table. "It can never be said that I have been the advocate of weak counsels; but now, like the willow, our strength may lie in yielding. Let us not hesitate any longer. In half an hour I shall be ready. We shall gain seven hours, at least, upon the enemy; and, surely, that will place us in security."

"Madam," said young Bertrand of Thurm, "by your good leave, you shall have some longer space. My lord the King has made me governor of this citadel. I have five hundred men in whom I can trust. With them I will undertake to hold it out for three full days against false Maximilian of Bavaria and his fifty thousand. This Jesuit-soldier shall find work enough beneath these walls to keep him for that time, at least, from pursuing the kinsman he has betrayed, and make him recollect, perhaps, the promises he has violated."

"Never!" cried Elizabeth, warmly, taking the young man's hand in hers; "I will have no such sacrifice. Never shall the son of our best friend hazard his life to cover my flight. Nor even would I expose this city, fickle as it has proved itself, to the outrages of a furious enemy for such a consideration as my poor safety. Rather let me perish at once, than be remembered as a curse."

Thus saying, she quitted the room, calling to her ladies to follow; and a scene of indescribable confusion succeeded, while hasty preparations were made for instant departure. Servants hurried hither and thither; carriages and horses were prepared in haste. What small supplies of money could be obtained, a few of the most necessary articles of apparel, some papers of great importance, some treasured memorials of days of happiness, and a small supply of ammunition for the men of the troop, were packed up with all speed; and a rapid consultation took place between Frederic and his principal advisers, as to the roads he should follow, and the course in which he should direct his flight. All agreed that Breslau was the place best fitted for his first pause, as it brought him near the dominions of friends and relations; and some one was eagerly sought amongst the attendants who could act as a guide to the fugitives through the desolate and inhospitable regions which they had to traverse on the way.

Algernon Grey, unable from his ignorance of the country to advise, and uncertain what part he might be called upon to play himself in this sad scene of flight and disaster, remained waiting the decision of others, till at length, a page entering called him to the presence of the Queen.

He found Elizabeth standing in a small room within, holding Agnes Herbert's hand in hers. There was no one else in the chamber; and a single candle afforded the only light, which showed him the pale countenances of his sovereign's daughter and her young companion.

"My lord," said Elizabeth quickly, as soon as he entered, "you promised to save and protect this dear girl. You will remember your promise, I am sure; and I must remember one I made to her uncle twelve long months ago. It was to the effect that, if by the chances of war I was obliged to quit Prague, I would send her back to him under safe escort. She would fain go with me now; but I must deny her wishes. You will doubtless be able to reach the Upper Palatinate in safety; there will be

no object in stopping you. The fierce pursuers will most likely be upon my path like hounds before to-morrow morning. In your charge, therefore, I will place her; to your honour as a gentleman, and your conscience as a Christian, I entrust her. She is pure and good, noble and true, worthy of the love of the highest in this or any other land, and worthy of reverence as spotless innocence can render woman. Stay not for ceremonious leave-takings; but farewell! You will find a horse prepared for her below; and God bless and protect you, as you protect her!"

"One moment, your Majesty," said Algernon Grey. "Some ten of my sturdy Englishmen have got into the town in safety. Each, I will answer for him, is ready to shed the last drop of his blood in your behalf. Each is well armed and mounted, and provided with gold to defray all his own expenses. You yourself give me another destination, and I will obey your commands; but let these men remain with you as a sort of body-guard. I will leave them under the command of young Hopeton, a gentleman of honourable family, and a friend's son. My page and one servant will be enough with us—indeed, we shall pass more easily with few than many. The rest of the men, when you are safe, can join me at Heidelberg, where, please God, I will yet serve your Majesty to the best of my power."

"Be it so," answered the Queen. "Now, farewell! And Heaven reward you, my lord, for all you have done for me and mine. Adieu, dearest Agnes, adieu!"

The Queen opened her arms as she spoke; and Agnes Herbert cast herself upon her bosom, and, for an instant, gave way to tears; but, at length, Elizabeth gently removed her, saying, "We have no time for long adieus, sweet cousin; we shall meet again, if it be God's will. There, my lord," and she placed Agnes's hand in his, looking at him steadfastly for a moment as she did so, and then raising her eyes to Heaven.

Algernon Grey understood the appeal, and saying in a low tone, "On my life! on my honour!" he led Agnes from the room; and without passing through the chamber where he had left Frederic, advanced to the top of the great staircase. There he paused for a moment; and, drawing Agnes's arm through his, looked down on her face tenderly, asking in a low voice, "Are you afraid, Agnes?" She raised her eyes, beaming through her tears: "Not in the least," she answered—"sorrowful, but not afraid."

When they reached the court-yard, it presented a strange wild scene; carriages, horses, men mounted and dismounted, were all gathered together by the light of a few torches; and some minutes elapsed before Algernon Grey could discover which was the horse that had been prepared for his fair companion. At length, however, a strong but light jennet was found, with a lady's saddle and a small leathern bag, or portmanteau, strapped upon the croup; a page held it, saying, that it had been got ready by the Queen's order; and, lifting the sweet girl lightly into the saddle, Algernon Grey mounted his own horse, bade the boy, Frill, who was waiting, follow, and rode out, turning towards the great gates of the citadel. There he found assembled the men of his own band, who had escaped into Prague, after the slaughter on the Weissenberg; and, after speaking for some minutes to a fine-looking young man at their head, he bade his old servant, Tony, who was with them, mount and come after him; and then, riding through the streets, soon reached the gates of the old town, and began to descend into the lower part of Prague.

The city was now comparatively quiet. The news of an armistice, which he himself had given, had spread amongst the people, calming their fears and cooling their heated passions. Multitudes had retired to their own houses; others had gone to consult at the town-house as to their future conduct; and none but a few stragglers were seen here and there, as the young Englishman and his fair companion rode through the dark unlighted streets. A cold November wind was whistling amongst the tall houses; the sky was varying every moment, now showing a star or two, now loaded with heavy clouds; and every thing bore the same sad and cheerless aspect that was presented by the fate of the royal persons he had just left. Summer had passed away, and the long, cold, desolate winter was close at hand. A flaming sort of beacon, raised in an iron frame upon a pole, shed a broad glare over the open space before the guard-house of the inner gate, to which he directed his course; but no one was seen there but a sentry walking up and down; and Algernon Grey directed his servant to give the rein of the baggage-horse, which was led with them, to the page, and desire some one to open the gates. The warder, who came forth with one or two soldiers, seemed disposed to make some difficulties; but the young Englishman produced the pass which he had received some hours before when going to the Bavarian camp, and, with a surly and discontented air, the man unlocked the heavy gates and let him pass. The drawbridge was slowly lowered; and, after a careful examination from the wicket-tower, to see that no enemy was near, the warder of the night opened the outer gates and let the whole party go forth, murmuring something about—"The fewer mouths in Prague the better!"

All was darkness, except where upon the summit of the Weissenberg the light of a fire, here and there, marked the bivouac of an Imperial regiment occupying the position where the Bohemian army had been encamped the night before. Taking a narrow road to the right, though he knew not well whither it led, Algernon Grey rode on for some way through a sandy part of the ground, and then passed a small stream by a narrow bridge hardly wide enough for two horses to advance abreast. The moment after a broader glare of light was seen upon the left, and innumerable flames, flickering and flashing on the clouds of smoke rising from the wood fires, showed where the whole host of the enemy lay.

Algernon Grey laid his hand gently upon that of Agnes Herbert, saying in a low tone, "We are safe for the present, dear Agnes. On our journey we will be brother and sister. God send the time may come when we may call each other by dearer names!"

These were the first words that had been

spoken, but they made Agnes's whole frame thrill; and the next moment, putting his horse into a quicker pace, Algernon Grey led the way onward to the dark woods that stretched out before them.

CHAPTER XXX.

"I FEAR there are storms in the sky, dear Agnes," said Algernon Grey, as the stars disappeared, and the heavy clouds rolled broad over the heavens. "How cold the night wind blows!—does it not chill you, dear sister?"

"No," she answered; "I am warmly clad; but the poor Queen!—I dread to think of such a journey for her Happy it is, indeed, that all the royal children were sent away before!"

"Happy indeed!" answered her companion; "for their presence would have added terribly to all the sufferings and fears of such a time as this. The darkness of the night, however, like many another gloomy thing, may not be so evil as it seems. It will conceal their flight; for I much fear that Maximilian of Bavaria would hold himself justified in seizing and keeping prisoners both King and Queen, notwithstanding the armistice, if he discovered they had left Prague."

"He, surely, never would be so base!" cried Agnes, warmly.

"I know not," replied her lover; "policy is a base thing; and there never was an act so foul that some smooth excuse could not be found for its commission. He has been brought up, too, in a school where plausible pretexts for evil deeds is one part of the training; and to hold Frederic in captivity, would be too great a temptation for a Jesuitical spirit to resist, I fear."

"Then I will thank the darkness," answered his fair companion, "if it be as black as that of Egypt."

"It may sorely impede us ourselves," replied Algernon Grey. "Do you remember, Agnes, that last time we wandered together through the greater part of the night? I never thought it would be our fate to do so again. But what a different evening was that!—preceded, it is true, by dangers and sorrows, but followed by many brighter days. Oh, may this be so too!"

"God grant it!" cried Agnes. "I recollect it well—can I ever forget it? Oh, no; it is one of those things that, painted on memory, like the frescoes of the Italian artists—in colours that mingle with the very structure of that which bears them,—can never perish but with memory itself! To me that day seems like the beginning of life—of a new life, it certainly was; for what varied scenes—what spirit-changing events, have I not gone through since then! How different has been every aspect of my fate! how altered all my thoughts and feelings, my hopes, and even my fears!"

"I, too, shall remember it for ever," answered Algernon Grey; "though my fate has not undergone such changes. On has it gone in the same course, tending, I trust, to happiness, but by a thorny path. Yet, with no sudden changes, men have fewer epochs in their lives than women, Agnes—at least, in ordinary circumstances; but still, for those who feel, though the current of external things may not be subject to such changes, yet, in the world of the heart, they find moments, too, marked out indelibly in the history of life. That night was one of them for me. Let us ride on somewhat faster, and I will tell you, Agnes, as much as will interest you of my past existence;—you must know it some time. Who can tell when opportunity may serve again?"

"Oh! not to-night, not to-night," answered Agnes, shrinking from new emotions on a day which had been so full of agitation. "I may be very weak, my friend; but I have already undergone so much within twelve hours that, if you would have me keep my courage up for other dangers which may be still before us, you will not tell me aught that can move me more just now. And how can I," she added, feeling that she was showing the feelings of her heart more clearly than woman ever likes to display them; "how can I hear anything, affecting sadly one who has saved, befriended, comforted, supported me, without being deeply moved? Another day, Algernon, when we have calmer thoughts."

"Well, be it so," answered her lover; "I only sought to speak of matters not very bright, lest Agnes Herbert should think, hereafter, I had willingly concealed aught from her that she had a right to know."

"I shall never think evil of you, Algernon," she answered, in a firm, quiet tone; "I could sooner doubt myself than you. Hark! do you not hear voices speaking—there, to the right?"

Algernon Grey listened, but all was still; and, somewhat quickening their pace, they rode on through the deep wood which then stretched along the bank of the Moldau. A few minutes after, the sky became lighter as the shadowy masses of vapour were borne away by the wind, and Algernon Grey said, in a low voice, "The moon is rising, I think. Darkness were our best friend, dear Agnes; but yet I trust we are now beyond all danger from the enemy. The wood seems coming to an end."

It was as he supposed; for, ere they had gone a quarter of a mile farther, the trees suddenly ceased, and they found themselves on a broad road by the side of the river. The moon was shining on the wide waters, rendering them one sheet of liquid silver; but a minute or two after they had emerged from the screen of branches, the horse of Algernon Grey swerved violently away from some object on the bank. He reined him round, and gazed towards the stream. There was a corpse lying on the bank, stripped already of arms and clothing; and a large dark body—what, it was not possible to discover—was seen floating rapidly down the stream. All was still and silent around, without a sound but the murmuring Moldau rushing between its banks, which there were low and flat; and it had a strange and horrible effect, as Algernon Grey gazed over the scene, to behold that naked corpse lying there in the bright moonlight, with the glistening river flowing by, and the dark towers of Prague, far up the stream, rising in its splendid basin of hills, vast and irregular, so that rock and town could hardly be distinguished from each other; while, on the other side of the river was still to be dis-

tinguished, though faint and indefinite, the glare of the Bavarian watchfires.

"There have been plunderers at work here already," said Algernon Grey, riding on; but Agnes had seen the same object which caught his sight, and she kept silence, covering her eyes with her hand.

The road then rose again a little, and then fell into a sort of wooded glen; and, as they were descending, a voice suddenly cried out, "Stand! who goes there?" and at the same moment an armed man, pike in hand, presented himself, while two or three others drew out from the bushes.

Agnes's heart sunk; but Algernon Grey answered, in a calm tone, "We are peaceable travellers, if we are not molested. But we will not be stopped."

He looked over his shoulders as he spoke, for he heard the galloping of a horse, and to his surprise he saw that while the boy Frill remained firm, and had already drawn his sword, his old and tried servant Tony was riding quickly away.

"Peaceable travellers!" said the man. "You ride late, and with casque and cuirass. Come up, my men; come up! We must make these peaceable travellers account for their doings to General Tilly."

Algernon Grey's eye ran over the ground around. There were but four men visible, and all seemed armed alike as pikemen. "Drop behind, Agnes," he said in a low tone; "they have no fire-arms. I and the boy have."

As he spoke, the nearest man advanced to lay his hand upon the horse's bridle. "Stand back!" cried the young Englishman in a stern tone, drawing a pistol from his saddle-bow, and levelling it. "Make way there!—you are mere marauders, that is clear, stripping the dead. I will stop for the bidding of none such."

The man recoiled a step or two; but then, after an instant's hesitation, he sprang forward, pushing his pike at the horse's poitral. The young Englishman's finger was pressed firmly and steadily upon the trigger, the hammer fell, a ringing report followed, and his assailant reeled and fell back upon the turf at once. "Now for another," cried Algernon Grey, in German; "which of you will be the next?" and at the same moment he drew a second pistol from the holster. "Have the other weapons at hand, Frill," he continued, speaking to the page, but never withdrawing his eyes from the group before him. "Who is the next, I say?"

No one moved; but they still stood across the path, apparently speaking together in a low voice. It was evident to Algernon Grey that the enemy had no force to fall back upon, and that the party consisted merely of men sent across the river to cut off any stragglers from the Bohemian army, or else of the plunderers who always follow great hosts, and live too frequently by assassinating the wounded and stripping the dead. As they were still three to two, however, and the presence of Agnes Herbert filled him with apprehensions on her account which he had never known on his own, he was unwilling to hurry into any further strife, while there was a chance of the men retiring and leaving the way open. He therefore paused, ere he took upon himself the part of assailant, holding the pistol already cocked in his hand, and prepared at once to repel any sudden attack. After a brief consultation amongst themselves, however, the men separated; one remained close to the road, merely drawing behind a tree to the side; the other two ran to the right and left amongst the bushes, evidently with the intention of springing out upon him and his party as he passed. The position was dangerous; but there seemed no choice. To retreat might throw them in the way of other and stronger parties of the same marauders. To parley with the adversary could produce no good result; and, choosing his course speedily, Algernon Grey turned his head to Agnes, saying, "Close up close to me, dear lady; you, boy, take your place by the lady's left, put up your sword, and advance slowly, pistol in hand; aim steadily and near, if any one attacks you, and still keep on."

Then, drawing his sword, he placed it between his teeth, and, holding the pistol in his right, advanced at a foot-pace as soon as Agnes had ridden up to his side.

It would seem that the adversaries were somewhat intimidated by his proceedings, for they did not make their attack at once, as he had expected; but the delay brought unexpected help, for, as the young Englishman, reining in his horse, was proceeding slowly along the road, he suddenly heard the galloping of a horse behind him, and, for an instant, feared that all was lost. He did not venture to turn his head, indeed, keeping a watchful eye in front, and on either side; but the boy Frill, less cautious, looked round by the light of the moon, and then exclaimed aloud,—

"Hurrah! Here comes friend Tony with help."

Either the sort of cheer he gave, or their own observation, showed the marauders that they were likely to be overmatched. The man behind the tree started away and ran down the road, receiving the ball of Algernon Grey's pistol as he went, falling, rising again, and staggering in amongst the bushes. The other two were heard pushing their way through the dry branches; but, ere they could have gone far, the old servant was by his master's side.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, for running away. I'm not accustomed to that trick; but I had heard English tongues, and caught a little glimpse of a fire, as we passed through the wood; and I thought I could serve you better in the rear than in the front."

"Who have you got with you?" asked Algernon Grey, looking round to the other men who had come up, one of whom, with his sword's point dropped, was gazing down upon the body of the man who had been shot, while two others had followed Tony close to the young gentleman's side, and a fourth seemed to be searching the brushwood on the right for any concealed enemy.

"They are four men from Master Digby's troop," answered Tony. "I could have sworn that the tongues I heard were English, so I had no fear in going back; and they may prove desperate good help to us as we proceed."

Algernon Grey paused to consider for a moment; and then, turning to the men, he asked them some questions, the answers to which

showed that after the last charge on the part of the Bohemian force, they had contrived to cross the Moldau, and concealed themselves in the wood. They had seen several bands of plunderers come over the river during the evening, and had lain quite still till it was dark, when they had lighted a fire, and sent one of their number to a neighbouring village for provisions. The store they had obtained had been scanty; but they were solacing themselves with this supply when Tony's apparition called them to the saddle; and, without hesitation or fear, they came down to aid a countryman in distress. They asked no better than to accompany the young Englishman and his party; but Algernon Grey, recollecting that Digby's troop had suffered but little, and that Brandeis had been appointed as a rallying place, would only suffer them to accompany him three or four miles farther down the river; and then, paying them liberally for their escort, directed them to the best of his knowledge, on their road to the point of rendezvous.

A little village lay immediately before him, when he parted with his new companions; but it was all dark and solitary; and, though the clouds had gathered thickly over the sky, and the north-east wind was blowing keen, he asked Agnes if she could still proceed; and, on her answering in the affirmative, rode on along the broad and even road, catching, from time to time, a glimpse of the glistening Moldau on the left, though at a much greater distance than before.

"If I recollect right, dear Agnes," he said, "some six or seven miles ahead is the small town of Weltrus, where there is a passage-boat across the river. We can discover there whether there is any danger on the road on the other side; and, if not, can get across; and, placing ourselves in the enemy's rear, after which we shall have no difficulty in reaching Waldsachsen, where we shall be in a friendly country, and make our way through the Upper Palatinate to Heilbroun and Heidelberg."

Agnes agreed to all that he proposed; but the distance was somewhat greater than he had imagined. His own horse showed great symptoms of fatigue. It became necessary to proceed more slowly as they advanced; and the church clock struck three as they entered the narrow street. All was dark and silent as they advanced, till, when they were about midway through the little town, they heard the watchman of the night, as was then common in almost every village in Germany, and is still practised in remote places, knocking at the doors of the principal houses, and waking the drowsy inhabitants, to assure them that "all is right."

With the aid of this functionary, the landlord of the little Guest-house was brought to the door, and rooms speedily prepared for the travellers to repose. He would fain, to say the truth, have put them all into one chamber; for the manners of that part of the country were somewhat rude in their simplicity; and the good man could not at all understand the delicacy of a more refined state. All, however, was arranged at length; and Agnes lay down to repose. Her lover occupied a chamber near; and his two attendants were placed on a pallet across the lady's door.

It was evident, from the quiet manner of the host, that no tidings had yet reached him of the rout of Prague; but Algernon Grey was anxious to depart before the rumour spread through the country, and, with the first ray of morning light, he was on foot. From the boatmen at the ferry he found that the only intelligence they had yet received from the scene of war was nearly four days old. Men spoke of the combat of Rakonitz as the last event, and, satisfied that, on the way before him, there would be found none but the ordinary dangers which awaited all travellers in those days, he returned and roused Agnes from the deep slumber into which she had fallen.

In a few minutes she was by his side, saying, "How strange a thing is sleep, Algernon! I had forgot all, and, in the only dream I had, I was a child again, in the happy valley by the banks of the Meuse."

Algernon Grey smiled sadly. "Sometimes I hardly know," he said, "which is the dream, which the reality: the vivid images of sleep, or those that pass before our waking eyes. Perhaps a time may come when we shall wake to truer things, and find that this life and all that it presents was but a vision."

"No," said his fair companion, after a moment's thought; "there are some things that must be real. The strong affections that go down with us to death; good actions, and, alas! evil ones, likewise. But I am ready; let us set out again."

But Algernon Grey would not suffer her to encounter renewed fatigue without some refreshment, and after a light meal, already ordered, they passed across the river in the ferry-boat.

"Great news! great news!" cried a stranger, riding up to cross over from the other side, just as they were remounting their horses after landing. "The good Duke of Bavaria and General Bucquoi have defeated the heretic Elector Palatine under the walls of Prague, and taken him and his English wife prisoner!"

"Are you sure of the intelligence?" asked Algernon Grey, gravely.

"Quite," said the horseman, sharply; "do you doubt it, young gentleman?"

"Nay, wait till you get to the other side of the water, and then inquire further," answered Algernon; "there is many a battle reported won, that is really lost. Good-day," and he rode on with Agnes, leaving the traveller in some doubt and consternation.

"We must lose no time, dear Agnes," he said; "but hasten on into the rear of the enemy's army ere this news spreads far. If we can reach Laun, I think we may escape suspicion as fugitives from Prague, and there are still some garrisons in that quarter which have not yet submitted to the Austrians."

But, as usual in all calculations of distances, the state of the roads was not calculated upon. The day proved lowering and gloomy, the wind blew in sharp fierce gusts over the bare hilly ground between the Moldau and the Eger, and though the distance from the one point to the other is not thirty miles in a direct line, the sinuosities of an ill-made country road rendered it nearly double. At length as night was falling, Algernon Grey lifted his fair weary com-

panion from her horse at the door of a small village inn, somewhat to the west of Teinitz, and gladly sat down with her by the fireside of the good widow hostess, who with her daughter were the only occupants of the house. The fare was scanty and simple, but there was a cheerful good humour in the manner with which it was served which rendered it palatable; and the inhabitants of a remote place, with neither fortress nor castle in the neighbourhood, seemed to know and care little about the war which had passed with its rude current at a distance from them. The woman, too, could speak German, and after having provided the weary travellers with all that her house could afford in the way of food, she threw her gray hood over her head, saying, with a cheerful laugh to Agnes, "I am going out to search the village for eggs, and fowls, and meat; for it will snow before morning; and then we may not be able to get them."

Agnes gazed in Algernon's face with a look of apprehension; but he smiled gaily, replying to her look: "Let it snow if it will, dear Agnes. We shall then have an icy fortress for our defence, which no enemy will be in haste to pass. It will give us time for rest, and thought, and preparation."

The woman's prophecy was found true, for the next morning at daybreak the ground was covered with several feet of snow, and for three days the roads in the neighbourhood were impassable. They seemed to fly very quickly, however, to Agnes Herbert and Algernon Grey, though she felt her situation strange. But her companion's gentle kindness deprived it of any painful feeling: the rich stores of his mind were all poured forth to cheer and to amuse her, and if they loved before the hour of their arrival there, oh how they loved when, on the fourth morning, they again set forth from the poor but comfortable shelter they had found!

The day was bright, and almost as warm as summer, they and their horses, too, were refreshed and cheered, and a long day's journey brought them close to the frontiers of the Upper Palatinate.

Avoiding all large cities, they again rested for the night in a small town; and on the following day gladly passed the limits of Bohemia, never to return. The rest of their journey was performed without difficulty, though not without fatigue, remembered dangers made present security seem more sweet, the weather continued clear and fine, and they wandered for six days through mountains, and valleys, and woods, almost as happily as if in the first spring of young love they had gone forth together to view all that is fair and bright in the beautiful book of nature.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Evil news, Oberntraut, evil news!" cried Colonel Herbert, as he sat in his tower at Heidelberg, with an open letter in his hand. "Anhalt has been defeated under the walls of Prague —totally defeated! How could it be otherwise? Fifty thousand trained Austrians and Bavarians against thirty-five thousand raw recruits—a mere mob of herds and citizens, and wild Transylvanian horse!"

"What more?" asked Oberntraut, who stood before him with a stern but calm brow. "There must be other news at the back of that; and if you have not yet got it, few days will pass ere it comes."

"There is plenty more," said Herbert, sadly; "Frederic, the Queen, and all the court fled, no one knows whither, and Prague surrendered on the following day."

"I thought so," answered Oberntraut, without any change of tone; "one could see it coming as plain as the Neckar from the bridge. But who is the letter from—your niece? Where is she?—How fares she?"

"I know not," answered the old officer, laying the paper down upon the table and clasping his hands together.

"The letter is from Lodun—but he says no word of Agnes—God help us! But I will not be apprehensive; where her royal mistress could pass, she could pass too. Besides, even if she remained in Prague, these men would never hurt a woman."

"I do not know," replied Oberntraut, with a very gloomy brow. "Tilly is not tender, and such as he have done strange things in the Palatinate lately, as witness Bensheim, Hippurheim, and Otterberg. Herbert, I love your niece too well to rest satisfied so. I must have further news, and I go to seek it."

Herbert rose and grasped his hand, gazing sadly in his face. "Alas! Oberntraut," he said, after a moment's silence, "I fear you are preparing disappointment for yourself. Woman's heart is a wayward thing."

Oberntraut waved his hand. "You mistake me, my friend," he said. "Any disappointment that could be felt has been drunk to the dregs already. Agnes loves me not, as I should require to be loved; and I seek no heart that cannot be entirely mine. I have had my lesson, and have learned it well. I love her *still*, but with a different love to that of former times; cold, but not less strong; and in return she shall give me esteem and regard. This she cannot refuse, for it depends upon myself, not her—but let us talk of other things. I will have news of her, ere many days be over. I cannot leave my post, 'tis true; nor can you quit yours; but still, neither of us can rest satisfied without some tidings of her fate—you have no indication of which way her steps are turned?—None of where the Queen has gone to?"

"None," answered Herbert. "Lodun says naught that can give the slightest clew. He feared, it would seem, that his letter might fall into the enemy's hands, and wrote most guardedly in consequence. Yet stay, I recollect that when she left me, the Queen made a solemn promise to send her back hither, if by the chances of war Frederic's court should be driven out of Prague—nor is she one to forget such a promise."

"Hither!" said Oberntraut; "it is an unsafe place of refuge. Here, with war at our very gates; Heidelberg itself menaced daily; weak, vacillating princes, ruining the noblest cause and the finest army ever men had; the Spanish army daily gaining ground against us; and the whole valley of the Rhine a prey to a foreign enemy. But it cannot be helped. Even now,

most likely, she is on the road; and we must try to shield her from peril, when she comes into the midst of this scene of carnage."

As he spoke a heavy step was heard upon the stairs; and an armed man thrust his head into the room, saying, "The town is in a strange state, Colonel; for the news has driven the people out of their wits with fear."

"What do the fools expect?" exclaimed Oberntraut; "that Maximilian will march hither direct?"

The man shook his head, as if he did not understand him; and Herbert interposed, inquiring, "What news, Ancient?"

"Why, that Spinola has taken Weinheim, and is marching hither," replied the soldier. "Professors and half the students are flying to Neckargemuend; and all the rich citizens are frightening each other with long faces in the market-place; while the women are in the churches, praying as hard as they can pray."

"This must be seen to," said the Baron of Oberntraut. "You go and quiet the people, and prepare for defence. I will ride out with my troop, and see what truth there is in these tidings."

"I love not to meddle," said Herbert, "for I vowed I would have no command when Merven was put over my head here. But still, I suppose, I must do my best; and, when the hour for fighting comes, they will find that I am young and active enough to defend the place, if not to command the garrison."

"Nay, nay, cast away jealousies," said Oberntraut; "do I not serve under mere boys when the time requires it?"

"Ay, you are mightily changed, my friend," said Herbert.

"I thank God for it," answered Oberntraut; "I have lost naught that was good to keep, and much that was better cast away. But minutes are precious: let us forth. I think the folks will fight when the time of need comes; for these citizens are often more frightened at a distant rumour than a present peril."

"Let those that will, fly," answered Herbert, casting his sword-belt over his shoulder, and putting on his hat. "If we are to have a siege, the fewer mouths and the fewer cowards the better."

The town of Heidelberg presented a strange scene, as the two officers passed through the streets, after descending, by the shortest path, from the castle. Consternation was at its height; and the only preparations to be seen were for flight, not for defence. Men on horseback and on foot—women in carts, many with children in their arms—waggons loaded with goods, and every sort of conveyance that could be found in haste, well nigh blocked up the way leading to the eastern gate of the town, now called the Karl-thor; and in all the market-places and open spaces of the city, crowds of burghers were to be seen; some of them bold, indeed, in words, but almost all of them filled with terror, and meditating future flight.

Herbert mingled with the different groups, amidst a population where he was well known, asking, in a calm and somewhat scornful tone, "Why, what are you afraid of, good people?" and generally adding, "There is no danger, I tell you, if you have but a little spirit. First, the news is not true, I believe; and, secondly, Spinola has not half men enough to take Heidelberg, if but the schoolboys and parish-beadles will please to hold the gates against him. Come, come; go home and rest quiet. Six months hence it may be a different matter; but now you have no cause for fear."

In many instances, his words, but, more still, his calm tone and easy bearing, had their effect in re-assuring the people. They began to be ashamed of their fears; and a number of the principal townsmen returned to their homes to tell their wives and families that the danger had been magnified; and as no farther report of Spinola's approach reached the town during the day, towards evening Heidelberg became far more tranquil, though it must be admitted that the population was considerably thinned between morning and night.

In the mean while, Oberntraut issued forth by the Mannheim-gate at the head of a party of about two hundred horse, and advanced rapidly into the plain. No enemy could be discovered for some time; but at length the young commander saw the smoke of a burning mill at some distance, and concluded thence that Spinola, after sacking Weinheim, had retired, making a mere demonstration on the city of Heidelberg, more for the purpose of striking the inhabitants with terror than with any intention of attacking a place too strong for his small force. Shortly after, from a small rise, the rear guard of his army could be discovered marching towards Ladenburg; but, at the same time, several large parties of Spanish horse were to be seen on the south side of the Neckar, and two or three cornets could be perceived going at a quick pace along the mountain-road towards Wiesloch.

"On my life! they are somewhat bold," said Oberntraut to himself. "Whither are they going now, I wonder? We must see."

He paused for several minutes, watching; then called up to his side one of the young officers of his troop, and gave him orders to proceed with fifty men on the road towards Mosbach, to inquire eagerly for all news from Prague, and if he met with any of the ladies of Elizabeth's court returning towards Heidelberg, to give them safe escort back. Three single horsemen he despatched on separate roads. The reader who knows the Palatinate will remember that, passing through the woods and orchards, there are innumerable small bridle-paths and cart-tracks, to watch the movements of the party which had been seen advancing towards Wiesloch; and then, advancing slowly amongst the trees, so as to conceal his force as far as possible, he did not halt till he reached the village of Hockenheim, whence he threw a small party into Waldorf. Night fell shortly afterwards; and Oberntraut was seated at his frugal supper, when one of his men returned in haste to tell him that the Spanish horse had passed by Wiesloch, and just at nightfall attacked Langenbrücken.

"They had got possession of one part of the town, I think, ere I came away; but the people had barricaded the bridge, and seemed resolved to hold out on the other part."

"We must give them help," said Oberntraut

traut. "How many of the Spaniards were there?"

"One of the men I found half drunk upon the road," said the soldier, "told me that there were Jeronimo Valetto's troop and another; in all near three hundred men."

"Well, we are a hundred and fifty," answered Oberntraut. "Go down, call the men to the saddle—but no trumpets, remember; we will do all quietly;" and, as soon as the soldier was gone, he filled himself a large horn-cup full of wine and drank it off; then placing his helmet on his head again, and tightening the buckle of his cuirass, he issued forth, and in five minutes more was in the saddle.

Advancing quietly and silently by the paths through the plain, which he well knew, he approached Langenbrücken, fancying at one time he heard a firing in that direction. As he came nearer, however, all was still; and neither sight nor sound gave any indication of strife in the long straggling village. At the distance of a quarter of a mile the young baron rode on with four or five men in advance of his troop; and, shortly after, heard several voices laughing, talking, and singing. They were not German tongues; though the language that they spoke was more harmonious than his own, it did not sound sweet to Oberntraut's ear. Dismounting in profound silence, he advanced with four of his men on foot, till he came in sight of a fire at the end of the narrow street, where three Italian soldiers were sitting, whiling away the time of their watch with drink and song; and, approaching as near as he could without being seen, Oberntraut whispered a word to his followers, and then darted forward upon the little party of the enemy. He had one down and under his feet in a moment; the others started up, but were instantly grappled with by the German reiters and mastered at once. One of them, indeed, levelled a carbine at Oberntraut and was about to fire; but a stout, tall German thrust his hand over the pan just in time to stop a report which would have alarmed the town.

"The least noise and you are a dead man," said Oberntraut, in as good Spanish as he could command. "Where is Valetto?"

"Who are you?" demanded the man to whom he spoke.

"I am he whom you call 'that devil Oberntraut,'" answered the young baron; "so give me an answer quickly, or I'll drive my dagger down your throat."

"He is in that house there, where the sign swings," answered the man sullenly, pointing up the street.

"And the rest of the men?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, in the different houses, where you will see lights and hear tongues," answered the Italian soldier in bad Spanish; and looking over his shoulder at the same time, he saw the young baron's troop advancing quietly over the dusty road into the town.

"Let fifteen or twenty dismount and come with me," said Oberntraut in a low voice; "the rest search all the houses where there are lights; but let a party be at each door before the least noise is made; then cut down the enemy wherever you find them. Give these men their lives, but guard them well."

Thus saying, he advanced, with the party he had commanded to follow him, at a rapid pace towards the house which the Italian had pointed out as his officer's quarters. There was a little step before the door; and, as Oberntraut put his foot upon it, he heard voices speaking in the room to the left. One was that of a man, loud, boisterous, and jovial. The other a woman's tongue, soft and sweet, but speaking in the tone of lamentation and entreaty. Something in that voice made the young baron's heart thrill; and, cocking the pistol in his hand, he pushed open the outer door, turned suddenly to the left, and entered the room whence the sounds proceeded. Before him, seated at a table with viands and wine, was a stout tall man with a face inflamed with drink; while, a little in advance, held by the arm by a rough soldier, was the never-to-be-forgotten form of Agnes Herbert. Her face was drowned in tears; her limbs seemed scarcely to have strength to hold her up; and yet her eye flashed as she said, "You are cruel, ungenerous, discourteous!"

Valetto started suddenly up from his seat as he beheld Oberntraut's face; and the soldier, who held Agnes, turned fiercely round and was drawing his sword. But the young baron's pistol was at his head in a moment; the hammer fell, and he rolled dead upon the floor.

Agnes sprang forward to Oberntraut's side; and Valetto sank down into his seat again as pale as death, for the heads of five or six German troopers were seen behind their leader, and the sounds of contention, fierce but short—pistols fired, clashing swords, groans and oaths in Spanish, Italian, and German—were heard from other parts of the house.

"Take that man, and tie him!" said the young baron, speaking to his soldiers. "Two will be enough. The rest go and still that noise! I will come after. Fear not, fear not, lady! The town is in my hands—you are now quite safe. Here, sit you down for an instant, and I will rejoin you speedily." As he spoke, he led Agnes gently to a seat, and was then turning away to leave her, when she exclaimed, "Oh! my kind friend—there is—there is—one who needs aid in that room behind, if they have not murdered him. We were on our way to Heidelberg, when—"

"I will return directly," said Oberntraut, as the sound of another pistol was heard, "fear not—all shall be done that you can desire."

Thus saying, he left her; and Agnes, sitting down, covered her eyes with her hands and wept.

In the mean time the two German soldiers had tied Valetto's arms, and he sat gazing upon the fair girl he had been grossly insulting the moment before, with a look of anxious hesitation.

"Speak to him for me, lady," he said, at length, in Italian, "that incarnate devil will put me to death, if you do not. I know his face too well."

"What do you deserve?" asked Agnes Herbert, raising her eyes for a moment, with a look of reproach; "not for what you have said to me, for that I can forgive, though it was base

and cowardly, but for what you have done to those who defended me, and only did their duty to the Prince they serve."

"What is it he has done?" cried Oberntraut, who had overheard the last words as he returned to the room.

"Master Algernon Grey," answered Agnes, with the colour mounting in her pale cheek again, "escorted me hither from Prague, by the Queen's commands. He aided the people to defend the town, and was brought in badly wounded. They tore me away from him when I would have staunched the blood; and I heard that man order him to be put to death."

"Take him out to the door," said Oberntraut, "and hang him to the sign-pole."

"I did but jest! I did but jest!" cried Valetto, who had learned some German, "the cavalier is safe—you will find him living—I know —I believe he is living—if he died not of his wounds—I did but jest—the soldiers know it."

"Nay, nay,—I beseech you," said Agnes, in a tremulous voice, laying her hand upon Oberntraut's arm, "I do not seek revenge—I ought not— must not feel it—oh, spare him!"

"If our noble friend is alive, well," answered Oberntraut, sternly; "but if he be dead, I will avenge him, whatever you may do, lady,—the act shall be mine,—come show me where he was;—and you, my friend, make your peace with Heaven, as far as may be, and as soon; for, if I find him not in life, your time on earth will not be more than five minutes. Come, dear lady, where was our friend when last you saw him? I trust this man's words are true; for no soldier would venture to put a prisoner to death, unless by his commander's orders."

"Come;" said Agnes, "this way," and she led him through the door.

There was a man lying across the passage, with a ghastly wound on his left temple, and the blood weltering forth over the scorched and smoke-blackened skin, forming a small pool in the inequalities of the earthen floor. The lady recoiled for an instant from that fearful object; but the life of Algernon Grey was at stake; and, summoning all her resolution, she stepped over the corpse, and pursued her path towards the back part of the house.

It seemed that the German soldiers had not penetrated there; and it is probable that many of Valetto's men had made their escape already by the little garden at the back, the door of which stood open; but some few steps ere she reached it, the fair girl paused and laid her hand upon the lock, hesitating with that terrible contention of hope and fear, from which the human bosom is seldom free, either in one shape or another. She might the next moment see him she loved lying a corpse before her eyes; she might find the greater part of her apprehensions vain; but yet fear had the predominance, and it required a great effort of resolution to make her open the door and look in. There was a light in the room; and the moment a step was heard, Algernon Grey turned quickly on the bed where he was laid in the clothes which he had worn on his journey; looking round with a faint smile, and saying in a low and feeble voice, "I am better, dear Agnes—the bleeding has stopped—what has that man done?—what was all that noise?"

Had the whole world been present, Agnes Herbert could not have resisted the feelings of her heart; and, advancing to the bed-side, she dropped upon her knees, resting her hands on his, and exclaimed, "Thank God!—oh, thank God!"

"Ah, Oberntraut, too;" said Algernon Grey, "then I need not ask what those pistol-shots implied. Welcome, my good friend, welcome."

"Hush!" said Oberntraut, gravely, holding up his hand. "The doctors made me keep silence when I was wounded, and so will I with you. Are you sure that the wounds have stopped bleeding? Come, let me see;" and advancing close to the young Englishman's side, he drew back his vest and the neck of his shirt, which were already stiff with blood, and saw a large wound on the right breast, and another, apparently from a pistol-shot, just below the bend of the shoulder.

"Is this all?" he asked, in a cheerful tone. "Methinks these won't kill you, my good friend."

"There is another just below the knee," replied Algernon Grey; "but that is nothing."

"Let me see," said Oberntraut; "let me see;" and he proceeded to examine.

"It is not much," he said carelessly; "but still, this is bleeding and must be stopped; and we must take care that the others do not break out again. I wonder if there is such a thing as a leech in the place—there must be a barber, and we will send for him. Barbers never fly, for enemies must have their beards dressed as well as friends. Stay with him, dear lady, stay with him, and do something, if you can, to stop this blood. I will send some one who knows more of such matters than I do; my trade is more to shed blood than to staunch it."

He staid to say no more, but hurried out; gave some hasty orders to the soldiers in the house, went further down the street, looked into several houses where there were lights within and horses at the door, and, having satisfied himself that all resistance was over in the place, he inquired of a countryman, whom he found in one of the rooms, where the barber of the village was to be found.

"Oh, a long way farther up," said the man; "you will see the pole and basin out," and, calling two or three of his troopers to follow him, Oberntraut strode away, giving various orders for the security of his men as he went.

The trade of the barber and the profession of the surgeon were then very strangely combined together throughout the world, with the exception of one or two cities in one or two kingdoms, in which the chirurgeon was acknowledged as belonging to a higher and more honourable class than the mere trimmer of men's beards and the shaver of their cheeks. In every country town, however, the latter exercised the craft of bone-setting and wound-dressing, and the learned functionary of Langenbrücken was not at all surprised at being called upon by the Baron of Oberntraut to tend a wounded man.

"You have nothing to do," said the Baron, in a commanding tone, "but to stop the bleeding, and to make sure that it does not break out again as we go to Heidelberg. This case is above your skill, my friend, so that I want you to do naught more than I have said; no vulnerary salves and sympathetic ointments, if

you please; and, if I find you meddling beyond your craft, I will slit your ears."

"But how is the gentleman hurt?" asked the barber; "let me know that, at least, that I may bring what is needful."

"How is he hurt?" exclaimed Oberntraut, "what a question is that! First, he is very badly hurt, and I doubt he will not recover, so I don't want you to make it sure. Then he is hurt with sword-thrusts and pistol-balls. All you have to do is to bind up his wounds. Therefore come along at once;" and, leading him down to the door of the house where Algernon Grey lay, he then went on to ascertain the number of prisoners that had been made, and of the dead and wounded on both parts.

When the barber entered the room to which Agnes had conducted Oberntraut, he found her still kneeling by her lover's bed-side, and with her hand clasped in his; but the wound, from which the blood had been flowing when the young Baron left them, was now tightly bound up with a scarf, so that but a few drops trickled through, staining the bandage slightly. The lady withdrew her hand as soon as the door opened, and the barber proceeded to his examination, and, being not without skill, from long experience, to which science is but a handmaid, he did what was really best at the moment in all respects but one. His look and his words certainly did not tend to reassure the wounded man, for, with a fault very ordinary in his calling, he was inclined to make the worst of any case presented to him, for the sake of some little additional reputation if recovery took place, and of security if a fatal result occurred.

Poor Agnes's heart sank at the doubtful shake of the head, and the still more alarming words, "A very bad wound indeed—I wonder where the point of the weapon went;" and not even the cheerful tone of Oberntraut, when he returned, could dispel her apprehensions.

"There, get you gone, sallow-face," said the Baron, addressing the barber. "There's a crown for you. Your dismal looks are enough to push a sick man into the grave, were he a mile off it. Well, my good friend," he continued, speaking to Algernon Grey, "you will be upon your feet as soon as I was, I dare say. We must get you to Heidelberg to-night, however, for this is an open place and without defence. You shall have a little wine before you go to keep you up, and I have told the men to make some sort of litter to carry you—there, do not speak; they told me that speaking was the worst of all things. I will answer all your questions, without your asking. I found a man and a boy in one of the houses hard by; the man shot through the leg, just like yourself, and the boy with a wound through his cheek and two or three grinders lost; but they'll do very well, and can ride as far as need be. Did you come in a carriage, or on horseback, dear lady? I can find no carriage in the place, but horses enough to mount a regiment."

"On horseback," answered Agnes. "We had no time for carriages in quitting Prague."

"Ay, ay! a sad affair, that!" said the young Baron. "But tell me, what has become of the King and Queen, for here we are all in darkness."

Agnes gave him a short account of all that had taken place up to the time of her quitting Prague, under some embarrassment, indeed, for the keen eye of the young Baron of Oberntraut was fixed upon her countenance during the whole time, not rudely, but firmly. Shortly after her account was concluded, and before he could ask any more questions, one of the men came in to say that all was ready, and that the boy had pointed out the lady's horse. Some wine was then procured, and Oberntraut insisted not only that Algernon Grey should take some, but that Agnes should partake, passing the cup from the one to the other with a meaning smile, not without some share of sadness in it. The hastily constructed litter was then brought in, and the wounded man placed upon it and carried out. At the door of the little hostelry a number of the villagers had gathered together on the report of the enemy's discomfiture, and Oberntraut addressed them in one of his blunt short speeches, saying, "I have a great mind to burn your town, you knaves, to punish you for not defending it better; but look well to the wounded, and I will forgive you. Keep a shrewd watch over the foreigners, and send them in to Heidelberg as they get better. I have left only one of my men with you, and if you do not treat him well I will skin you alive. There, bring the prisoners along;" and, placing Agnes on her horse, he mounted himself and rode away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The long and weary hours of sickness fell heavy upon Algernon Grey. Never for a day during the course of life had he known the weight of illness before, at least within his own remembrance. Powerful in frame, and vigorous in constitution, moderate in habits, and inured to robust exercises from early youth, life had been hitherto all light activity; and if some sorrows and cares had touched him, they had not had power in any way to affect his corporeal frame. The aching head, the dim and dazzled eye, the fainting heart, the weary and powerless limbs of the sickly or the overstudious, he had never known. It had only been with him hitherto to will and to do; the body had been no clog upon the mind; and the active energies of both had seemed to give fresh strength and vigour to each other.

Now, day after day, and week after week, he lay upon a sick couch in the castle of Heidelberg. Feeble, languid, full of pain, with every movement uneasy, with broken sleep at night, and drowsy heaviness by day, his cheek and his eyes dull, he lingered on under the unskilful hands of ignorant surgeons, who, with the wild phantasies of the time, only prolonged the period of sickness by the means which they employed to cure the wounds he had received.

All that could comfort or could soothe was done indeed by those around him, to alleviate his sufferings, and to make the heavy time pass lightly. Herbert was with him long every day; and Agnes, too, with a maid to bear her company, sat many an hour beside him. She read to him the books he loved, she sang to him the songs which she thought might waken hope

and banish despondency; she conversed in gentle yet cheerful tones, and the sweet sound of her musical voice was the only medicine he received that seemed at all to advance his cure.

There was no opposition to her wishes. She came, she went, when she would; and yet not one word had passed between her and Colonel Herbert on her position with regard to Algernon Grey. He seemed to comprehend it all; to see that they loved mutually and truly; to know that to withhold her presence from him would be to destroy him; that to refuse her the solace of tending him would wring the gentle heart which it was the thought and business of his life to render happy. He was a man of a peculiar character too, not singular—though I had nearly used that word—for there are many such in the world; he was doubtful and careful at first, perhaps somewhat suspicious, but his confidence once gained it was unbounded; and no thought of cold proprieties, no question of what the world would say, ever shackled the free energies of any generous impulse. He had set himself free, years before, from all the trammels of convention; he had seen another do so from love for him. It had produced, though it so seldom does so, perfect happiness to both; and he perceived no reason why, between two beings pure and high, and honest in mind, the same conduct should not effect the same result. It might have been a fatal error had he mistaken the character of either, even in the slightest point. But there were other causes for his calm acquiescence in all that Agnes wished. Up to the hour at which she left him for Prague, he had watched her from infancy with fond care and anxiety; all her actions had been under his own eye; her very heart and soul had seemed open to his view; and he had given to her mind in many things the bent of his own. Though he loved the free, wild spirit that animated her at times, he had directed, he had counselled her; but now, for more than a year she had acted entirely for herself. He had accustomed himself completely, in thought, to look upon her as independent of his advice and control; and in none of her letters had he found one word to make him wish that his guidance was still extended over her. She had been alone, too, with Algernon Grey in troublous times and difficult circumstances, for many a long day; she had assured him, that, during that time, no brother could have treated her with more kindness and consideration; and he knew that Agnes would not say that, if there was one dark spot in all the memory of their intercourse. Love, he saw, it was too late to guard against; and for all the rest, he had the fullest confidence.

But there was another who also, from time to time, visited with kindly feeling the chamber of the sick man. The young Baron of Oberntraut came, whenever he set foot in Heidelberg, to see his former adversary. He conversed cheerfully, and yet considerately with him; he told him tales of all those wild and daring exploits which he himself and his gallant band performed by day and night against the enemy, who were now overrunning the Palatinate in every direction—exploits with which the pages of the old chroniclers glow; for, if ever there was a name which, for devotion, gallantry, unceasing activity, and brilliant success with small means, deserves to be placed upon the roll of heroes, it is that of John of Oberntraut. But of the sad reverses which the forces of the Protestant princes met with, in consequence of the weakness, indecision, and discord of their leaders, Oberntraut spoke not; for he well knew, that to depress the spirits of his hearer, would be to frustrate every means employed for his cure.

Yet at times he would gaze at him, as he lay with pale cheek, dim eye, and bloodless lip; and a look of thoughtful, sad, and intense speculation would come into the gallant soldier's face. What was it that he pondered? What was it that he calculated? Heaven knows. I cannot tell; then, generally, he would turn away hastily, and bidding his companion adieu, leave the room.

It was one day, after a fit of this sort of dreamy meditation, that going down to the Altan to gaze into the plain of the Rhine, he found Agnes breathing the free air, for a short space, before she resumed her post in her lover's sick chamber. She spoke with him kindly and frankly for a moment; and he talked to her with a thoughtful and abstracted air; but very few words had passed, ere she bade him adieu, and turned to go.

"Stay, Agnes, stay," he cried, "I want to speak with you."

She turned, with her cheek somewhat paler, and a degree of alarm in her look, which she could not hide; for now that she knew more of love, she was well aware that Oberntraut had loved her; and she feared that he might love her still.

"You avoid me, Agnes," he said; "nay, hear me—I see it well—or, if you do not avoid me, you feel a restraint, an apprehension, when I am near you. There is but one means of banishing this; and, for both our sakes it must be banished; that must be by a frank explanation on my part. There was a time when I loved you more than life—when I hoped I might be loved in return; and then, with rash vanity and eager passion, I would have taken the life of any man who attempted to cross my course. Come, sit you down here, dear Agnes; for you tremble needlessly; and, when you have heard me to the end, you will never fear me, or shun me again. I tell you what has been, not what is. I saw you meet another; I saw your hearts and spirits instantly spring towards each other; I saw your eyes mutually light up with the same flame; why colour so, sweet lady? It is true, and natural, and just. I was half mad; I did him wrong; I sought his life; I placed him in a situation of danger, difficulty, and, it might have been, dishonour. I was vanquished, surpassed, and frustrated. From that hour I knew you never could be mine; I felt I must have lost much of your esteem, and that I had never possessed your love. I resolved that I would regain your respect, at least; ay, and your friendship. Weakened, tamed down, and softened, I spent the hours of sickness in arguing with my own heart, and conquering my own spirit; and in this combat, at least, I was successful. I cast the thought of love away from me; I made up my mind to the fact, that you

were to be his. I could not deny to myself that he had acted generously by me; and I resolved that I would return it by my very best endeavours. I knew, at length, that he who lies ill up there had rendered me the best service; and with a terrible struggle, but still a successful one, I cast jealousy, and anger, and mortified vanity, and irritated pride away, resolving that he should be my friend, and I would be his. So much for what is between him and me, Agnes; now for our part of it. I loved you passionately then. I love you calmly, coolly now, as a brother, Agnes—as a friend; not only no longer with hope, but no longer with passion. There is yet a remnant of pride in my nature, but this pride has turned to good and not to evil; for it has taught me to read myself, and study myself. I know that I could never be satisfied with aught but the first fresh affection of a free and untouched heart; that I should be jealous of every thought—ay, even of every remembrance—of the dead, even as well as of the living; that from the woman who consented to be mine, I should require the whole affections of her nature, from the first to the last. I would not have in the whole past one spot upon which her memory could rest with regret. I would be her happiness; and she should not have ever dreamed of other love but mine. In one word, then, Agnes, if he who possesses your love, and I do believe deserves it, were to sink under the wounds he has received—which God forefend!—this hand, once so coveted, should never be sought by me. I tell you so, to set your mind at rest, that we may be all that we ever can be to each other—true friends. Shrink not from me henceforth—dread not my presence or words. Look upon John of Oberntraut as your brother, if you will; and, at all events, believe that naught which a brother's love could do for a sister will not be done at any time by me for you; naught that the warmest friendship can prompt shall be wanting on my part towards him you love."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" answered Agnes, giving him her hand. "This is kind, indeed. But, tell me, were those words you spoke just now about his state but hazarded to show your meaning, or uttered as warning to me to prepare!"

She covered her eyes for a moment, and then added, in as firm a tone as she could command,

"You said, if he should sink under his wounds. Oh, tell me, tell me! is this likely? He does not seem to amend, or so slowly that one day shows no gain upon the other; and these men who come to attend him, with their grave faces and scanty words, alarm rather than reassure me. My heart sinks when I see them."

"Nay; he will do well," said Oberntraut, in a kindly tone. "No thanks to them, I do believe. 'Tis despite of their art, rather than by it, that he will be cured: by a strong frame, and not by drugs and salves. He will do well. Even to-day he is better. There is more light in his eyes; his lips are not so pale; his voice was somewhat stronger. But there is one question I would ask you, Agnes. Do you yet know who he is? Are you aware that this name of Algernon Grey—"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, with a smile, cheered by the hopes he had given. "I have long known all; but you should not doubt his honour in aught. He has not a thought that is not high and true."

"I do not doubt," he answered. "I am sure he is honest and noble; but many a tale hangs long upon the lips in times of trouble and of sickness. I heard this from some of his men, who have come in from Breslau, and who seem to love him much. They came asking for 'the earl,' and no one knew whom they meant till I questioned them. But a word or two more must be said, dear lady, before we part. I would fain that he cast away these men's medicaments. I firmly believe they keep him ill, and that, if left to nature, he would have been well ere now. It is very needful that he should recover speedily. The sky is growing very dark, lady; Tilly, that fierce butcher, is already on the Rhine; post after post has been lost by our weak generals. Though Franckenthal holds out, yet it, and Heidelberg, and Manheim, are all the places of good strength that we possess; and what can I do with a few hundred men? or Horatio Vere, in Manheim, with his handful of English? Heidelberg will not be long ere she sees the Bavarian under her walls. Herbert will not leave this castle so long as there is breath within him. I may be away, or dead—who can tell? and there must be some one to protect and guide you. We must have him well with all speed. Would he would cast away these drugs. They keep his chamber far too hot. Plain cold water and free air would do more than all these potions."

"Is there not a famous man at Hulbrona?" asked Agnes. "We could send for him."

"That is well bethought," answered Oberntraut. "But there is one man here who, though no physician, has studied nature and her secrets more than any of them—old Dr. Alting. I will go down and bring him up; and if he sanctions my plan, we will pursue it without asking further help. Farewell, for the present. Cheer him, cheer him, dear lady." And, thus saying, he hurried away.

Taking the path under the old arsenal, which stood in front of the large octagon tower, Oberntraut hastened down into the town, and soon reached the house of Dr. Alting. He asked no one for admission; but, with his usual impetuous spirit, opened the door of the outer chamber, and was walking straight towards the old professor's library, when his servant-maid suddenly appeared, and placed herself in the way, saying, "The doctor is busy, noble sir, and bid me not to let any one disturb him."

"I must disturb him," answered Oberntraut, putting her unceremoniously aside, and walking on towards a door, through which he heard voices speaking. The moment after, he laid his hand upon the lock, and pushed with his strong arm. Something resisted slightly; but the small bolt gave way ere he had time to think and withdraw his hand, and the door flew back.

Old Alting, with his black cap off, and grey hair streaming, ran instantly towards him, as if to stop his entrance; but, at the same time, Oberntraut saw clearly a man's figure, wrapped in a large falling cloak, pass through the opposite door.

"Why, how now, doctor!" he exclaimed. "Are you busy with your familiar? I beg his

highness's pardon for intruding upon his conference with his master; and yours, too; but you must excuse me, for I have a friend sorely ill, up at the castle, of three bad wounds and two worse leeches; and I would fain have you tell me what you think of his case."

The old man seemed sadly discomposed and ruffled in temper. "Am I a physician or a chirurgeon either?" he cried. "In truth, Baron of Oberntraut, I will not be thus disturbed when I have a pupil with me. I will not have aught to do with your friend. Let him get well as he can. It is not my trade to cure wounded men who get themselves hurt, brawling with their neighbours and breaking God's law."

"Nay, nay, my good doctor," exclaimed Oberntraut. "Poor Algernon Grey has been doing naught of the kind. He was defending your friend Herbert's fair niece, that was all."

"Algernon Grey!" cried Doctor Alting. "Is it Algernon Grey? Why, I knew not he had returned. He has never been to see me: that was not right; but I will come—I will come."

"He could not come to see you, my good friend," replied Oberntraut, "unless he was brought on men's shoulders; for he was well nigh knocked to pieces at Langenbrücken now more than two months ago, and has ever since been lying in the castle, with two men trying to promote his getting well."

"I will come to him," said Alting, more calmly; "though you are a rude visitor, my good young lord. Wait for me a moment, and I will go with you, if I can."

Thus saying, he left Oberntraut, who muttered to himself, "If he can! What should stop him if he will?" The next moment he heard voices speaking again in the room beyond, and he walked to the window that he might not catch the words.

At the end of about ten minutes, the old man returned with a broad hat upon his head, and mantle over his shoulders, followed by another personage dressed in black, with his neck and chin buried in a deep ruff, pressed up by the collar of a large wrapping cloak; on his head, too, was an enormous black beaver, pressed far down over his brow, and his face was farther hidden—not by the ordinary moustache and small pointed tuft of the time, but by a wide-spreading beard, which covered his whole chin and cheeks. Oberntraut gazed at him firmly for a moment; and Dr. Alting, as if imagining that the young Baron's inquiring look might embarrass his companion, said, in a quick and hurried tone, "This is a learned pupil of mine, who, since I saw him, has travelled in many lands, and has learned a great many curious and valuable secrets. He will go with us, and give us his advice."

"I thank him heartily," said Oberntraut, gravely. "We had better set forth, my good friend; and, as the shortest way, we will go through the garden-gate, under the ——, and then up through the subterraneans; I have the keys."

Thus saying, he moved towards the door, but stopped for a moment, courteously, to let the stranger go first. As soon as they were in the street, he led the way to a narrow lane, which conducted to the old wall, below that part of the gardens where the valley had been filled up with rocks and earth to form rocks and terraces. A few hundred yards from the entrance of the lane, a small arch door was seen in the wall; and Oberntraut, producing a key, opened it to give admission to his two companions. Locking the heavy, iron-plated door as soon as they were within, he looked around, and seeing some labourers working on a path to the right, he took the zig-zag road to the left. It was a good deal longer, as both Dr. Alting and himself well knew; but the worthy professor made no observation, and followed in silence. Some way up the slope, a small open arch with an iron gate was seen; but it also was opened by the young Baron's keys, and he led the party, by various stairs and passages, till they came out beneath the steps leading from the Altan to one of the smaller entrances of the castle. Then, hurrying his steps, Oberntraut, as if some sudden fit of impetuosity had come over him, mounted towards the higher parts of the building so rapidly, that the poor old professor was obliged to call for mercy.

"Well!" muttered Oberntraut to himself, "the castle is nearly deserted now; and there is no great chance of meeting any one. This way, my reverend friend—in the chamber above lies my young companion;" and, going on more slowly, he opened the door of the chamber where Algernon Grey had remained ever since his arrival. Agnes Herbert was sitting by the bedside, with a book in her hand; and her maid was seated in the window, busy with some embroidery. But the young lady instantly closed the book when Oberntraut and his companions appeared; and, beckoning her aside, the young Baron said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all, "I have brought Dr. Alting to see our friend Algernon; but I wish, dear lady, you would send for your uncle, to his lodging in the tower. He is down at the Trutzkaiser. Tell him I have something important to say to him, and will join him in a few minutes."

Agnes looked somewhat surprised at the request, for the message might as well have been conveyed by an ordinary servant; but Oberntraut's face wore a peculiar expression; and, merely bowing her head, she turned away, and left the room with her maid.

In the mean while, Algernon Grey had turned round uneasily on his bed, and welcomed Dr. Alting with a faint smile.

"Lie still, lie still," said the old man, advancing, and taking his hand: "I have come to see what can be done for you. So, you have been wounded, it seems—and two months ill. They must be strange physicians, not to have killed you or cured you in that time!" and he pressed his fingers on the young man's pulse.

"I say that all he requires is fresh air and cold water," cried Oberntraut: "if he has those he will be well in a week."

"As to fresh air, you are right," answered Dr. Alting. "The frost is gone; the wind is mild;—open that window at once. As to the cold water, we must inquire farther;" and he proceeded to examine the wounds in the

young gentleman's breast and shoulder. "Two months!" he said at length.

"Nay, well nigh ten weeks," answered Algernon Grey, faintly.

"Nay, then, cold water is not the remedy," said Dr. Alting; "good sound wine of the Rheingau—a moderate quantity at a time, but frequently repeated—and wholesome and nourishing food, is all that is required. Take no more of these medicines, my young friend;" and he pointed to some potions on the table; "they might be good enough at one time, but the disease has spent itself, and all you want is strength to heal your wounds. Is not that your opinion, my learned friend?" he continued, turning to the gentleman who had accompanied him.

"Assuredly!" said the other; "but I will add a remedy, which will greatly aid his cure. It is a secret, however, which no one must hear. If you two gentlemen will retire for a moment, I will join you at the door immediately."

Oberntraut instantly withdrew, without reply, and Dr. Alting followed more slowly; but as soon as they were on the corridor, and the door closed, Oberntraut grasped the old man's arm, saying, in a low tone, and with an agitated look, "This is a terrible risk!—we have no force to defend the town, in case of sudden attack; it were better to send off for Vere and his men directly, and leave Manheim to its fate, rather than suffer the King's person to be so risked;" and he took a step towards the head of the stairs.

"Stay, stay!" cried Dr. Alting, catching him by the sleeve; "let us hear farther, ere you act."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The sun had set; the early moon had risen; and the clear sky of the early spring-time was full of stars. A great deal of bustle had been observed in the castle, though it was now no longer tenanted by a host of servants; and the gay scene of courtly splendour which it had formerly displayed—the hurrying multitudes, the splendid dresses, the clanging trumpets, and the beating drums, had subsided into dulness, silence, and almost solitude. The ruined fortunes of the Palatinate house seemed shadowed forth in the desolate change which had come over their dwelling-place.

Yet, as I have said, an unusual degree of activity had appeared in the castle during the last two hours before sunset. Some seven or eight mounted men had gone forth in different directions, none of the ordinary inhabitants of the place knowing what was their errand. The young Baron of Oberntraut himself rode out, followed by a single trooper; but, instead of going down into the plain, which was the direction he usually took, and where his men were quartered, he rode up by steep and precipitous paths—where, perhaps, a horse's hoof had never trod the ground before—round the hills looking upon the Rhine, and going from height to height, often pausing to gaze, shading his eyes with his hand, and seeming to scrutinize every path and road in the wide extent of country below him.

At length, just at sunset, he returned to the castle, and inquired if any of the messengers had come back. Three had already arrived; and he examined them strictly as to what discoveries they had made in regard to the movements of the enemy's troops. They all agreed that Tilly and his forces had passed over the bridge which he had thrown across the Neckar, had directed his course towards the Rhine, and had crossed that river near Oppenheim.

This news seemed to give the young officer great satisfaction; and he proceeded from the court to the lodging of Colonel Herbert, where the door was carefully closed after his entrance. About an hour subsequently, as good a meal as could be prepared in the castle was carried up to the rooms of the English officer; but his own servant and Agnes Herbert received the dishes at the door, and the ordinary attendants were not suffered to enter. Another hour elapsed, and then Herbert and Dr. Alting came down the stairs of the tower alone, looked everywhere round when they reached the door of the tower, and then walked slowly on, taking their way along the inner rampart towards the library-tower, and thence, by the small doors and steps, into the garden. There they turned towards the grating of the arch by which Dr. Alting had been brought that morning to the castle; and Herbert, opening the gate, paused beside it conversing with his old friend.

They had been followed, however, for some way by another party; for, while they were walking along the rampart, Agnes had descended the stairs with the gentleman who had accompanied the old professor in the morning; and they took, too, their way to the gardens. The young Baron of Oberntraut, and Colonel Herbert's servant armed with a stout tuck, followed at a distance of about fifty yards, and, in whatever way Agnes and her companion turned their steps, kept them still in sight.

The fair lady's path seemed somewhat devious: now it was turned towards the lower garden; then, at a word from the gentleman by her side, she mounted the steps, and wound round amongst the trees above, towards the great terrace; then down to the parterres with their curious arabesques; then up again by another flight of steps to the terrace once more; the moon shining bright upon their path the whole way.

"It is a weakness, I know," said her companion, "to cling thus to particular scenes, which only fill one with melancholy regret; but here, fair lady, have passed so many happy hours, that I feel it difficult to tear myself away, although these inanimate objects present nothing to my mind but the memories of pleasures, gone for ever, perhaps."

"The past has a spirit, your Majesty," answered Agnes, "which animates the dull form of the present. The soul of happiness departed, I can well understand, gives life to this changed scene; and to your royal eyes rise up, with every object that we pass, some peculiar hours or days which can never die to the affectionate remembrance of the heart. But let me hope, too, that there lives a future, when once more, amidst these scenes, with all you love best on earth, the days of old shall be renewed, and these dark moments be recalled but as a tempest-cloud that the wind has long swept away."

Frederic shook his head sadly. "I know not," he said; "God grant it! but there is a dark foreboding at my heart that the curse of ambition is upon me, and that the joys which I did not estimate sufficiently when they were mine, are snatched away for ever."

"Ah, no!" said Agnes, sadly; "I would fain think that honour, and virtue, and high purposes can never sink, overwhelmed, before fraud, and violence, and wrong."

"Yet such is too often the course of things here below," replied Frederic. "It will not be for ever. But the world has a life as well as we, dear lady; and our lives are but parts of the world's life. The time will be, when, in the long existence of the universe, all things shall be set right and honesty triumph; but, alas! I fear no man's time is wide enough to give space for hope that evil suffered will have compensation here. I might add, no man is good enough to complain even when his best purposes are the steps that lead to the punishment that his faults deserve. Alas! fair Heidelberg, thou place of so many memories and so many dreams, I must quit thee once more—for ever—yes, I feel it is for ever!" And, with his head bent and his eyes full of tears, he descended the steps and hurried on to the spot where Herbert and Dr. Alting waited for him.

"Herbert," said the unfortunate Prince, "I go; but you must stay, and, if it be possible, defend this place we both so fondly love from the rude spoiling hands of the enemy. It would be bitter indeed to know that the Bavarian was in these halls; that his brutal soldiery were wasting and devastating all that a long line of princes have with care and skill been bringing to perfection; that the scenes of love and peace—the dwellings of art, and poetry, and science, were polluted by men who have neither feeling nor reverence for such higher things. I do beseech you, my noble friend, aid to defend this place to the best of your power, though some wrong has been done you by others, though not by me."

"With the last drop of my blood, Sire," answered Herbert; "but in truth it is time your Majesty should go. You have a long and dangerous journey before you ere you can rejoin Mansfeld; but I trust that it will pass safely, and that together you will strike such a stroke at the enemy as will keep him far from these walls. Have you all the papers you sought?"

"All, all," answered the King; "but some one must go with me to lock the gate after I and the good Doctor here have passed."

"That will I, your Majesty," said Oberntraut, who had now joined the rest; but Frederic replied, "No, no, you had better mount at once and ride down to your men as we agreed. Herbert, you have to see that no one else quits the castle for two hours. Does this dear lady know the way?"

"Right well," replied Herbert: "I took care of that long ago."

"And will she have no fears in returning through those passages alone?" inquired the King.

"None, Sire," answered Agnes, with a smile; "I have become inured to real dangers, and fear so *imaginary ones.*"

"Well, then—farewell, my friends," said Frederic, shaking hands with Herbert and Oberntraut; "if we never meet again here below, God bless you! and we shall meet hereafter, I trust."

Thus saying, he passed through the open gate with Dr. Alting. Agnes received a large key from her uncle, while Oberntraut took a dark lantern from the servant, unshaded it, and placed it in her hands. Thus provided, she followed quickly upon the steps of the King, and lighted him through the long and winding passage which at that time led down from the castle to the town. Not a word was spoken as they passed between the heavy walls of rude masonry, on which the green damp stood thick, and through which the water from the earth around oozed in many places; but at the door leading into the city, Frederic paused and pressed Agnes's hand, saying, "Farewell, my sweet cousin! Wear this ring for my sake and for the Queen's. See our young friend, Algernon, to-night, and I think you will find that the intelligence I gave has proved a better medicine for his wounds than any the doctors have prescribed. It was the cup of hope, fair Agnes; but it were well that, as soon as he can bear a horse's pace, he should set out for England without delay of any kind. Once more, farewell!"

Agnes put the key in the lock and threw the door open for the prince and his old companion to pass; and then saying, "God speed your Majesty!" saw the King depart from the dwelling of his ancestors for the last time.

With slow and thoughtful steps, and eyes that more than once filled with tears, the fair girl trod her way back towards the castle. She took not, however, the same course which Oberntraut had followed when he led Frederic up some hours before; but, turning to the right at the top of the ascent, where a long gallery ran for some way round the side of the hill, she came to a door which led forth into the open air within the gate, near the great battery which connected the defences of the castle with the old town wall long since destroyed. The exit was into a narrow passage between the armoury and the tennis-court; and there she found Colonel Herbert pacing slowly up and down, awaiting her coming.

"I have been up to see Algernon, my love!" he said, "and the poor youth seems much better this evening. He asked if you would not come again to-night, Agnes: so I promised for you, and left your girl to wait at the foot of the stairs. Would to Heaven that he would get well quickly! for every report of the enemy's movements makes me tremble till there is some one to protect you in case I should be taken away."

The colour mounted into Agnes's cheek; for these were the first words that Herbert had ever uttered having a reference to the probability of a union between Algernon Grey and herself.

"I am sure he would protect me," she said, with a little of that timid hypocrisy which women ever practise even to their own hearts; but the next moment she added more frankly, "the King has just told me that it will be absolutely necessary for Algernon, as soon as he can travel, to go to England for a time."

"That is unfortunate indeed," said Herbert, thoughtfully; "but what does the King know of his affairs?"

"Nay, I cannot tell," replied Agnes timidly. "His Majesty gave him happy news this evening, it would seem, and that has doubtless done him good. It is also very likely that he should have heard from his ambassadors in England, much that has not reached us here."

"True," replied Herbert, "a man of his rank is ever food for busy tongues. But there is one thing, my child, which must not be long delayed. He must know all respecting her whom he has chosen."

"Oh, hush!" cried Agnes, in much agitation, "I know not that he has chosen me—I cannot tell that—"

"Then he has not yet asked your hand?" said Herbert quickly.

"No," replied Agnes, and was pausing there with some anxiety respecting the effect of this information upon Herbert, when she suddenly remembered a chance expression of Algernon Grey's the very day before he had been so sadly wounded; and she added, "I know that he loves me—that he did not conceal; but he said that he would speak with you as soon as we arrived—tell all—explain all."

Herbert mused for a moment: "That was right," he said at length, "that was quite right; and I can easily conceive, Agnes, that the hours of sickness and despondency have not been those he would choose to execute his purpose. Still, let the explanations first come from you, my love. It were quite as well that, ere he says one word more, he should know fully what he is doing. I do not doubt him, Agnes—do you?"

"Less than I should doubt myself," answered Agnes, warmly. "I will do as you tell me; I would have done so before, but I had not your permission; yet, surely, it cannot be done, while he is still so ill."

"Oh, no," answered Herbert; "there is time enough. Let health come back, at least in some degree; and then, the first time that he goes forth to walk in the gardens here, let him hear the tale. It is pleasant in the sunshine and the free air, beneath green trees and amidst sweet flowers, to tell such a story of times gone. The mind pauses on it untrammelled with the worldly thoughts of crowded cities; the heart opens to it unoppressed by the heavy air of the close room. In the presence of heaven and of God's works, the pure, high feelings which nature gave at first, but which hang their heads like sickly city-flowers amongst the multitude, raise themselves up refreshed; and we understand and sympathize with the sorrows and the hopes of others, and feel the link of kindred between ourselves and all mankind. Take some such moment, my sweet child; it is but fair to him and yourself."

Thus saying, he led her on to the castle, and to the foot of the stairs which led to Algernon Grey's room. Her maid was waiting for her; and, thus accompanied, she went up, and was well repaid by seeing the brighter and more cheerful look, which, to her eyes, was full of the anguries of returning health. Nor was she mistaken, for, every day from that hour forward, Algernon Grey gained ground against disease. His wounds healed rapidly. The languor and the feebleness they had left behind passed away, and at the end of little more than a week he was able to rise and sit by the open window, and listen to Agnes as she sung. Spring advanced, too, early and radiant; and several causes of disquietude were removed from the inhabitants of the castle. News came, not only that Frederic had recrossed the Rhine in safety and joined his army on the other side, but that, aided by his bold friend, Count Mansfeld, he had defeated the Imperial army, and forced Tilly himself to retreat. No speedy attack of Heidelberg was, consequently, to be expected; and Herbert employed the time of respite thus afforded in strengthening still further the defences of the place.

It need not be said that the heart of Agnes Herbert grew lighter and more cheerful hour by hour. How soon it is in youth that we forget the storms and tempests that pass over us! The drops are scarcely dry upon the grass ere the sunshine seems to us more bright; the distant sky more clear than ever; and thus it was with Agnes Herbert—ay, and with her lover also, though he had a wider knowledge of the world. The dark events which had taken place in Bohemia, if not forgotten, were remembered as present joy, only more sparkling; and, when Agnes walked forth one day through the gardens above the shining Neckar, with Algernon once more by her side, it seemed to her the brightest hour of existence; and she could scarcely bring her heart to fear that the coming time might present days as dark as those that had been passed. On they went for more than an hour, walking slowly, for his strength had not fully returned; but their conversation was like a gay mountain-stream, bounding the brilliant leaps from one point to another. They sat down to rest; they rose up and walked on again; and they might have rambled far and long, had not a quick step behind them caused Agnes suddenly to turn round.

The person who followed was her lover's page, with eager haste in his look; and, the moment he came up, he held out a letter to his master, exclaiming, "A messenger from your uncle, my lord, has brought this post-haste from England."

Algernon Grey took it calmly, opened the packet and read. But Agnes could see his countenance change; his brow contracted—his lip quivered—his cheek grew red.

"This is bad news, yet good, my Agnes," he said. "To tell the bad first, I must away to England without an hour's delay; but, as some consolation, I learn that all those difficulties and impediments which seemed raised up like a barrier between me and happiness are now giving way, and, ere a month be over, must certainly fall to the ground."

"To England, without an hour's delay!" cried Agnes. "Oh, you cannot go! You are unfit for such a journey."

"Nay, not so," replied her lover. "To Manheim will be the worst part of the affair. Then dropping down the Rhine in a light boat would but refresh me, were it not that I part from you, my Agnes; but the joyful thought of my return must cheer me; and, though the hours will be

long, they will not be many, ere I return to claim this hand, not promised, yet mine, I know."

"Oh, the dread uncertainty of the future!" said Agnes, with a deep sigh and eyes full of tears. "Had any one told me, Algernon, but a few brief months ago, when I first met you here, and wandered through these gardens with you, that I should have seen such sights, and witnessed such disasters, should I have believed it?—should I have believed even that I myself should be so changed in thoughts, in feelings, almost in spirit, I may say? And what may not the coming months, too, bring? I thought it was bitter enough, when I parted at Prague from those I loved dearly, from those connected with me by the ties of kindred, with a strange, uncertain fate before both them and me; but what will it be now, to part with you!"

"Let us not cloud the moment, dearest Agnes," said Algernon Grey, "which in itself is a sad one, with gloomy anticipations. I go, I acknowledge, full of hope; for the thought of being freed from a detested bond, which bars my union with her I love, is too joyful not to lighten even the pangs of parting. But you say, my Agnes, that at Prague you left those connected with you by the ties of kindred; I knew not that you had kindred there."

Agnes shook her head sadly and thoughtfully; for the tone of the mind contrives to extract from every event reflections of the same hue with itself. "It shows how little we can count even on an hour," she said. "I had thought to-day to tell you, amidst these fair scenes, a melancholy tale of days long gone—to dwell upon it, and to let you hear each incident, without which a story such as this is but a lifeless sort of stick, like a vine stripped of its leaves in the winter season. But now, as we go back, I must do it drily and briefly. My mother was the Abbess of a noble convent in France, of the high family of Latour d'Auverne, and, consequently, by the father's side second cousin, and by the mother's cousin-german to the Electress Dowager, Louisa Juliana. In the course of the war, an English gentleman, of high family but small fortune, was wounded severely whilst serving under Henry the Fourth of France, was brought to the small town of Mousson, where the Abbey stood, and was tended kindly by the good sisters. The greater part of the family of Latour are zealous Protestants, as you know; but this branch has always been vehemently Catholic; and the young Abbess had been brought up in that faith. You know the degree of liberty that nuns of high rank have in France; so that the vows they take form very little restraint upon their intercourse with the world. The Abbess saw my father often; acquaintance, with kind care on the one side and gratitude on the other, soon changed into friendship and to love. My mother was frightened at first at her feelings; and when my father first ventured to speak his affection, fled from him in terror and in anger. But they met again, and then he found means to shake her trust in the dogmas of the Church to which she had hitherto belonged. He brought her into communication with a Protestant minister. The Bible in its simple purity was laid before her. Her eyes were opened, and she renounced the superstitious faith! She dared not do so openly, however; for she was surrounded by powerful and unscrupulous relations, who would have hesitated at no means to punish, where they could not restrain; and she was wedded in secret to my father, till the opportunity served for removing her to a Protestant land. It soon became necessary that she should quit the convent, however; and they removed to a small solitary place in the Vosges, where I was born. Various events detained them between four and five years, living concealed in profound retirement; but they were sought for everywhere; and my father found, at length, that it would be necessary to fly, for that a cew had been obtained to their retreat, and pursuit was coming near. They, consequently, set off for the Rhine on an autumn evening, my father and mother in a carriage, with a few servants on horseback, and my father's horse led behind. Their movements, however, had been watched. In passing through a wood the carriage was fired upon, and my mother and one of the men wounded.* She said, at first, that the injury was but slight; and my father, springing out, mounted his horse, and attacked the assassins. They were speedily put to flight; and one of them was killed, by my father's own hand. When they came to examine, they found that it was my mother's own nephew who had fallen—but that she never knew; and, pursuing their journey rapidly, they reached the Palatinate, where, at the town of Franckenthal, the wound my mother had received was first dressed. It was then seen to be much more serious than had been supposed. She lingered a week, and then expired in my father's arms!"

Agnes paused; and Algernon Grey demanded eagerly, "But what became of your father?"

"He hastened hither," continued Agnes, "told his tale to the Electress, who had already been made aware of part, and eagerly besought her countenance and protection for myself. She promised she would be to me as a mother; and she has been so, as you know, Algernon. But my mother's brother, a stern and cruel man, was in high favour with the Queen of France; and, as soon as it was known my father had found refuge here, the Elector was required to give him up to answer for my cousin's death. Could a fair trial have been expected, he would have surrendered; but it was known that such was not to be obtained, and he was obliged to fly. He served for several years in distant lands; and when it was supposed that men's passions had become more calm, he returned to be near his child. You have often seen him—know him well, Algernon. But Duke John of Zweibrücken, who was guardian to the Elector Frederic at the time of his return, insisted that some concealment was still necessary; and my father, assuming the character of his brother, who had died the year before, has passed ever since for my uncle, in order not to give offence to the court of France."

"I had some suspicion," said Algernon Grey, "for there has been a tenderness, dear Agnes, in his manner towards you, that naught but the yearnings of paternal love could give. And now, dearest Agnes, we are coming near the

* This is fact, not romance.

castle. I, too, ought to open my whole heart to your father. I fear, however, there is not time; for, when we came away, he said he was going down to strengthen the defences by the bridge. Send down to him, however, dear girl, and ask him to return. I will wait till the last moment, in order to see him; but I ought to reach Mannheim before it is dark."

The messenger, however, could not find Colonel Herbert. Two hours passed by without his coming; and, having waited with his men mounted in the court till not more than half an hour of daylight remained, Algernon Grey tore himself away and rode on towards Mannheim.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In all ages of which we have record, England has been unlike any other country in the world; nor has it been alone in the character of the people, their political institutions, and their religious feelings, that it has differed from all others; but the very aspect of the land has been totally apart, shadowing forth in its very look the mind of the people. We see forests and mountains, rocks, rivers, and cataracts, wide fields and waving corn, in other countries; but where else would you see a green bowery lane like that, canopied with boughs and tapestried with flowers, down which those two figures are now walking slowly on? It is England all over—sweet, peaceful, pleasant-looking England. Though the age is remote from that in which we live; though the costume both of the man and woman is very different from our own; though the plumed hat, and the hanging cloak, and the slashed sleeve, might lead one to suppose one's self amongst Spaniards; yet look at the trees with the ivy creeping up them, the yellow banks, the small fields, the trim hedgerows, and not a doubt remains that the scene is English.

But we must just listen to their conversation, too; and that, alas! is very un-English. We must remember, however, that the age was one when a number of events had tended to corrupt society generally, and the court in particular; when the tone of the human mind, both in Britain and in France, had become debased by the conduct and example of the highest personages in the realm; when the monarch on the throne of England at least presented to his people the pattern of all that is despicable, low, and vicious in a man, all that is hateful and contemptible in a monarch; a tyrant without energy or courage; a debauchee without fire or passion; a tricky politician, without perspicuity or judgment; vain of his religion, yet wavering in his doctrines, irreligious in his conduct, and blasphemous in his discourse; proud of his cunning, yet always deceived and frustrated; assuming the tone of command, yet led like an infant or a fool; governed by others, though a despot himself; and only perfect in grossness, selfishness, and treachery. With such a sovereign; with minions imitating and despising him; with a court hungry of gold and avaricious of vice; with the scaffold and the prison offered as rewards for virtue, energy, and genius: can we be surprised that the poison spread, more or less, through all classes; and that the nobles, brought more immediately within the pestilential atmosphere of the court, were peculiarly affected by the moral malady of the time? Can we wonder that every kind of wickedness which the perverse heart of man can conceive or generate was rife; that corruption of all kinds was too common to excite attention; that brawls and murders were heard of every day; and that the enemy or the rival, whom the knife could not reach, found death in the platter or cup? Can we wonder that such conversations as the following were heard by the ears of the air every day?

"He must be disposed of," said the gentleman, speaking to a lady of extraordinary beauty who walked by his side; "he must be disposed of, that is very clear."

"Ay, but how is it to be done?" asked the lady. "It is very well for you to counsel me, but give me no help."

"Nay, sweetest Kate," replied her companion, "I am willing to give you every help in the world; but I have heard that, during my long and tedious absence from your fair side, you did not fail to console yourself by reasonable tenderness for this same object of your present hate."

"And do you believe such tales?" she exclaimed, turning her flashing eyes upon him. "You do not, William, you do not! I am the creature of your hands; you have made me what I am. From infancy till now you have tutored and led, guided, commanded me—no, not commanded, but at least directed; and you should know—"

"For that very reason I do know," he replied, "that it is the most natural and likely thing in the world, dear Kate, that you should seek a little consolation for a lover's absence. I say no more, I imply no more; for I know that, if real love were in the case, the bold, brave spirit in your heart, guided and directed as you say it has been by me, would even to myself avow the fact, and daringly set all my rage and jealousy at naught. Is it not so, sweet Kate?"

"Ay," she answered with a smile, "even so."

"Well then," he continued, "as you see I understand you fully, and neither suspect nor doubt, but only think that in a vacant hour, dull, and for mere idleness, you have trifled with a growing passion in this great lord, till it has risen into a flame which has somewhat scorched the fingers of the kindler—I say it must be by some means drowned out. The only question is how, and that we must consider. But in order to judge of the best means, I must know fully the provocation he has given, my fair love. Nay, knit not your fair brows, dear Kate, with such a puzzled look: I will help you to explanations."

"You cannot," she said; "there can be no explanations, William Ifford. It suffices to me, and should suffice to you, that he has offended and insulted me—her whom you say you love."

"And do love," answered he whom we have hitherto seen under the name of Lovet, "ay, better far than all the thousand I have loved and been loved by before. But yet it matters much, my Kate; for, if the injury and the in-

sult, as from something you let drop a day or two ago I do suspect, touches me in the slightest possible degree, my course is very plain, and I will cut his throat ere the moon be an inch broader. But if it refer to you alone, it might be dangerous to take the step of the duello on such a topic, as giving point to certain rumours of our close friendship which would mar all our plans."

The lady looked down, bending her large, dark, haughty eyes sternly upon the ground; but she murmured in a low tone, "He treated me as he might treat a common harlot; and when I mortified his vanity by cold repulse, he spoke of you, called you my paramour, vowed he could prove the facts and make my shame public to all the world. Now, though I would break, by any means—at any risk, that idle tie to your cold hypocritical cousin Hillingdon, yet I would fain do so without having the finger of every smooth, well-concealed, mock-virtuous woman of the court pointed at me in scorn. He said he could prove it, I tell you. You start, William, and turn pale: that is not as if your blood fired up like mine."

"My blood has something else to do, bright Kate," answered her cousin. "Why I started was, because your tale awakens a strange doubt in my mind. There was safe in my house, when I left England, a little agate casket with a secret lock, which kept good guard over your dear, long-preserved letters. Here is the key hanging ever round my neck; but yesterday when I sought for that casket, I could not find it; and, thinking that it had been mislaid, I left the search, trusting to meet with it another day. Can any one have stolen those letters?—At all events that man must not live much longer; but, my dear Kate, it will not do to fight on such a cause of quarrel. Nay, moreover, if I seek occasion against him, he will judge rightly of the cause, and spread his tale of scandal to the world,—perhaps produce his proofs, if he really have any. We must employ quieter means, wear a smooth face towards him, and, as we do with a wild beast that we fear, lure him into a trap well prepared beforehand. How did you part, in enmity or calmly?"

The lady had turned very pale as he spoke of the loss of the casket; and some time passed ere she answered his question. He repeated it, however, in a quiet, tender tone; and, looking up, she said, "He cowed me—rage sank beneath fear, and I smoothed my brow—nay, even smiled and laughed, in order to gain time, till I could speak with you. But you were long ere you arrived, and now it is too late to perfect any plans. He comes to-morrow evening, and has promised to bring the proofs he spoke of with him."

"Not too late, not too late," answered her companion. "I will speed home like lightning, search for these letters, be with you again to-morrow early; and then, if you have courage and resolution, we will find means to rid us of one whom we cannot deal with openly. I will have all prepared if you will but second me. Where will my lord, your uncle, be to-morrow?"

"A hundred miles hence and more," replied the lady. "He and my good aunt, do not return for two days to come."

"Then all will go easily," rejoined the other. "The man must die—he must not reach Royston alive."

"But blood is soon traced," she said, in a tone of hesitation.

"We will have no blood," replied her lover, with a smile: "men die occasionally of very rapid diseases. I will plan it all—you must execute."

"But how shall we get the papers from him," asked the lady, "without—"

"That must be cared for," answered Lovet. You must be tender, my fair Kate, till you have got him to produce his proofs; give him fair hopes, and lead him on. He will sup here, of course; and after supper, when he has trifled with somewhat dangerous viands, bid him show the weighty evidence he spoke of. When they are all spread forth, I will come in, to your surprise and his, and take my own again. Then, if he be inclined to quarrel, one hasty thrust, given ere any one has time to hear his tale, will settle all, and I shall pass blameless for despatching one whom I found insulting my sweet cousin. It will be a claim, too, on her love—a fair motive in the world's eyes for her (in gratitude, to give me her soft hand."

The lady smiled with a meaning look. There was no surprise; there was no horror; there seemed hardly to be any fear. Had her mind been conversant with such ideas before? Who can tell? Such deeds were assuredly common in those days, and at all events, they were commonly reported. The rumour of crimes always generate fresh ones of the same character. There is an infection in the very sound of such deeds, and the mind that hears it often catches the moral pestilence and dies. As she thought—and for some moments she did not reply—a look of triumph rose in her glittering eyes. "Ay!" she repeated, "ay! he shall rue it. Yes, he shall rue it! William, you are right. It would not do to raise a clamour about the man's death, by taking your usual mode of settling such affairs; but against one thing you must guard right carefully, that his death be not traceable to us—unless, indeed, it be in a hasty brawl, where weapons are soon out, and execution done ere men have time to think. I mean, if he quits my house alive, they must not be able to show that it was in the cup, or in the food which he there partook that he found death."

"I will take care," said her cousin, significantly; "but you must be both ready and resolute, my sweet Kate—no doubt—no hesitation—no weak remorse."

"I have none!" replied the lady, lifting her hand boldly; "we kill a wolf or a tiger, a snake or a shark. It is the first principle of nature and of right to destroy that which would destroy us. His death is needful to my life. He dies, or I die. Nay, more; I feel the hunter's spirit within me, and, life for life, I would rather die myself with him, than not to see him die."

"His offence must have been very bitter," answered her cousin; "though it was very needful to our happiness that Hillingdon should be out of our way, you never thought of using such means with him."

"I may have thought of it," answered the lady musing; "but I would not have done it

William. In moments of eager impatience, I may have wished him dead—nay, have said so, I think, to you; but yet I would have practised naught against his life. Hillingdon never offended me. He loved me not; but, as I loved him not, that was no offence. His tone was courteous, too, when he did write to me or to my uncle. Plainly and boldly he said he wished the contract dissolved; but I wished it too, and therefore, it was a kindness, not an injury. His very absence, that he might never see me, had—as he turned it, and I believe as he felt it—a certain courtesy. Nay, Hillingdon, though cold and stiff, and opposite in almost everything to my nature and my wishes, is still a high and noble-minded man, a gentleman in heart and spirit."

Her companion bit his lip, for he loved not to hear his cousin's praises from that lady's tongue. He was silent, however, and she proceeded: "But this man has, indeed, offended me bitterly, as you say. Encouraged by a light smile, and perhaps some idle freedom—I will not deny it—he thought I had become his slave, assumed the air of triumph, boasted, I doubt not, of his conquest amongst drunken comrades, and thought mine was a heart that would bear the insolent tone, the rude assumption of success, the air and words of conquest. Fool! I taught him better; and then he threatened to turn my bold contempt to burning shame—he did more than threaten, William. He it is, and he alone, who has staid the dissolution of my infant marriage with Hillingdon. The judges were all agreed—the king himself was won, when this man stepped in. The minion persuaded the king, by his cringing arts, to pause. Nay, look not doubtful! He told me so himself; with scornful triumph vowed my fate was in his hands; and said, if I had not treated him so disdainfully, I should have been now as free as air. Do not the facts bear out the assertion? All that was required by any one was Hillingdon's oath in open court, that he had never seen me since I was ten years old. He came and gave it. Then, suddenly, the king paused and prevaricated, and Algernon returned disgusted and despairing. Have I not cause to say this man is a viper in my way? Have I not a right to set my heel upon his head?"

"Assuredly!" replied William Ifford; "and the sooner the better, my sweet Kate. I see that your mind is made up, and your courage equal to the task. He sups here; he will dine at Hertford, at the inn there. I will take care—though the deed cannot be done there on account of the many eyes upon us—that some circumstance of suspicion shall occur at Hertford, to direct the doubts of men afterwards away from your house. I have a powder brought from Italy, which I have heard has been most serviceable in the great house of Medici. May it prove as useful to us! And now farewell, my Kate. I will not go up to the mansion with you, as I must return to-morrow morning. Do not pause and ponder on our plans, lest your resolution fail."

"No fear!" she answered, with a calm look; "my courage is firmer than you think, William. Adieu!"

Sir William Ifford left her, and walked back to a village about half a mile distant, where he had left his horse. At first he went quick, as if in haste; but after he had turned out of the lane his pace became slower, and he meditated, murmuring a part of his thoughts as he proceeded. "A dangerous housekeeper!" he said; "and yet a glorious creature—not the most faithful in her loves, I fear—yet how can I blame her? I have not been right faithful myself—and she was alone. We will both do better when we are wedded. There must be more in this affair than she thinks fit to own—she could not hate so strongly had she not somewhat loved. Well, when he is dead that will be wiped out; her own hand will avenge both herself and me. Yet it is hardly politic to teach her tricks which she may practise hereafter on myself. I am a bold man to link myself to one so well tutored; but for such a woman, and for such a fortune, who would not be bold! All that will be needed is care for the future, and a sure antidote in my doublet pocket."

Full of such reflections he reached the village, and, mounting his horse, rode on to a house which, with the small estate around it, had descended to him from his mother. His patrimonial property had been long spent, and even this was not unencumbered. Springing to the ground, he mounted the six steps which led up into an arched porch, covered with ivy, opened the door, and went in. A servant was called, and ordered to bring a fresh horse, and then William Ifford paused a moment in the hall, bending his eyes upon the marble pavement in deep meditation. It seemed of a very gloomy character too. Perhaps it was remorse that moved him; for the heart, however sunk in vice and crime, shrinks from the touch of a new crime. Rarely does it happen, that it is so corrupted that there is not some sound spot left somewhere; and so long as there is, that part will tremble at the first touch of the corroding hand which has destroyed all the rest. His brow became very cloudy, and gathered thick over his deep, keen eye; his lip quivered; and the fingers of the hand, which had fallen by his side, were seen to move slowly together till they were clenched firmly in the palm. The light, the scoffing, and the scornful will have their moments of thought, of doubt, and of depression, as the vicious of regret. There comes upon us all, against our will, we know not how, we know not whence, a shadow, as from the gloomy, inevitable rock before us, clouding the sparkling sunshine in which we sported, rendering the gay dreams gloomy, and the clear future obscure. It is the time to ask ourselves, whither that path tends, where those sports may end. But still the counteracting power of evil, waging his eternal war against all good, suggests some reason, presents some excuse for following the impulse of the wilful heart along the course of error; till at length when all warnings have been given, and every opportunity neglected, the toils of our own acts close round us; and, in the inextricable net which we ourselves have aided to weave, we struggle in vain; till death takes us forth, and an unknown state begins.

Slowly and even sadly Sir William Ifford raised his eyes and cast a melancholy glance around the dim old hall. There was an air of desolation and neglect about it, very different

from the gay and splendid scenes in which he was accustomed and loved to move. The look of poverty was stamped upon it; and in an instant flashed before his eyes the images of a long future of care and penury, and forced self-denial and niggardly restraint. "It must be," he cried, "it must be done;" and hurrying to an old oaken cabinet, which he opened with one of the keys he wore about him, took out an extremely minute vial filled with some white substance, and gazed at it attentively for an instant; then, placing it in his pocket, he entered his bed-chamber, and drew forth from a large chest a masker's beard, nearly white, and several separate locks of silver hair. With these, put safely up, he rode away towards the town of Hertford, which he reached shortly after nightfall; but, before he entered the street, he fastened the false locks to the lining of his hat, and brought them over his forehead and his neck. The beard completed a disguise sufficiently close to prevent any eyes, but such as knew him very well, from recognising him; and then, entering the town, he dismounted at a small public house, and walked on foot towards the principal inn in the great street. About half an hour after, he might be seen speaking in the court-yard to a man in a white night-cap and apron. Their conversation seemed merry, too; for few even knew better how to assume familiar courtesies towards the lower classes, when he liked it, than William Ifford.

"You foolish dog," he cried at length; "will you lose a good gold piece just for your vanity in your art? I tell you it is for a bet with him. I vowed I would make him eat bitter pottage ere a week were over; and I ask you not to do aught that can hurt him. There's many an innocent herb, and salutary too, that tastes like soot in the mouth. Take your choice of them, and stuff his pottage and the first two dishes full of it. Go out into the garden and get some bitter endive, or any other purifier of the blood. So you will be sure that no harm can come of it. I must have it done, however; and here is a gold piece for your pains."

The man seemed still to hesitate; but William Ifford doubled the offered bribe, and the cook's virtue could not resist the temptation.

"Keep your own counsel," said the gentleman, as he left him, "and all is safe. I shall laugh heartily to-morrow night, when I hear him curse the bitter that he had at Hertford."

Thus saying, he turned away, mounted his horse again and rode back. On the following morning early he was once more by the Lady Catherine's side; and for two long hours they talked eagerly with meaning looks, but in low tones, as if they feared to be overheard, although they well knew that no ear was near to hear them. But there is a consciousness in crime of an ever open eye, an ear that is never closed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Yes, sir, yes," said the King of England, lolling upon his left leg, and sticking out his right hip, as if he had dislocated the joint, at the same time thrusting one hand into the wide open pocket of his black velvet hose, "yes, sir, ye had better gang your way back. As ye've staid awa sae lang, I think ye may stay awa a while mair. We'll just conseeder o' the matter—haud your tongue, Steenie; nane o' yer clavers; I've said the word!"

The Duke of Buckingham, who had stepped forward, as if to speak, drew back again with a very significant and uncourtier-like look of disgust and impatience; but Buckingham by this time rested the ladder of ambition rather upon the favour of the Prince than the King, and feared not every now and then to express his dissent somewhat boldly from the Monarch's views.

James's words were addressed to Algernon, Earl of Hillingdon, who stood before him in the midst of a circle of courtiers and flatterers somewhat surprised at the cold, callous, determined manner of the young peer.

The Monarch ended his sentence; but then, seeing that the young lord did not withdraw, he added somewhat sharply: "God's life, man! you shall know our pleasure when it is time."

"I hope your Majesty's pleasure may be to do me justice," answered Algernon Grey; "but, by your gracious permission, I must add a few words before I go. Famous lawyers, bearing high offices in your royal court, have pronounced this marriage null by reason of the age of the contracting parties. Ecclesiastical judges, appointed by yourself, have come to the same conclusion. Your Majesty hesitates, from some scruples, to suffer the sentence to be pronounced; but let me add, that I must by some means soon learn whether this contract, entered into in my infancy, is a marriage or not. If not, I have naught to say; for all parties are free. But if the law pronounces it a marriage, I must without loss of time move my peers for a divorce on account of the lady's adultery with a person high in your royal favour."

"Hout, tout," cried the King, with his sallow face flushing, and his thick lips quivering, while his large tongue rolled round and round in his mouth, as if he had a plum, or some other extraneous substance therein; "By ——, you shall have neither one nor the other. What! are we not oursels the supreme head both of the church and the law, God's vicegerent in this puir kingdom of England! Awa wi' ye, sir; and let me hear nae mair. Tak the man awa;" and with a blasphemous oath he added: "ye'll drive me daft."

Prince Charles advanced to his father's side and tried to calm him; while the Duke of Buckingham took the Earl's arm and led him gently from the King's presence.

"Go, Hillingdon, go," he said; "and do not enrage him more. We will do the best for you. You have said too much already, my lord."

"Not more than was needful to say, Duke," replied Algernon Grey, somewhat sharply; but then, feeling that irritation had made him ungracious towards a man who had exerted himself strenuously in his behalf, he took Buckingham's hand, adding, "Pardon me, your Grace, I thank you a thousand times for all that you have done; but it moves me, I do confess, to see a pitiful, unworthy, ungentlemanly upstart, like this Lord ——, have power to pervert the course of justice, and impede the operation

of the law. This is a bitter disappointment to me altogether; and your Grace must pardon something in a man so circumstanced."

"I do, I do," answered Buckingham; "and I counselled you but for your own advantage. Leave the kingdom as soon as may be, and trust to me and his Royal Highness." He paused an instant; and then, laying his hand on Algernon's arm, he added, with a proud and significant air, "This man is my enemy as well as yours! Is not that sufficient?"

"Methinks, it ought to be," answered Algernon Grey; "but in this strange world, where merit and unworthiness, wisdom and folly, seem to succeed alternately, as if upon the chances of the dice, one may be permitted always to doubt what will come next. However, I will follow your Grace's advice; and, repeating my thanks, withdraw."

"The sooner the better," answered Buckingham; "for the Tower is near at hand; and your best friends might find it difficult to keep you out, if the King be wilful; or to get you out, if once in."

Thus saying, he turned away; and Algernon Grey retired from the palace, and proceeded to his house on the bank of the river, in what is, and was then called the Strand.

"Pack up everything for instant departure, Tony," he said, speaking to his old servant, who opened the door in his bed-room for him. "Let the barge be ready in half an hour, and call a wherry up to the stairs at the end of the garden. See that all the men be warned that they will have to embark to-night on board the 'Mary Anne,' for Rotterdam."

The good man looked in his lord's face, and for a moment was inclined to ask,—"Has all been settled to your satisfaction?" but the expression of Algernon's countenance was answer sufficient; and, without a word, he retired to make the arrangements required. It is strange, the influence of the character of a master upon servants and dependants. There be some men, who, without any effort to conciliate or win regard, seem to command it; and their joys or sorrows diffuse themselves around, as it were in eddies, to the utmost limit of those who know them. A few words from the old servant, as he communicated his lord's commands to the rest of the household, spread gloom over the whole; and the attendants went about their preparations with a sad and sorrowful air, as if each had received some personal disappointment. At the end of half an hour, Algernon Grey issued forth from his chamber with several written papers in his hand. They were merely orders, which he was more inclined to write than to speak. The greater part of the attendants were to accompany him to Germany; but were to wait where they were an hour or two for the return of his barge, which was now ready to convey him, with six or seven whom he had selected, to a vessel about to sail for the mouth of the Rhine. The rest were to remain in London till they heard farther. Some stores of arms, not yet ready, were to be sent after him to Germany in another vessel. Especial care was ordered to be taken of his tenantry, and of two or three old pensioners of the family; and, according to a laudable custom of that time, which the law of Elizabeth had not altogether abrogated, a certain sum was to be distributed in weekly alms to any deserving poor.

Several of his principal servants delayed his departure for a short time by asking directions in various matters which he had not remembered; but ere an hour and a half had passed after he had quitted the palace, he was floating on the broad bosom of the Thames; and, in about half an hour after, had embarked for Rotterdam. His followers showed zealous punctuality in joining him without delay. Baggage and arms were embarked safely; and, with the first tide that night, the ship dropped down the river. The passage could hardly be called fair, for it blew a gale from river-mouth to river-mouth; but the wind was favourable, and speed was all he cared for.

Often he asked himself, however, why he should so eagerly press forward; what but pain and grief lay before him; what had he to communicate to her he best loved, but doubt, uncertainty, and disappointment! and yet the thought of seeing her again, of holding her hand in his—of gazing into those beautiful, unspeakable eyes—of reading their love, and hope, and confidence—of gaining new trust for the future from her very look, drew him onward, and formed at least one bright spot in the future, which all the cares and sorrows that surrounded him had no power to cloud. Then, again, at times, he would revolve all that had taken place in England since he had again visited his native land, and he would ask himself, with doubt, whether all had been fair in the conduct of those who professed themselves his friends, and pretended to support his cause. Whether Buckingham was sincere,—whether Prince Charles himself had not been deceiving him? and then he would accuse himself of mean suspicions, and try to cast them from his mind. There was one point, indeed, on which the more he thought, the more he doubted. Had the Lady Catherine's family, though affecting to urge the nullification of the marriage, really exerted themselves to the utmost. They were powerful; in high favour at court, and yet he could not but remember that the contract between the lady and himself, while both were mere children, had been first proposed by the very uncle with whom she now lived,—a man not very pure in morals, and ambitious in character. Ere he reached the shores of Holland he resolved to take one step more, to write to the Lady Catherine herself, and telling her he had done all he could to set her free from an engagement she detested, leave her to move her own relations to exert themselves more strenuously than before. He would trust the letter, he thought, to his old servant and the page,—the one having many friends in the household to which he was sent, from whom he was sure to learn much of the past; the other being of a character almost too remarking, who would form a very sure notion of the disposition of all parties present. He gave them no orders, indeed, to inquire or to observe, but simply sent them back to England with the letter, as soon as his foot touched shore, desiring them to obtain an answer, and hasten to join him at Heidelberg.

The voyage up the Rhine, in those days, was slow and difficult; but for some way the strife

that was then actually going on in the Low Countries deterred him from landing; and it was only when he reached the first state of the Protestant Union that he disembarked with his followers, and took his way forward on horseback. Many difficulties and impediments delayed him on the road; and rumours continually reached him of the movements of contending armies in the Palatinate, some true, and many false. He gathered, however, from all accounts, that the temporary prosperity which had visited the arms of the King of Bohemia had by this time passed away; that Mansfeld had retreated into Alsace; that the Prince of Orange had been recalled to Holland; that greater discord than ever reigned among the united princes, and that Horace Vere and his troops, nearly confined to the town of Mannheim and its immediate neighbourhood, could effect little or nothing against a superior force led by one of the first generals of the age. Tilly, with the united Bavarian, Austrian, and Spanish armies, ranged and ravaged the Palatinate without check. Frankenthal, indeed, resisted still; but there was no power in the open field to protect the villages from oppression, or to maintain the smaller towns against the invader. Every report he received was more or less gloomy; and by some it was stated that Heidelberg itself was menaced; while others represented that the city was already invested.

All these accounts but served to make the young Englishman press more eagerly forward. The men, as well as their horses, were wearied with the rapid advance; but they did not complain, for they all comprehended the feelings in their lord's bosom, and there was sufficient of chivalry even in the lower classes of that day, to make them think it would be hard that he should be kept from the lady whom he loved simply because they were tired. Thus, on the ninth day after they had reached Rotterdam, they entered the dominions of the Elector Palatine; and after a weary march through the plains of the Rhine, with no intelligence but vague rumours amongst the peasantry, they reached, towards nightfall, a large village about eight miles from Mannheim, and somewhat more from Heidelberg. During the last day's journey, sad traces of the ravages of war had been apparent at every step. Villages burnt, houses and churches in ruins, and here and there a dead body lying unburied within a few yards of the road, had marked the devastating course; but the village that they now approached seemed to have escaped better than most of those they had met with; and a barricade drawn across the end of the little street showed that it had been prepared for defence by one or other of the contending parties. A number of the peasantry, armed with heavy arquebusses, presented themselves to the eyes of Algernon Grey just within the barricade; and a loud call to halt and keep off was almost instantly followed by two or three unceremonious shots, which, luckily, did not take effect. Bidding his men retire a little, the young Englishman rode on alone, and was suffered to approach the barrier; but, though he spoke to the peasants in German, begging shelter and repose for at least a few hours, his foreign accent created suspicion; and, with a sagacious shake of the head, the leader of the peasantry told him that they knew better.

"Well, my brave man," answered Algernon Grey, "you seem to be frightened by a very small number; I have not thirty men with me in all; and, if I were an enemy, it would be much more dangerous for me to trust myself within your place than for you to let me in; however, if I must ride on to Heidelberg with weary men and horses, it cannot be helped; but you are not serving your Prince, I can tell you; for I am one of the King's officers, and was with him in Prague."

"Heidelberg!" said the peasant; "I doubt that you will get in. Whom do you want in Heidelberg?"

"Either Colonel Herbert or the Baron of Oberntraut," answered the young Englishman.

"The Baron of Oberntraut!" said the good man, eyeing the other from head to foot; "you may find him without going to Heidelberg; perhaps sooner than you like, if you be what I think."

"Whatever you may think," answered Algernon Grey, "I cannot find him sooner than I should like."

"Well, then, I will send for some one to show you where he is," replied the peasant. "It is not far; and he has two hundred good Reiters with him." Thus saying, he turned to the people who surrounded him, and whispered a word to a light, active lad. The latter instantly laid down his arquebuss and ran full speed up the village.

"The Baron is in the place, my good friend," said Algernon Grey at once. "I understand it all; so you can have no objection to open your barrier and let me in alone to speak with him."

But the worthy peasant was a very cautious man, and he would not venture even upon so safe a step till, in about five minutes, Oberntraut himself was seen coming down the street on foot; the next moment Algernon's hand was grasped within his. The men were brought into the village and obtained some scanty refreshment; and in the mean time, while night fell rapidly, the two gentlemen walked up and down before the church in eager conversation. Algernon Grey now learned that Tilly, reinforced by a large detachment from the army of the Archduke, had been for the last three days drawing nearer and nearer to Heidelberg, evidently with the intention of besieging that city.

"He has not men enough to invest it entirely," said Oberntraut; "but, alas! there are too few in the place to defend it long against the force he has."

"Then I will go on to-night," answered Algernon Grey; "under such circumstances every arm is something."

"Your men may indeed give assistance," said the young Baron; "mine are only accustomed to the open field and their horses' backs; therefore they can be of more service without than within. I will give you escort, however, as far as Neunheim; for the way is not without danger."

"Where does Tilly lie?" asked Algernon Grey. "It would take a large force to close all communication with the town."

"The last news showed all his foot at Rohr-

bach," answered Oberntraut, "and his horse scattered about by Wiesloch, Russloch, and Wieblingen. There are few parties, if any, on this side of the Neckar; but they cross from time to time, especially at night; so that it will be better that I and my people should go with you. We may, perhaps, gain some advantage by the way."

In the latter expectation, however, Oberntraut was disappointed. The whole forces of the Bavarian general remained on the other side of the Neckar; and Algernon and Oberntraut, with their several forces, reached Neunheim without seeing any human beings, except a few of the unfortunate peasantry, who fled across the fields as soon as they heard the sound of horses' feet.

Furnished with the pass-word, Algernon Grey presented himself at the gates of the bridge, and was immediately recognised by the officer on guard, who had seen him before at Prague. The news spread amongst the soldiery of a reinforcement having come to the aid of the garrison; the word passed from mouth to mouth over the bridge and into the city. Some of the boys and the students, who were loitering about, took it up; a little crowd collected, gathering as it went, and accompanied the English party with loud cheers to the gates of the castle. The sounds reached Agnes Herbert, as she sat sad and lonely in her own chamber; and, with the presentiment of love, a glow spread over her cheek; a thrill passed through her whole frame; and, leaning her head upon her hand, she wept under the struggle of hope and fear. Some time passed by, however; and every thing remained quiet and sad; for Algernon Grey had been, in the first instance, led to the apartments of the governor, Merven, which lay in a distant part of the castle. Hope gave way to apprehension; "I have deceived myself," she thought; "it is not he! The place will be invested; and he will not be able to force his way in;" but at the end of half an hour there were rapid steps heard coming along the corridor. She knew her father's foot; but there was another, too, the tread of which was hardly less familiar to her ear. Joy overpowered her more than sorrow had ever done. She could not rise—she could not move from her chair, but, with her eyes raised, her hands clasped, her bosom heaving with the quick, short breath of expectation, she gazed towards the door. The next moment there was a light knock; she had hardly strength to say, "Come in;" but, whether he heard the words or not, Herbert threw it open and drew back to let her lover pass in first.

What a painful thing is the struggle between the natural feelings of the heart and the conventional modes of life! Had Agnes given way to what she felt, she would have sprung to Algernon's arms and poured forth her love upon his bosom; but she dared not; and, rising with timid grace, her cheek flushed with emotion, and eyes in which the tears would scarcely be restrained, she glided forward, with her fair hand extended.

He took it and pressed his hands upon it warmly, tenderly, eagerly; but she remarked at once that there was a melancholy shade upon his brow, a look of sadness in his eyes. What could it mean? she asked herself. A letter, received ten days before, breathed nothing but hope and joyful expectation; it had told of difficulties overcome, of all obstacles removed, of a clear course towards love, and union, and happiness. Whence could that sadness proceed, then? It must arise from the dangerous position of the town; from the thoughts of the approaching siege; from a knowledge of the weakness of the garrison, from the apprehension of danger to those he loved; from any thing—any thing, Agnes was willing to believe, but new obstacles, fresh barriers having risen up between him and her. Every thing but that was light to her. Perils she feared not; privations she was ready to endure; but upon the thought of disappointed love she dared not suffer her mind to dwell even for a moment.

No time, however, was given for explanation; for, after a very few words had been spoken, Herbert took her lover's arm, saying, "There, my dear child, I was resolved that you should see our friend safe and well; but now I must go to visit the new redoubt I am throwing up behind the Altes Schloss; for it must be carried on night and day; and he has promised to go with me."

Thus saying, he turned to the door; but Algernon Grey lingered yet for a moment, saying, in a low voice, "I must find a moment to speak with you alone to-morrow, dearest Agnes. Matters do not proceed so quickly as I could wish, but all will go well, I trust."

The door closed upon them, and Agnes Herbert sank into her seat again, and sadly covered her eyes with her hand. Oh, how often in life is the long looked-for moment of joy alloyed by bitter disappointment!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The wind was from the west, the grey morning dawning calm, and somewhat hazy. Few eyes were open in the castle of Heidelberg, except those of the sentinels on the walls; and amongst those who slept soundest, strange to say, was Algernon Grey. He was wearied with long exertion and fatigue; he was wearied with anxiety and thought; he was wearied with several months' strife between hope and fear; and now, when a brief period of repose had come, when there seemed a pause in his fate, when no exertion on his part could advance or retard whatever events Fate had in store for the future, he slept profoundly, for many hours dreamlessly, till, towards the morning, faint and fleeting visions of Agnes Herbert in danger and distress crossed his mind, changing like the forms of clouds borne over the summer sky. Suddenly something, he knew not what, awoke him from his sleep, and he gazed round bewildered. For an instant he knew not where he was; but then he heard a faint and distant sound like that of a slowly beaten drum, and he murmured, "Surely that is the noise of fire-arms." Starting out of bed, he flung on a loose furred dressing-gown, and threw open the door of the anteroom. His servants were already

up; the outer door was open, and a man was looking out.

"What is that noise, Stephen Graves?" exclaimed the young Earl, anxiously. "Run and gain intelligence."

"They say it is the enemy, my lord," replied the man, "who have attacked the redoubt called the Ape's Nest, and the new trench you went to see last night. Colonel Herbert has hurried up already; but I will soon get farther news;" and away he ran.

It was the first act of the siege; and Algernon Grey, while he armed himself in haste, felt that strange sort of impression which is ever produced by the commencement of any great and decisive transaction long delayed and expected, in which we are destined to bear a part. The siege of Heidelberg had begun. How was it to end? he asked himself. What might be the fate of himself and of those he held most dear, ere the final scene of the tragedy then commencing? But although deep reflection and strong feeling were inherent in his character, yet energetic activity was the predominant quality of his nature. Thought never made him pause or hesitate; and, as no particular post as yet had been assigned to him, he resolved at once to hasten as a volunteer to the point assailed, and render the best service in his power. His men were speedily gathered together, and the arms of the soldiers of that period were caught up and donned; when, just as they were descending to the court, the loud, dull boom of a piece of ordnance was heard, and a cannon-ball struck the wall above, and some heavy pieces of stone fell down across the window.

"They have won the redoubt, my lord," said one of the men, pausing, and turning round to speak to Algernon Grey.

"Never mind," answered the young nobleman; "it can be won back again. Come on;" and, passing to the head of the troop, he led them down into the court, and through what was called the fore-yard of Louis the Fifth's palace, by a passage which led by the side of the library-tower to the upper casement, and to the conduit-casement; thence through the kitchen gardens and the pheasant garden, out to the mount-fort, where the new trench commenced. As they went, another and another cannon-shot was heard; and the balls whistled high over their heads towards the castle and the town. Several soldiers were met hurrying back towards the fortress; and two of them, carrying on their arms a wounded man, paused, at once to rest themselves for an instant, and to tell their advancing comrades that the Ape's Nest and the new trench were carried by the enemy.

Algernon Grey made no long halt, however, but hurried on to the southern entrance of the small octagonal fort, where he found Colonel Herbert directing a furious fire from two small pieces of cannon and about fifty arquebuses, upon the trench running up from the half-finished redoubt.

"Ah! my noble friend!" he cried, as soon as he saw the Earl; "this is kind help, and much needed. They have attacked us sooner than we thought, driven out the masons and the few soldiers who were working there; and, worse than all, captured all the beeves which the peasants had gathered up here for the supply of the castle."

"Methinks we can retake the trench and the redoubt," said Algernon Grey, gazing forth, and shading his eyes with his hand from the light of the eastern sun, "perhaps even recapture the cattle; for that is a serious loss. Cover us with a sharp fire, and I will undertake to regain the works with my own men, provided there be not strong reinforcements beyond that wood."

"None, none," replied Herbert; "they have not three companies on the ground."

"Upon them, then!" cried Algernon Grey. "Stephen Graves, array the men before that little gate below—quick! for they are coming along the trench. Now, my gallant friend, let your fire be directed beyond that little mound of earth in the trench till we reach it, and then cease. You can send out a party to support us if you see need and have men enough. If you put some small balls into that falconet and brought it to sweep the trench, it would cover us well—jam them down close, or you will burst the gun."

Thus saying, the young nobleman ran down to his men below, and, ere the cannon he had pointed to could be charged, was seen issuing forth with his men into the trench. The Spaniards and Bavarians were gathering fast beyond musket-shot in the other end of the trench, prepared to rush forward to the attack of the octagon fort, and presented a firm front across the trench, jostling against men with their arms and steel caps glittering in the sun. But two guns besides the falconet had been brought to bear upon the trench from above, and Herbert himself, ordering the cannoneers to pause, aimed the falconet with a keen and experienced eye, and then adjusted one of the other pieces of ordnance. He had not time to give his own attention to the other; for Algernon Grey put his men into the charge; and, with sharp pikes lowered, the sturdy Englishmen rushed on. They were not two hundred yards from their opponents, and the word to meet them at the same place had been given to the Bavarian infantry, when the report of three guns from the fort, discharged rapidly one after the other was heard. One ball tore through the close ranks of Tilly's soldiers like a hurricane through a forest, laying a number of strong men low in a moment; another struck the edge of the trench beside them and covered the Bavarians with earth and rubbish; and in the midst of the confusion that followed, a shower of half-pound shot, fitted for what was then called the wall-petronel, completed the disarray. Then came the firm charge of the English, and in a minute or two the trench was swept from end to end, and Algernon Grey and his men rushed with the scattered enemy into the redoubt of the Ape's Nest which had been taken an hour before. Here, however, the struggle became more fierce; for a company of Spanish foot, fresh and in good order, advanced to cover the flight of their allies; the Bavarians rallied behind them, and for a few minutes Algernon with thirty men had to contend with a force of five times that number. The English, however, had the impulse of attack and success with them; the half-completed mounds of the redoubt afforded the enemy no shelter;

the first shock drove the Spaniards back, though still in fair array; and ere they could recover their ground, Herbert himself and a party of Palatinate troops poured in and completed the victory.

In rout and confusion the adversaries' forces were driven down the slopes of earth which had been thrown up, and fresh troops arriving from the castle and the fort, the pursuit was continued so sharply that neither Spaniards nor Bavarians had time to rally. Flying in confusion, some towards the Wolfswell, some towards Königstuhl, a number were slain by those who followed them, and some way beyond a small wood which was then called the Cammerwald, the whole drove of oxen which had been carried off in the morning was recaptured, and the poor herds who had been made prisoners liberated.

A halt of the Palatinate troops was then ordered, for no one knew where the chief force of Tilly was posted, and to both Herbert and Algernon Grey it seemed impossible to conceive that so experienced a commander would have suffered so small a force as that which had attacked the redoubt to advance far without support.

"You go back with the man to the fort," said the young nobleman after some consultation, "I will proceed with a small party to reconnoitre, and bring you intelligence soon."

Algernon Grey sent but did not bring intelligence; for with efforts of the mind, as with those of the body, it is not always possible to check a strong impulse at once. A man runs towards a particular object; but unless something arrests his progress, he is sure to run beyond it; and finding no large body of the enemy within sight, after having gone more than a mile in the direction of the position Tilly was reported to occupy the night before, the young Englishman was led on to reconnoitre further. Guided by one of the soldiers of the castle, whom Herbert had given him as a companion, and followed by eight or ten men, he glided through the woods upon the Königstuhl, taking advantage of every rocky point to examine accurately the ground below, and not even satisfied with the knowledge thus obtained, he determined to descend and approach as close as possible to Rohrbach and Wiesloch, where the enemy's principal force of infantry was supposed to be quartered. The ground, which is at present covered with vineyards climbing half way up the hill, was then shaded with thick woods; and under shelter of their branches, at that season in full leaf, the young Englishman approached to within about a quarter of a mile of Rohrbach, where the orchards and plum gardens rested upon the verge of the forest. Pausing on a small spur of the hill, which the guide called the Badger's haunt—I know not by what name it goes now-a-days—Algernon Grey leaned against one of the large oaks, and gazed down below, hearing some voices evidently speaking, not far off. Some clouds had come over the sun; and for a moment he could not discover the persons who were speaking; but moving a little to one side, while the sun shone out at the same time, the glittering of a steel cap caught his eyes, and the white head-gear of a country girl. Another slight change of position showed him a Bavarian sentinel, talking with a young woman of the Palatinate; and, to say truth, making somewhat warmer love than is common with his countrymen of the present day. Turning round to his companions with a smile, he very hardheartedly proposed to carry off the poor sentinel from his present relaxation, in order to obtain at leisure whatever information he could afford. No great difficulties presented themselves to the undertaking; for the man had been placed to guard a little hollow way leading up into the wood, and had wandered a few steps from his post in order to enjoy the conversation of his fair friend unobserved. On the other side was a plum-garden, fenced by a stone wall, with a break in it; and, dividing his men into two parties, Algernon Grey, with four companions, glided quietly down the hollow way under cover of the bank; while the other party crept on into the plum-trees, till they reached the break. The soldier had laid down his arquebuse for a moment or two; and, ere he could recover it, which he attempted to do, at the first sound of a footfall, he was seized; and, with a pistol at his head and an injunction to keep silence, was dragged up into the woods.

Without pausing to question him at the time, lest the woman, who had been left behind, should give the alarm, the young Englishman took his way back to the castle, through different paths from those by which he had gone forth; but the whole day had been consumed in these proceedings, and the sun was setting when he reached the small fort at the Ape's-nest. Herbert was no longer there. The soldiers in the redoubt declared that all had passed quietly; and the reconnoitring party proceeded in the twilight to the castle, where their long absence had caused some uneasiness, although a messenger had been sent about midnight to say that no great movement could be observed in the enemy's forces.

The examination of the prisoner took place immediately; and from his answers it was found that the report was general in Tilly's camp, that the siege would be regularly commenced on the following day; and that the principal point of attack would be the Ape's-nest, and the high ground around it. A road had been prepared, the man said, for transporting the artillery; and several large pieces of ordnance had that very day been carried a considerable way up the mountain, with less difficulty than had been anticipated.

Thus passed the first day after Algernon Grey's return to Heidelberg, and in the whole course thereof he did not obtain more than half an hour of the society of her he loved, nor was that without the drawback of the presence of many others, as they sat at supper in Colonel Herbert's tower.

Ten persons were assembled round the table at a late hour, comprising Merven, the general governor of the place, and the principal officers of the German, English, and Dutch troops; and though placed next to Agnes, with Merven between her and her father, yet but a few words could pass between unheard by all. Algernon Grey, however, did not lose the opportunity, but whispered in a low tone, while the conversation was going on loud around, "Come down

hither, dear girl, early to-morrow, ere your father goes forth; I wish to speak with you both; for, in the dangers which are approaching, there should be no doubt on any part — nothing unexplained — no hesitation, no fear."

Agnes merely bowed her head, for, at the moment Algernon concluded, the governor addressed her on the other side, and all private communication between her and her lover was over for the night.

At eleven o'clock the party rose, and most of the guests retired, but Merven, ere he went, took both Herbert's hands frankly in his, saying, "There is something on my mind, my noble friend, and as we shall all soon be at hard blows with the enemy, I cannot go into the strife without saying it. By every right you should have the command here, and I am sure Horace Vere was not aware that you had made up your mind to stand the brunt of this siege after having fought so well in other places, or he would have offered it to you; but let us divide our labours and our authority. Take which you will for your own particular post, the castle or the town. I will take the other, and we can hold council together upon all great affairs."

Herbert turned away his head for a moment, but left his hand in Merven's, and then, returning the friendly pressure, he said, "The castle for me. It has been my dwelling for many a year. I have bestowed much pains in strengthening it. It has become a sort of plaything to me—a pet, a favourite, and I would fain stand by it while it stands, or perish with it."

"So be it, then," answered the other. "I will defend the town, and do not think of either letting it fall or perish. No gloomy anticipations, Herbert. We will try, at least, to repel the enemy, and doubt not we shall succeed, and all live to remember our united efforts with pride and satisfaction."

Herbert shook his head gravely, though it could not be called sadly. "It is all in God's hand, good friend," he said. "Death never strikes without authority."

"And God protects the right," answered Merven; "so we will not doubt. I suppose, my lord, you will remain in the castle with your men; but come with me for a moment to my lodging ere you go to bed. I have some news for you from England, brought by a special messenger, since you left our native land, in a letter to Mannheim."

Algernon Grey's eyes lightened with fresh hopes; for love had wrought a change in him; and, whereas he had long given way to despondency, the tendency of his mind had now become hopeful. As soon as they reached the governor's lodging, Merven put a letter in his hand, signed Horace Vere, and pointed to a particular passage, "Tell the Earl of Hillingdon," so the paragraph ran, "that I have news from the Duke of Buckingham, of the third of this month: he states that there is good hope for the Earl in his cause. The new favourite is getting out of favour, has absented himself from the Roystron party without the King's leave, and has been roughly handled in discourse. These advantages improved may remedy all that *has gone* amiss in the Earl's cause; and Buckingham declares that he may trust to him and the Prince for the result."

Such were the tidings which sent Algernon Grey to rest with a heart somewhat relieved; but still many an anxious apprehension crossed his mind, and kept him waking for more than an hour.

He resolved, however, to lose no time in communicating to Colonel Herbert the exact position in which he stood. To Agnes's uncle he might not have felt himself bound by the same rules which affected him towards her father; but he determined, whatever might be the result, he would not keep the parent of her he loved in ignorance of the exact situation in which he was placed.

All such resolutions—indeed, all human resolutions—are the sport of circumstances; and, in the present case, he could not perform that which he had determined to do. Early on the following morning, he knocked at the door of the English officer's saloon; it was the sweet voice of Agnes that bade him enter; and her first intelligence was that her father had already gone forth to the outworks.

"I told him," she said, "that you wished to see him, that you had something to communicate to him of importance: nay, that it referred to me and my happiness; but he would not stay. He replied, that the defence of the place was the first thing to be thought of; that he did not wish his mind to be distracted from his task by any other considerations: that he trusted entirely to my own judgment and feelings; and that, whatever I promised he would confirm. I think he mistook the nature of the communication you had to communicate, Algernon; that he thought it simply a matter of form; but yet I could not make up my mind to press it upon him; for when excited by such events as are now taking place, he is impatient of any opposition, and gives his whole heart and soul entirely up to what he considers to be his duty as a soldier. Whatever you have to tell, I do think it will be better to reserve it till this siege is over, or at least till we are compelled by other circumstances."

"First hear what it is," replied Algernon Grey, "and then judge; for I must not have him say at a future period, that I acted dishonourably by him;" and he proceeded to relate all the events that had occurred to him while absent in England. He showed her that he had formally applied for the nullification of the marriage, to which he had been a hardly conscious party in his boyhood; that no opposition had been made, but a similar petition addressed to the courts by the lady Catherine herself; that, after some difficulties, all obstacles had been swept away; and that nothing had been required but his oath, corroborated by other testimony, that he had not seen the lady since she was ten years old; that having gone to England to prove the fact, the judges appointed had come to a unanimous decision; and that his expectations and hopes were raised to the highest pitch, when suddenly the King had interfered, and forbidden the sentence from being promulgated. The causes which were supposed to have led to this tyrannical conduct on the part of James, he could not fully detail to ears so pure as those which heard him; but

that a new favourite of the monarch's was the moving cause, from some base motives of his own; and that he had good hope of this new and painful obstacle being speedily removed.

Agnes listened attentively, in deep, sad thought. She asked no questions, for she feared that if she did, the bitter disappointment that she felt would show itself too plainly. When he had done, however, after a short pause, to assure herself of her self-command, she replied,—"I think still, Algernon, it will be better not to press the subject upon him. He cannot say that you have deceived him, when you have sought to tell him all, and he himself has declined to hear; and I know that such tidings, and the doubts they would inspire of my fate and happiness, would agitate and disturb him terribly."

"There is another course, dear Agnes," answered her lover, "and that I will take. I will write the whole facts down, and give the paper to him. He can read it or not, if he likes; but I must not fail on any point where you, dear girl, are concerned. I will go and do it directly, and take the very first moment of putting the statement in his hands."

As soon as he was gone Agnes gave way to tears, but they lasted not long, and her mind became more calm afterwards. On his part Algernon Grey hastened back to his own chamber and wrote, as he had proposed, stating the facts simply and straightforwardly, and pointing out that the decision of the judges being unanimous and upon record, though not published, the marriage must, sooner or later, be declared null. He then folded up the paper, sealed it, and hurried forth towards the outworks in search of Herbert. He met him ere he had gone a hundred yards, and the good old soldier grasped him frankly by the hand, saying, with a gay air, "I ran away from you this morning, my good friend; Agnes told me you wished to talk with me. I knew the subject was love; and I will have naught upon my mind, during this siege, but fighting. I trust fully to her and to you, my noble friend; and, as you cannot be married till all this business is over, we can talk of it hereafter, if we both survive. If I die, you must supply my place to her under another name—is it not so?"

"I will," answered Algernon, pressing his hand in his; and Herbert continued with a graver air, "If you fall, Agnes's heart—and I know it well—will be a widowed one, and remain so to her grave. This is all that is needful to say for the present."

"Nay," answered Algernon Grey, "though I would not press the subject upon you, as you dislike it, yet I must not leave you without information on any point when you choose to seek it. I have written down some facts which, I believe, you ought to know, in this packet. Take it and read it when you are disposed and have leisure. I must never have you suppose, my gallant friend, that I do not deal frankly with you in all things."

"I never will," answered Herbert, taking the letter and gazing at it with a smile,—"I will put this safely by, where it will rest undisturbed for a month to come, if this Bavarian do not press his operations more speedily than he is doing at present. No fresh attack has been made; we have finished the redoubt and planted some guns there; but there are defects in the whole position both of castle and town, which I only hope he is not wise enough to understand. Hark! there is a trumpet blowing at the gate—a summons, I suppose; let us go and see."

It proved to be not exactly as he supposed; for Tilly's envoy, on being admitted to the presence of Merven and Herbert, did not formally demand the surrender of the place. The import of the message was, that the Bavarian general desired to confer with the governor of Heidelberg at any place that he would appoint; a truce being agreed upon for the time. A resolute answer was returned, to the effect that such a proposal was quite inadmissible, and that any farther communication that might be required, must take place with Sir Horace Vere, general in chief of the Palatine forces.

Scarcely had the trumpeter and the two commissioners, by whom he was accompanied, retired, when a sharp cannonade was heard from the north-east; and when Herbert and his companion hastened to the pheasant garden, they found that the newly constructed redoubt was in possession of the enemy, and that the force by which the attacking party was supported left not the most remote chance of recovering the position lost. Such was the first event of importance in the siege of Heidelberg.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The cannon thundered from the Geisberg; and thick and fast the cannon-balls fell into the town and castle; but the distance was great, the science of projectiles little known; and for several days the damage done was of no great importance. Nearer and nearer, however, the Bavarian general pushed his approaches; and almost hourly news reached the city of fresh reinforcements having arrived in the enemy's camp, of some other point being assailed, or some other gate blockaded. No advantage, however, was gained against the place without a fierce and resolute contest. No sooner was a trench dug, than the foe were driven from it; no sooner was a fresh battery constructed, than a fierce and vigorous assault was made to wrest it from the hands of the enemies. Still, however, they advanced slowly but steadfastly. If they were driven back defeated one day, they gained somewhat more than they had lost the next; and with fresh troops continually pouring upon the spot assailed, they carried on the strife unceasingly; while the garrison of Heidelberg were too few in number to oppose anything like an effectual resistance; and retired every night utterly exhausted by the labours of the day.

Wherever the struggle was the most severe, there was Colonel Herbert and Algernon Grey; wherever the fire was the hottest, and the danger most imminent, there they were in the midst of it. The confidence of the soldiery was unbounded in those two commanders, especially towards the former, who, leading, encouraging, directing, inspired them by his example, and guided them by his experience; and although they saw that the Bavarian army daily made

some progress, yet they easily perceived that, if the resistance was carried on with such vigour, months must pass ere the town could be reduced; and the never silent voice of hope assured them, that ere then succour would arrive.

On the nineteenth of August, under a tremendous fire of all kinds of missiles, an assault was made on the Trutzkaiser, one of the principal defences of the town; and for nearly an hour and a half one storming party after another poured on relieving each other; but each was met and driven back with a degree of vigour and determination which the Bavarian general had not been led to expect from the terror and consternation which he knew his first approach had spread through the town. The citizens aided the soldiers; the soldiers encouraged the citizens; and not only were the assailants repulsed, but followed far beyond the defences, and many of them slaughtered between the walls and the main body of the Bavarian army.

Habit is a marvellous thing, familiarizing us with all that is most dreadful and abhorrent to our nature. At first the fall of each cannonball in the streets of the town, the destruction of a chimney, the carrying away of a buttress, spread a thrill of terror through the whole place. The inhabitants covered over the narrow streets with large sheets of linen to hide them from the eyes which they imagined were directing the messengers of death towards every one who was seen walking in the town. The fall of the place was looked upon as inevitable; and many of the burghers cursed in their hearts the garrison, whose resistance exposed them to a siege. There were others, however, and indeed the major part of those who had remained in the town, whose loyalty and devotion were of a firmer quality; and the spirit which animated them spread to almost all the rest, as soon as habit had rendered the ears of the townspeople familiar with the roar of the artillery. The death of a citizen by a shot from above then began to be spoken of as an unfortunate accident; and the man, who some days before would have run half a mile at the report of a cannon, only jumped a little on one side to avoid the falling stone-work, when a ball struck one of the buildings of the city close to him.

One person in the beleaguered place, however, could not be reconciled to the dangers of that siege. Personal fears she had none; she went out into the town; she visited the wounded and the sick in the hospitals; she passed along the most exposed streets and the paths under the immediate fire of the enemy; she comforted and supported the timid; she encouraged the resolute and strong-hearted; she spoke of resistance unto death, and loyalty that knew no termination but the grave. Wherever she came, her presence to the hardy man or the frightened woman was as that of a strengthening angel; and men turned to ask, "Who would have thought that fair Mistress Agnes Herbert, so gay, so gentle, and so tender, would ever have shown such courage and resolution!"

But in the solitude of her own chamber the heart of Agnes sank at the thunder of the cannonade, when she thought of those so dear exposed to hourly peril; and when a group of men were seen bearing a wounded or dying comrade from the quarter where her father and her lover were engaged, a feeling of sickening apprehension would come over her; and often with faint steps she would hurry forth to see the face of the dying man. Then she would reproach herself for weakness, resolving, for the future, not to anticipate the evil day; and would prepare to cheer with bright smiles the return of weary friends, when the combat and the watch were over.

They needed all that could be done, indeed, to keep up their spirits in the contest that was going on; for day by day and hour by hour, notwithstanding every effort of the garrison, notwithstanding an amount of courage on the part of the citizens which no one had anticipated, the enemy gained ground. To Herbert it was a bitter disappointment as well as grief; for calculating with the experience of long years of war, he felt sure, that when Tilly commenced the siege, the forces of the Bavarian general were inadequate to the task he had undertaken, and that Heidelberg could hold out for months, if it were defended as he was resolved it should be. But a few days after the siege commenced, fresh bodies of troops appeared where they had not been expected; a greater number of pieces of heavy ordnance, then had been in the Imperial camp on the fourteenth of August opened their fires on the town and castle on the nineteenth; and the report became rife, that the general of the besieging army had been reinforced by ten thousand men from the forces of the Archduke. The English officer became moody and desponding; and, though in the hour of danger and of combat he was full of fire and energy, filling the soldiers by his very look with courage and determination like his own, yet, when he returned to his lodging in the castle, he would fall into long fits of silence, gaze upon the ground with a gloomy eye, or pore over a plan of the defences, and sadly shake his head.

The operations of the siege were at first confined to the left bank of the Neckar; and the communication with the town from the right bank by the road over the covered bridge was unimpeded except by occasional parties of cavalry, who would pillage the peasantry, bringing in provisions, unless protected by a strong guard. The supply of the town, however, was facilitated by the exertions of the Baron of Oberntraut and his small force; and his very name had become so terrible to the Imperial troops, that the enemy's cavalry would withdraw in haste at the very first news of his approach. Often, indeed, he came upon them unaware like a quick thunderstorm; and almost daily news arrived in the city of this regiment of Croats, or that body of Cossacks, having been defeated by Oberntraut, and driven over the river in terror and confusion. He himself, however, never appeared within the walls till the month of September came in; and from the batteries above the Pheasant-garden a tremendous fire was kept up during the greater part of one whole day upon the defences of the castle and the town. The elements, too, on that morning seemed to fight on behalf of the enemy. One of the most awful tempests, that a land, prolific in storms, had ever witnessed, swept the valley of the Neckar. Lightning and hail filled the air. The thunder almost drowned the

cannonade; and about four o'clock, the wind, which had been rising for some time, increased to a perfect hurricane. Chimneys were blown down; houses were unroofed; men and women were killed in the streets by the falling masonry; and, in the midst of the terror and confusion, which this awful phenomenon created, the Bavarian general ordered a general assault to be made on the defences of the town and the castle. Merven, about two-thirds of the garrison, and a large body of the armed citizens presented themselves to defend the place from what was then called the Spire's gate, to where the walls of the town joined those of the castle. Herbert, with Algernon Grey, the Dutch troops, and the English volunteers, together with two hundred Palatinate infantry, undertook to repel the enemy in their attempt to storm the castle. The cannonade on both sides was tremendous, as the Imperial troops marched steadily to the assault; and from the top of the round tower at the angle of the great casemate, Colonel Herbert watched their approach, anxiously calculating to what point their efforts would be directed; while several inferior officers stood beside him to carry his orders to Algernon Grey and others who were in command of the troops in the outworks. Suddenly, as he stood and watched, he perceived the fire of several of the largest of the enemy's guns turned in the direction of the lower part of the town, and, as it seemed to him, upon the bridge; but, from the spot where he stood, he could not discover what was taking place in that part of the city. After a moment's consideration, he pointed with his hand towards the outworks which crossed the Pheasant-garden and the small battery on the mount at the angle, which commanded the trench towards the Ape's-nest, that had been lost in the early part of the siege.

"There will be the principal attack," he said, speaking to the officers near him. "Speed away, Wormser, to the troops, by the bath-house, and order them to detach fifty men to reinforce the battery. I must away to see what is going on down there; but I will join them in the Pheasant-garden in a few minutes."

"You will see best from the block-house, sir, by the Carmelite-wood, where the English volunteers are posted," said one of the officers who had marked the fire directed upon the lower part of the town; "I dare say the Earl can tell you what is going on."

Herbert made no reply, but hurried away as fast as he could go, seeing two more guns brought to bear upon the town, towards the river. As he hurried across the great casement, and thence through the gardens, the balls fell thick about him from the lesser guns of the Bavarian batteries. Every moment some of the fine rare trees, collected from all parts of the world, at an enormous expense, crashed under the shot, or fell, torn asunder, strewing the ground with fruits and flowers, such as Europe seldom saw. The vice and the folly of unnecessary war, is never, perhaps, more strongly felt than when its destructive effects are seen amongst all the fair and beautiful objects which the peaceful arts have gathered or produced. But the thoughts and feelings of Herbert at that moment were those of the warrior alone: the thoughtful and contemplative man, which he had appeared in calmer days, was cast away, and the lion was roused within him. The trees, in whose shade and in whose appearance he had delighted, he now cursed, for covering in some degree the approach of the enemy, and he would willingly have ordered them all to be swept away.

Turning the angle of the Pheasant-garden, he soon reached the block-house, where Algernon Grey, with his band of Englishmen, supported by a company of Dutch infantry, had been stationed, as soon as the preparations for an assault had been perceived; and as he reached the foot of the mound, the young Earl came down to meet him, asking, "Have you seen my messenger?"

"No," answered Herbert, quickly. "What news from below there?—they seem firing upon the bridge."

"The wind has carried off the roof of the bridge," said Algernon Grey, "and there is a great firing near the gate tower on the other side. One cannot well see what is taking place for the smoke and the tower; but fresh troops seem coming up from Neunheim and the plains."

Herbert set his teeth hard, but made no reply; and, mounting to the block-house, he gazed out, holding fast by an iron stancheon; for, on that high ground, it was scarcely possible to stand against the force of the hurricane. After a moment's consideration, he turned to his young countryman, saying in a low voice, "There is no one there we can trust. The fellow there is a coward, given that post because we thought it quite secure from attack. You will not be wanted here, Algernon. Take twenty men with you, and run down with all speed. Assume the command at once; if he resists, blow his brains out; and at all events, maintain the gate. If we lose the bridge, they will not be long out of the town."

Without a word the young nobleman obeyed, hurried down by the shortest paths, and passed through the deserted streets of the town, where no human being was to be seen but a wounded soldier crawling slowly back from the walls, and an officer, still more badly hurt, carried in the arms of three or four hospital men. He soon reached the Heidelberg side of the bridge, where he found the gates open, and the archway under the hither tower crowded with soldiery. From the other side of the Neckar, upon the bridge and the farther tower, was directed a terrible fire from a considerable body of Bavarian infantry with two small pieces of cannon; and from time to time the balls from the battery on the Geisberg passed over the bridge and dropped into the stream, without doing much damage, except to one of the nearer piers and the houses in the lower town; for it would seem that the Bavarian officers above were somewhat embarrassed by the position of their own men on the right bank of the river.

"Clear the way," cried Algernon Grey, "and, in Heaven's name, establish some order! There, Lauzprisade, array your men behind the gates, and keep ready to close and defend them, in case of need. Where is your commander?"

"God knows," answered the man, with a laugh; "we have not seen him for this hour. And Wasserstein and the rest over there are fighting as well as they can without orders."

"Well, I will command them," answered

Algernon Grey; and, advancing at the head of his men, he crossed the bridge towards the opposite gate. Just in the middle of the passage, a bullet through one of the windows of the bridge struck his corslet and glanced off, wounding a man behind; but the young Earl hurried on; and, forcing his way through the men crowded round the gate, mounted by the stone stairs to the top of the town, which was crowded by gallant fellows returning the fire of the enemy from every window and loop-hole. One man in particular, a burly-looking German, holding the rank, which we should now term sergeant, stood with his whole person exposed at the largest aperture, whilst two young lads behind him loaded and re-loaded a store of arquebuses, with which he busied himself in picking off the principal assailants, perfectly heedless of the shot, which sometimes passed through the window close to him, sometimes struck upon the stone-work, or lodged in the wood and tiles of the conical roof just above.

"You are Wasserstein," said Algernon Grey, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "I know you by your gallantry—let me look out for a moment, I want to see what is going on."

"One shot more, sir, at that man with the green plume," replied the man, who instantly recognised him. "We must make the best fight we can; but I think they are bringing up fresh guns; at least, I see horses there coming at a great pace."

Even while he was speaking he had been taking a quiet and deliberate aim; and the next instant the gun went off, and a Bavarian officer fell.

"There, that will do," said Wasserstein. "Now, sir, but don't be long."

Algernon Grey advanced to the window and gazed out. The next instant a shot grazed his face, shattered a part of his steel cap, and passed off; but he did not move an inch, and he could hear the man behind him murmur, "Ah! that is something like."

"Good news, my friend," said Algernon Grey: "that is Oberntraut coming up in their rear. I know his cornet, I must go out to meet him. You had better come down and command at the drawbridge when it is let down for me to pass."

"I would rather go with you," said the man.

"There is none here that I can trust but you," said Algernon Grey, laying his hand upon his arm. "You must stay to support me, in case of need."

"Well, I will, then," answered Wasserstein. "Fire away, my men, fire away! Don't give them a moment's rest: the young Englishman is going to cut their throats."

Descending to the gates, Algernon Grey addressed a few words to his men, arrayed them with as broad a front as the space would permit, and, after a moment or two spent in preparation, that the enemy might be taken by surprise, the gates were thrown open, and the drawbridge lowered in an instant. With shortened pikes, and shoulder touching shoulder, the English band rushed across, with their young leader at their head, while every loop-hole of the tower poured forth shot upon the enemy. A number of men, with long planks to form a sort of temporary bridge, were right in the way; but seeing what seemed to be a considerable body of the garrison rush forth to the charge, they dropped the timber and ran back upon the ranks, which were covering their approach, and threw the first line into confusion. The narrow road did not admit of a wide front to either party; and, assailed impetuously by the English pikemen, the front line of the Bavarians gave way, driving the second back upon those behind. A number fell; one or two on the left jumped down the bank into the Neckar; and confusion and disarray had spread panic amongst a body of several hundred men, before a mere handful of assailants, when the sharp galloping of horse was heard from beyond the turn of the road; and shots, and cries, and words of command sounded from the rear. A young officer of the Bavarian infantry made a gallant effort to rally his flying soldiers, but it was in vain; and, waving his sword in the air, Algernon Grey exclaimed, "On! on! gallant hearts. Oberntraut is upon their rear. Push on for that gun. We must have one trophy at least."

The men answered with a cheer, and the next moment the cannon was in their hands. Up the slopes, amongst the rocks and orchards, down by the stream, up to their middles in water, the Bavarian troops fled without order; and the moment after, the young Earl could see the Palatinate horsemen dashing in amongst them, pursuing wherever the ground permitted it, and cutting them down without mercy. It was a wild and strange scene; and in the midst of it was seen Oberntraut himself, without any of the defensive armour of the period, but habited merely with hat and plume, buff coat of untanned leather, and thick gloves and riding-boots.

"Oberntraut! Oberntraut!" cried Algernon Grey, as he came near; but Oberntraut took no notice, dealing a blow here and there with his sword at the heads of the routed Bavarians, and riding on towards the bridge. Yet it was clear that he must have recognised the English party; for they had a Bohemian flag with them, they wore the Palatinate scarfs, and no blow was struck at any of them, although the road was so narrow that the young Earl was obliged to halt his men, and give them a different formation round the captured gun, in order to let the cavalry pass.

"He is heated, and impatient with the fight," thought Algernon Grey; and, without farther comment, he commanded his men to bring the gun, and the stores of ammunition that were with it, into the town, and returned towards the bridge, knowing that there was scarcely a part of the defences where the presence of every man, who could be spared from other points, was not necessary. The drawbridge was by this time down again, and the gates open; and, leaving the cannon in the hands of Wasserstein, the young Englishman hurried up with his men towards the block-house, where he had been first posted, remarking a tremendous fire from the right of the Pheasant-garden, and a dense smoke rising up from under a cavalier of late construction, still farther to the right. As he approached, the comparative quietness of everything towards the block-house, and in the park of the Friesenberg, showed him that an attack had been made in that quarter; and, turning to the right, through the narrow winding paths and

half-completed terraces of Solomon de Caus, he soon found himself at the entrance of the Pheasant-garden, and had a view of the outworks which had formed one of the principal points of attack. The fire seemed somewhat to have slackened; but the Palatinate troops were still ranged within the parapet, and a group of officers were seen standing near the centre of the platform, amongst whom Algernon Grey could remark the figure of Herbert, and, somewhat to his surprise, that of Oberntraut also. Herbert's face was turned away from the Bavarian batteries, and his attitude at once made the young Englishman say to himself, "The enemy have been repulsed." The next moment, he saw Oberntraut shake Colonel Herbert warmly by the hand, and descend the steps leading to the path immediately in front. The young Baron came on with a heavy brow, and eyes bent down, as if in deep thought, scarcely seeming to perceive the approaching party with the Earl at its head. Algernon stopped him, however, and took his hand, saying, "What is the matter, my friend?"

Oberntraut gazed in his face gravely, then suddenly returned his grasp warmly replying, "There is a great deal I do not understand; but I am sure you're honest—I am sure you are, and I have said so."

Without waiting for any answer, Oberntraut turned away and walked down the hill; and, murmuring to himself, "This is very strange," the young Earl advanced and mounted the steps to the top of the cavalier. There he saw the enemy in full retreat, carrying with them, apparently, a number of killed and wounded. Herbert was now at the farther side of the work; but, though he must have seen the young Englishman approach, he did not turn towards him; and when Algernon spoke, his reply, though not discourteous, was distant and cold.

"The assault has been repelled, my lord," he said; "and will not be renewed to-night; nevertheless, it may be as well to be prepared; and, therefore, I will beg you to command here in my absence, while I return for a while to the castle, whither I am called by business."

Algernon Grey was pained and surprised; but it was not a moment or a scene in which any explanation could be asked; and, saying merely, "Very well, I will do so," he turned to examine once more the retreating force of the enemy.

Herbert, in the mean time, descended into the Pheasant-garden; and, quickening his pace, as soon as he was under covering of the trees, he walked in the most direct line to his own lodging in the tower.

On opening the door he found Agnes watching for his return; and her face lighted up with joy, as soon as she beheld him; but a cloud came over it the next instant to see him return alone, which had seldom happened of late.

"Oh, my dear father," she cried; "I am glad to see you back uninjured. This has been a terrible day—but where is Algernon? Is he hurt?" and here her voice sunk almost to a whisper.

"No, my child," answered Herbert, gravely; "he is safe and well, and has done his devoir gallantly;" and, putting her gently aside, he advanced to a small cabinet on the other side of the circular room, unlocked a drawer, and took out a sealed letter, which he instantly broke open and commenced reading. Agnes remarked that his hand trembled, which she had never seen in her life before. When he had done, he seated himself and leaned his head upon his hand in thought.

"Agnes, my love," he said at length; "this place is no place for you. The dangers are too great, the scenes are too terrible. I must send you to Louisa Juliana till the siege is over."

"Oh, no, no," cried Agnes; "I cannot, I will not leave you."

"Hush!" said Herbert; "you must go; your presence here unnerves me. I will send off a messenger early to-morrow morning to the Electress to know if you can be safe with her. He can be back in two days; and then you must go. Your stay here and all the risks would drive me mad."

Agnes bent down her head and wept; but Herbert's determination came too late. Before the following evening a large force of Imperial infantry and several pieces of cannon crossed the Neckar by the bridge at Ladenburg, and were brought round to the opposite side of the bridge. The town was thus completely invested; and, although not cut off from all communication with the country without, the obstacles that presented themselves were such as Herbert would not willingly expose his daughter to encounter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

On an evening at the end of summer, while leaves were yet green and skies yet full of sunshine, though the long daylight of the year's prime had diminished somewhat more than an hour, and darkness and winter were stealing slowly forward in the distance, a small but handsome room, richly furnished with everything that the taste of that day could display, with exquisite carvings of old oak, with fine pictures, with velvet hangings, ay, and with green shrubs and flowers, both rare and beautiful, showed preparations for a supper party, at which two persons only were expected. The table was arranged with great taste: rich fruits, in a silver vase, formed a pyramid in the midst; and two or three dishes, of the most beautiful workmanship, presented various tempting pieces of confectionery strewed over, in quaint devices, and in a regular pattern, with minute flowers. On the right of the principal table, at some little distance, was a carved oak buffet, covered with crimson velvet, just seen from beneath the edges of a damask napkin, on which were arranged some large silver tankards of beautiful forms, two golden goblets, and several tall glasses gilded on the stem. The windows of the room were open, but shaded with trees and flowering shrubs, and a green soft light spread through the interior, as the rays of the setting sun poured through the veil of leaves. That light began to assume a purple hue, showing that the orb of day had touched the verge of the horizon, when a lady entered by a door from the gardens, magnificently habited in an evening dress, with somewhat more display of her fair person than the general habits of the

English people rendered decorous. We see the same mode of dress in the pictures of Rubens, especially those in which he represents the court of France at that period; but the costume had not yet become general in Great Britain, and, to English minds, the dress might have been higher, the wing-like collar more close. The lady closed the door and locked it; looked eagerly round, advanced to the other door, and did the same. Then, taking a small vial from that fair bosom, and a plate from the table, she poured out of the little bottle a white powder into the centre of the plate. There was a little vase of silver standing near, filled with powdered sugar, and from it she took a portion with a small silver ladle, then mingled the sugar and the white powder in the plate intimately together, and sprinkled the confectionery thickly with the mixture. This done, she again gazed round, looked out through both the windows, replaced the little vial in her bosom, and then unlocking either door, went forth again.

The room remained vacant for half an hour; twilight succeeded to broad day, and night to twilight, but soft and fair; no heavy darkness, but a gentle transparent shade, with the starlight and the coming moon, felt though not seen, within the chamber. The windows remained open; the soft air sighed in through the branches, and a solitary note of the long-singing merle was heard every now and then from beneath the leaves.

Suddenly the quick hoofs of a number of horses sounded on the road near, then stopped, and voices talking gaily in the house succeeded. Two servants entered that carefully decked room, and lighted the candles in the lustres. A moment after, a man, in a white cap and apron, followed, looked over the whole table, moved some of the flowers upon the dishes, but the cook did not seem to remark that aught had been done to his confectionery.

"'Ods life, there are more of them coming," he cried, addressing the other two servants, as the tramp of more horses was heard; "I wish they would keep their hungry throats away. Run out, Lloyd, and see who are these new ones."

The room was left vacant again for a few minutes, and then the door was thrown open by one of the attendants. The lady entered, leaning somewhat languishingly on the arm of a tall, handsome young man, splendidly dressed, but yet without that air of high birth and courtly habits which were eminently conspicuous in his fair companion.

A slight degree of paleness spread over the lady's face as she passed the threshold, and the deep fringed eyelids dropped over the large black eyes. The gentleman's look was upon her at the moment, and his brow somewhat contracted; his countenance assumed an expression of shrewd and bitter meaning. He said naught, however; and the lady, recovering herself in a moment, turned her head, saying to the servant behind, "Let the men wait—tell the boy I will see him, and receive his lord's letter after supper."

"Who are these men?" asked the gentleman, advancing with her towards the table.

"The page of the Earl of Hilfingdon, my good lord," she replied, with a sarcastic smile, seating herself in the nearest chair; "his page and a servant, bearing a letter from that noble gentleman to poor deserted me."

"Nay, not much deserted," cried the other, in a gallant tone, "when my heart and so many others are at your feet."

"Hush!" she said sharply, though in a low voice, "nothing of this before the servants."

As she spoke a dish was brought in, and handed first to her guest; but he would be extremely courteous that night, and ordered it to be carried to her. She took some at once, and ate without noticing his attention, but saying aloud, as he helped himself, "I am but a poor housekeeper, my good lord, and am sorry my noble uncle is not here to treat you better; but I told the cook to do his best, and show his skill."

"Oh, this is excellent!" replied the gentleman, "and will make up for my bad fare yesterday at Hertford, where everything was so bitter methought I was poisoned. The taste is in my mouth still."

"Nay, we must drive it thence with better things," said the lady. "I would not deny myself the pleasure of receiving you, when you wrote to say you would come, though my uncle was absent; and I must try to make up for your disappointment in not finding him, by giving you good cheer—will you not take wine?"

"Let us drink from the same cup," said the gentleman, with a soft and passionate look, notwithstanding her warning; "the wine will only taste sweet to me, if your lips sip it too."

The lady's eye flashed suddenly, and her brow grew dark; but she answered, tossing her proud head, "I drink after no one, my lord. As to drinking after me, you may do as you please. Give me some wine."

"Oh, your cup will render the wine nectar to me," said the guest, while the attendant to whom she had spoken poured out some wine for her into one of the golden goblets. She took a small portion, and then told the man to give it to her visitor, saying, with a laugh not quite natural, "What foolish things men are!"

The supper proceeded; dish after dish was brought in, but the gentleman would taste nothing of what the lady had not partaken before, till his conduct became somewhat remarkable. Her brow grew dark as night for an instant, but cleared again; and all that remained was a bright red spot upon her cheek.

There was a slight rustling sound near the open window, as the supper drew towards its conclusion, and the lady remarked, "The wind methinks is rising." Twice or thrice she looked in the direction of the window, and a sort of anxious uncertain expression came into her face. She pressed her guest to drink more wine, and he did so, always using the same cup and keeping it by him; but the wine at last seemed to have its effect. His face flushed, his eyes sparkled, his language became warm and passionate, somewhat coarse withal, and mingled with a bitterness especially on the subject of woman's heart and mind, which was little less than insulting in a lady's presence.

Her eye fixed upon him firmly, shining clear and bright like a diamond, from under the slightly contracted brow; the red spot vanished

from her check, and she remained deadly pale. "Why gaze you at me so sternly, lovely Kate?" asked her guest.

"Because I think you do not yet know women rightly," answered the lady at once: "you will learn better one day. You need wait no longer," she continued, turning to the attendants; "we will be our own servants. Now, my good lord, to end your supper, taste one of these tarts of Flemish cream. I marked well when last you were here that you loved them, and I had them prepared expressly for you."

One of the servants, ere he went, carried the silver dish to his lady's guest; but the gentleman kept his rule. "Will you divide one with me, bright Kate!" he asked.

"Nay," she answered, glancing her eyes for an instant to the window, "I am not fond of them."

"Then I will not take them either," said her visitor. "What you love I will love—what you take I will take."

The lady set her teeth hard; then, as the servant set down the dish and withdrew, she suddenly stretched out her hand to another plate, saying in a low but firm voice, and with a bland smile, "Well I will divide one of these lady-grace's, as they call them, with you."

"That is kind, lovely Kate," cried the visitor, drawing his chair nearer to her; "and of all lady's grace on earth, let me have yours."

The lady smiled again quite sweetly, parted the sort of cheesecake equally, and gave him half. He paused an instant, and she began. Then he ate, saying, "This is excellent."

"It is not bad," she answered, continuing to eat the cake, and keeping her eyes fixed upon him.

"Now that I have my lady's grace," he continued, drawing nearer still, and endeavouring to put his arm round her. But, instantly, she started up with a look of scorn; and, at the same moment, William Ifford sprang in at the open window.

"What is this, my lord!" he cried, "insulting my sweet cousin! Upstart and villain as you are, were there a drop of really noble blood in your veins—"

"It is vain, William! it is vain!" said the lady, in a low tone. "You have come too late. I have eaten too. My right noble lord, you look very pale. I told you that you knew not women rightly. You know them now—as much as e'er you will know. Heaven! how faint I feel! But his eyes roll in his head. Stop him from the door, William. You are sick, my lord! Will you try some Flemish cream, or taste more of your lady's grace? Methinks you have had enough for once."

"I was warned! I was warned!" murmured the unhappy man, holding by the table for support.

"Ay; but not warned that the hate of a heart like mine will sacrifice life itself for vengeance," answered the lady, sinking down into a seat.

"I will have vengeance, too," said the guest, starting up, and staggering with a furious effort towards the door. But William Ifford caught *him* by the breast, and threw him back. He staggered—fell—rolled for a moment or two in frightful convulsions, and then, with a scream like that of a sea-bird in a storm, gave up the ghost.

William Ifford was at this moment by the lady's side. "Catherine! Catherine!" he cried, "have you taken much?"

She made no answer; some quick sharp shudders passed over her frame, and a sort of choking sobbing convulsed her throat. A minute after, her head fell back upon the chair, and then, with a low but sharp sound, sunk down to the ground.

Her guilty kinsman gazed from the one corpse to the other with a wild and hesitating look. But then he thought he heard a noise. It was the sound of steps and voices coming near; and, leaping through the window, he disappeared. He could not have been gone fifty yards when the door of the room was burst open in haste, and the attendants of the house flocked in, with the page Frill and the old servant Tony in the midst.

"Poisoned, boy! poisoned!" cried the man named Lloyd. "Heaven and earth! it is too true!"

All paused in an instant, as the sight which that terrible chamber presented lay before their eyes; and for some moments not a word was said, while one gazed over the shoulders of another at the two corpses. Then all burst forth at once, surrounding the Earl of Hillingdon's page, and questioning him closely with eager and vociferous tongues; but Frill was more guarded in his answers than might have been expected. He told them that, liking all fine sights, he had amused himself by watching the Lady Catherine and her guest at supper, through the window on the right, between which and the other window stood a thick tree. He then detailed minutely all that had occurred till the entrance of Sir William Ifford; declared that he had heard steps approaching over the grassy lawn, and there had seen some one suddenly appear in the room, who, he supposed, had entered by the other window. He stoutly denied having seen the intruder's face; but at the same time remarked that the poisoning could not be his doing, for that nothing more was eaten, till, in the midst of high words, which first gave him a clew to the terrible truth, the one had fallen, and then the other, and he had run away to bring assistance.

Had the poison been of such a quality that any antidote would have proved effectual, so much time was lost that none could be administered. Not a spark of vitality remained when the bodies were at length examined; and the only indication of how the fatal event had occurred which could be discovered, was a small vial in the lady's bosom, containing a very minute portion of a white powder, which, being tried on a dog, produced almost instant death.

The wonder lasted its nine days and was then forgotten by the world at large; but the sudden disappearance of Sir William Ifford, the gay, the witty, the dissolute, continued for some time longer to excite inquiry and remark. No one ever learned the conclusion of his history; some said he had entered a monastery of Barefooted Friars, and died there in the odour of sanctity; others, with greater probability on their side, declared that he had turned Turk, and was to the day of his death one of the most

relentless persecutors of the Christians. We only know that, on the night when this double death took place, a horseman rode away at a terrible pace from the small village in the neighbourhood, took his way as fast as possible towards the sea-side, and there left all traces of his course behind.

For three days the page and the old servant of the Earl of Hillingdon were detained in Huntingdonshire, to give evidence regarding the sudden death of two persons of such high rank; but coroners were as wise, and coroners' juries as enlightened, in those days as in our own, and a burlesque verdict was returned in a very tragic case. The stout old servant and his youthful companion then set out to join their lord, arrived in Germany in safety, and, thanks to many of those circumstances which might have seemed best calculated to impede them, such as their ignorance—or rather small knowledge—of the language, and their very narrow information upon geographical subjects, arrived within a few miles' distance of Heidelberg with fewer difficulties than better instructed persons would probably have encountered. The answers which they gave, in what they called German, to the questions of those who interrogated them completely puzzled their examiners; and the round they took to arrive at the city brought them to a point the most opposite from that at which a messenger from England might have been expected to appear. It was late at night when they arrived at the small village of Liegelhausen; but there they heard from the villagers a confirmation of the rumours which had previously reached them, that Heidelberg was completely invested, and, to use the expression of the boors, "that a field mouse could not creep in."

"I will try, at all events;" said Frill, "for I know my lord would give his right hand for the news we bring. If it cost me my ears I will try;" and with this magnanimous resolution he lay down to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was in the early gray of the morning: all was silent and solemn; the beleagured city lay in its brief repose; the cannon on the hills and at the gates were still; the camp of the assailants slumbered, except where the tired sentinel paced up and down, longing for relief, or where the wounded lay on the feverish beds of the crowded hospitals. Quietly and silently on foot, with their horses left behind at the village, and in the dress of the Palatinate peasantry, the servant and the page plodded on as if going from Liegelhausen to Neunheim. Ere they had gone far, they saw the tents which now thickly covered the slopes towards the Heilgiberg, the huts of the Croats, and the breastworks which had been thrown up; while six pieces of artillery were seen stretched out upon a battery some three hundred yards up the hill. Still they walked on, however, plodding along, and affecting the heavy step and swinging air of the boor.

They were within a hundred paces of the bridge, when suddenly, from the neighbouring field, they heard the call to stand, and the next instant several Austrian soldiers, in their white uniforms, sprang down into the road. One seized Tony by the arm, and the others were running up, when the page gave a look to the Neckar and sprang down the bank. The water, fortunately, was low, and the boy's heart stout.

"In Frill! in!" cried Tony; and, without more ado, the youth dashed into the stream.

Two shots were instantly fired at him, but in haste and ill-aimed. He was seen, too, from the bridge, and several arquebuses were discharged amongst the Austrians with very little reverence for poor Tony, who had nearly suffered severely, held as he was in the midst of the enemy. Protected by the fire from the bridge, the boy hurried on for some way, up to his middle in water, then climbing on some rocks, and at length plunging boldly in where the tide was deep and strong. He was a good swimmer, but the force of the stream was great, and the water deadly cold. He was borne down, notwithstanding every effort, carried through one of the arches of the bridge, and though he struck for the shore as long as he could, yet nothing but the town wall presented itself dipping in the river, and his strength began to fail. A little sally-port and landing-place at length came in sight; but the poor lad's heart sunk, for it was distant, and he felt no power within him to reach it. The last thing he saw was a man running quickly along on the top of the wall; then all became dim and green, with a rushing sound in the ears, bewildered thoughts, and, at length, dull forgetfulness.

When the page opened his eyes again, he was in a small room and laid undressed upon a bed, with an old man of a mild and venerable aspect gazing at him. His whole frame tingled; his breathing was heavy and difficult: it seemed as if there was a world upon his chest; and, for several minutes, he recollected naught of what had happened. There were sounds in the air, however, which soon recalled him to a sense of where he was. Every minute or two a loud explosion shook the house and made the casements clatter as if the whole building were coming down; and, raising himself upon his arm, he tried to speak; but the old man gave him a sign to be silent, and, going to a table near, brought him a small quantity of wine.

It was long ere the stranger would permit him to converse, and longer ere he would allow him to rise, although the page explained that he had come to bring some intelligence of importance to his lord the Earl of Hillingdon.

"Your lord is quite safe and well," replied old Dr. Alting, to whose house the youth had been taken, in answer to his anxious inquiries, "and you can go to him by-and-by. At present you are not fit. There will be no assault today, for there was one yesterday; so you will have time enough."

But Frill was impatient, and about three o'clock he was permitted to go forth with directions as to where he was likely to find his master. The poor boy, however, had somewhat miscalculated his strength; for he found to climb the hill a weary task; and when he had obtained admission into the castle, he was sent from place to place in search of

Algernon, till at length he sat down at the foot of the second casement, and cried from very weariness.

While there, a young officer passed with his hand bound up, and paused to enquire what ailed him. The matter was soon explained, and the lad was once more directed onward, but with better assurance.

"The Earl is at the block-house which you see just peeping up yonder," said the officer; "I left him there five minutes ago; 'out go by those lower paths, for the fire is somewhat hot, and you may chance to get hurt as I have done, or worse."

The boy rose again and walked on, passed through the park of the Friesenberg, and approached the edge of the Carmelite wood. The cannonade, as he went, became every moment more and more fierce, and the balls whistled more than once over his head, while the roar of the artillery was mingled at intervals with the rattling fire of small arms. Not only in front and to the right was heard the sullen sound of the heavy ordnance; but rolling round and round, the deep voice of the cannon from the walls, and then farther off again from the Imperial batteries was heard like thunder in a forest, and still the mountains and rocks surrounding the narrow valley of Neckar echoed and re-echoed the terrific [illegible]. He was a brave lad, but his nerves were shaken, and he looked round from time to time to right and to left expecting to see the enemy forcing their way in.

At length, however, he reached the foot of the little hill on which the block-house stood, and, looking up, saw two or three men whose faces he knew well, standing above, before a small palisade. "Is my lord here, Halford?" he cried. "Is my lord here?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the man. "Come up, Frill;" and the boy with a lightened heart ran up the steps of the mount. Before he reached the top, Algernon Grey came forth himself, saying to the man to whom Frill had spoken, "Go round to Colonel Herbert, Halford, as fast as possible. Say there is no demonstration even here—that I have too many men, and we are doing nothing. Ah, Frill, is that you? Welcome back, my good boy. How in Heaven's name got you in? Where is Tony?"

"In the hands of the enemy," replied the boy. "I swam the Neckar, and was nearly drowned, but he was caught."

"What news from England?" asked Algernon Grey eagerly. "Did the Lady Catherine give you or Tony a letter for me?"

"None, my noble lord," answered the page. "She intended, I believe, but was prevented."

"That is most unfortunate!" cried his lord bitterly. "All is going wrong here, and one word might have been of vast importance—"

"I have something to tell, sir," said Frill, in a low tone, "if you would move down a little, for it is not fitted for all ears."

Algernon took a few steps down the hill, saying, "Speak, speak!" and the boy went on, in a voice raised little above a whisper, to detail all that had occurred since he had left his lord. When he came to the catastrophe, Algernon Grey turned deadly pale, shocked and horrified beyond expression. For several minutes he did not utter a word, but gazed upon the ground in sad and bitter silence. He was free—the heavy bond which had weighed upon him for so many years was broken—his liberty was restored; but how dark and terrible were the means! and with these his mind busied itself in gloomy thoughts ere it would rest on aught else.

"Who was the man?" he asked at length,—"the person you say came in by the window?"

"I did not see his face, my lord," replied the boy; "but I heard the voice of Sir William Halford!"

"My lord, my lord!" cried the soldier Halford, coming back as fast as he could run, "Colonel Herbert desires you to advance to the pheasant-garden, without a moment's delay, leaving nothing but a guard here."

Algernon Grey hurried up, called out the English and Dutch troops from the block-house and a small detached trench in front, arrayed them on the slope, and, telling the page to remain with the guard he left behind, ordered the men to advance at the charging pace by the winding path through the wood. The roll of musketry was now heard sharp and near, mingled with drums beating the charge; and, falling back to the side of the man Halford, the young Earl demanded what he had seen and heard.

"There were full two thousand men, sir, advancing to storm the works in the pheasant-garden," he replied. "I counted ten Austrian ensigns myself; and there were a number of Bavarian troops behind."

"Were they near?" asked Algernon Grey.

"Half way between the Crane's-nest and the Cavalier," replied the soldier.

The young Earl ran on again to place himself at the head, murmuring, "No time is to be lost, indeed."

The way was heavy and circuitous, interrupted by frequent flights of steps, which greatly delayed the men; but there was no cutting across; for the trees and the rocks of the Friesenberg in that part which had not yet been levelled, interrupted the straight course which might otherwise have been taken; and the firing was heard nearer and nearer, till even the sound of the guns did not drown the cries and shouts with which it was mingled; whilst still the beating drum and the blast of the trumpet was heard urging the men on either side to deadly strife. The young Earl's heart beat vehemently to get forward, but a full quarter of an hour elapsed ere he came in sight of the point of attack, approaching the works assailed by the angle of a fortified terrace which led to the Cavalier. This terrace was, perhaps, the weakest point of the whole defences of the castle; and, though commanded by the guns of the Cavalier above, it formed a sort of step, as it were, to the attack of the stronger work. The parapets, too, had been terribly shattered by the enemy's fire, and, when the young Englishman first caught sight of it, a terrible and an alarming scene presented itself to his eyes. An Austrian flag was already upon the terrace; the fight was going on hand to hand in several places; and, at the farther angle, driven almost under the guns of the Cavalier, he caught sight of Colonel Herbert, with a

Bohemian flag in his hand, rallying his men to charge the enemy in the hope of clearing the platform.

No consideration was necessary; the only course to be pursued was plain and straightforward; and though at the risk of encountering the fire of friends as well as of enemies, Algernon Grey sprang up the steps to the top of the terrace, arrayed his men with a wide front, and gave the order to charge. There was no hesitation either on the part of the English or the Dutch. All saw that, without a great effort, the fort was lost; and, rushing on in a compact body, they swept the whole length of the terrace, driving the assailants before them at the point of the pike. Attacked in front and rear at the same time, the Imperial troops, who were establishing themselves on the platform, gave way; many threw down their arms; and many either leaped over the parapet into the midst of their comrades below, or rushed to the tops of the ladders, and cast themselves upon those who were climbing up to support them. The outwork was regained; and, waving his hand to Herbert, whom he saw a little in advance, the young Earl was turning his head to give orders for a part of his men to fall back and line the parapet again, when suddenly he saw Agnes's father stagger, drop the flag, and fall forward on the platform. With a few brief words as to the defence of the work, Algernon Grey sprang forward to Herbert's side. Two of his men had already raised him in their arms; but his head hung heavily on his shoulder; and a ghastly wound on the right temple, passing along the whole side of the head and evidently injuring the skull, "bade hope itself despair."

"He is dead, sir, he is dead," said one of the men who held him in his arms.

"I think not," said Algernon, watching his countenance sadly; "the brain will not be injured. Throw a cloak over him and carry him down into the garden; I will come in a minute, when I have spoken with the captain of the cavalier—get him some water."

The men took him up and bore him down the steps; but the news had spread already amongst the men, and it was evident that they were greatly discouraged. Although rapid means were taken by Algernon Grey and the officer now in command of the outwork for its defence it is probable that it would have been taken that night, as it was on the following morning, had not the Imperial officers, smarting from severe loss and discouraged by an unexpected repulse at the very moment when they thought themselves victorious, ordered the drums to beat a retreat. A furious cannonade followed the enemy as they retired; and, seeing that all was safe for the time in that quarter, Algernon Grey left his men under the command of the Dutch officer associated with him, and turned to ascertain the fate of his friend. At the top of the steps, however, his eye ran over the town of Heidelberg, and he beheld with consternation fire and smoke arising in large volumes from three different parts of the town. Springing down, he hurried to a spot where, under some trees, he saw several men grouped together around another lying on the ground, and, as he advanced, one of them, a young German officer, came forward to meet him, saying, "He is living, my lord; he has spoken, he has mentioned your name."

In another instant Algernon was by Herbert's side, and saw, with a gleam of hope, that his eyes were open, and the light of life and intellect still therein. They turned upon him, indeed, with a faint sad look, and the lips moved for a moment ere a sound issued forth. "My child!" he said, at length, "my child!"

"Shall I send for her?" asked Algernon Grey, kneeling by his side, and bending down his ear.

"No, no!" answered the wounded man, quickly; "but her fate, young man—her fate!"

"Fear not, fear not," answered the Earl; "I will defend, protect her with my life—die for her should need be."

"I believe you," said Herbert; "I will trust you, through God. Yet swear to me that you will deal with her honestly; swear by all that you hold most sacred—by your faith in Christ—by your honour as an English gentleman, that you will be to her as a brother."

"I will be more," answered Algernon, in a low, but firm voice, "I will be her husband. I swear to you, by all I hold most sacred, that, as soon as she herself will consent, she shall be my wife; till then, my sister."

"Your [illegible]aid Herbert, sternly; "have you not another wife, young lord?"

"No;" answered Algernon Grey, pressing his hand; "that impediment is removed—that bond broken. If you had read the letter which I wrote you, you would have seen that the marriage was but in name. "It is now, however, altogether at an end. I have received the tidings this day—within this hour. She whom men called my wife is dead."

"Dead!" cried Herbert, in a stronger voice; "death is busy just now;" and then he paused, and raised his hand feebly to his head; but the fingers rested upon the bloody hair, and he drew them back, and pressed Algernon's hand in his. "I trust you," he said at length, "I trust you, Algernon. Oberntraut's news that you were already married, frightened—shocked me. I found confirmation in your letter, and I have been very sad ever since; but I trust you. Love her—oh, love her, and make her happy, for she deserves it well. An hour more, and the father's arm will be cold and powerless. Be you all to her. What wants that man? Ask him whence he comes. I would fain die in quiet."

"The town has fallen, sir," said an officer, who had come up in haste. "In two places they have forced a way, and Colonel Merven has retreated to the castle with the garrison. He sent me up to call Colonel Herbert to instant council."

"Tell him," said Herbert, raising his head, "that Colonel Herbert is removed from his command by a higher power than any on earth. Tell him what you have seen, and that I say, God protect him, and bless his arms in a just cause! Now, Algernon, one word more—there are not many left for me to speak: the town is taken—the castle must fall; we have no stores, no means. Good God! let not my child be in this place, if it must fall by storm! Heaven and earth!—it makes this poor shat-

tered brain reel. Swear,—swear you will take her hence. There are the passages below; she knows them all. There is the way, out there;"—and he pointed with his hand.

"I will, if it be possible," answered Algernon Grey.

"Possible, possible!" said Herbert, his mind evidently wandering; "oh, yes, it is quite possible. You hear, he swears that he will take her hence," continued the dying man, with his faint eyes rolling over the bystanders; "he swears—remember—keep him to his oath."

"What, my gallant friend!" said an English voice behind Algernon Grey, "brought to this at last!"

"Ay, Merven, ay, even so," answered Herbert; "we must all come to this. Bring me some water. I will speak with you, Merven. He swears he will take her hence before they storm the place. Send him forth, for I know him—know him well. He will remain to fight; and then she is without father, husband, friend. Oh, God! have mercy on me! how my brain reels!"

"Let some one fetch a litter," said Merven, kneeling down by his side; "we must bear him home."

"I have sent for one already," said Algernon Grey; "yonder it comes, I think."

"My child, my sweet child!" said Herbert, gazing still in Merven's face; "she can close my eyes, and then away—you will not let him linger!"

"No," answered the Governor, "I will send him forth, upon my word. If my command is of any power he shall go. He can be of little service here, I fear."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Herbert, and fell into silence, closing his eyes.

A few minutes after, a litter was brought up from the castle; it was one which the Princess Elizabeth had often used,—and Herbert was placed upon it, and the curtains drawn. Four stout soldiers, taking it upon their shoulders, carried it down, and Algernon Grey followed, conversing sadly with Merven, and informing him of all that had taken place of the assault on their side.

"You have been more fortunate than we have," answered the Governor. "Trutzkaiser was taken early in the day; and the fools, forgetting to shut the gates as our soldiers rushed in, the enemy came pell mell amongst them. I rallied them, barricaded the street by the Spere's door, and kept them at bay till four, when came the news that the bridge was likewise forced; and it became needful at once to retire into the castle, lest I should be taken in front and rear at once. But even here I find," he added in a low voice, "there is but provision and ammunition for four days. Tilly has already sent to offer terms; but I have referred him to Vere, in Mannheim; and most likely we shall have another assault to-morrow. Hark! Do you hear those shrieks? 'Tis from the town. The bloody villains are at their work!" and he looked sternly down upon the ground, setting his teeth hard. Algernon Grey made no reply; and Merven continued, "You have promised to go, my friend, and take the sweet girl with you; but how is it to be done?"

"I know not," answered the young Earl; "but my promise was only conditional. If we could send her forth in safety all would be well: I cannot—ought not to quit the place while you remain to defend it."

"He knew you, you see," said Merven; "but if there be a means I must send you; for I have promised unconditionally; and you must obey me, my young lord—how, is the only question."

"Herbert seemed to think she knew of some means," said Algernon Grey; "but yet—"

"No buts, my lord," replied Merven. "If there be a means you must take it, when and how you can. I desire, I command you to do so; it will be two mouths less in the castle, and that is always something. Stay, I will ask him what he meant. Perhaps we could dress her as a page, and send you under a flag of truce to confer with Vere on the terms of capitulation; but no, it would not do. Tilly is such a brute; you would almost be as safe within the walls; and his men are not the most famous for keeping terms even when solemnly sworn to. I should not wonder if we were all massacred marching out. But I will ask him if he knows any other means;" and, taking a step or two forward to the side of the litter, he drew back the curtain. The moment after, he turned his face sadly towards Algernon Grey, shaking his head sadly, and saying, "He can give no answer now."

Herbert's eyes were open, but they were fixed and meaningless. The jaw had dropped; the hand grasped tight the side of the litter, but it was already cold as ice.

"Halt, my men," said Merven; "'tis useless bearing him farther. Carry him to the gardener's house, there;" and he pointed up to a small stone building lying between the outer and the inner works, some fifty paces on the left. Then grasping the Earl's hand, he added, "Hasten down to her and break the tidings; then ask her if she knows any means of flying from this place; and, if she does, remember it is my most express command that you guard her safely on the way. They tell me some one got into the town to-day from without; and if so, there must be a way hence also."

"It was my poor page, who swam the Neckar," answered Algernon, with a sad smile; "but I will go and bear my heavy story to poor Agnes."

"Do, do," said Merven; "and I will hasten back into the castle and send a messenger to Tilly, calling on him as a man and a Christian to stop the atrocities going on there below. Those shrieks wring my very heart."

The unfeeling reply to Merven's message is well known; and every reader of history is aware that for three whole days the town of Heidelberg was given up to a brutal soldiery.

Algernon Grey walked sadly on, and slowly too; for he shrunk from the terrible task before him. He did wrong, though unintentionally; for he calculated not how fast rumour travels, knew not that the utmost speed was needful to outstrip the winged messengers of evil tidings. He paused for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading to Agnes's apartments, which were still in what is called the Electress's lodging; then, having made up his mind how to act, and laid vain plans for breaking the tidings

gently, he ascended with a quick step, and opened the door.

Agnes was seated at a table, with her hands pressed over her eyes and her bosom heaving with heavy sobs; but the moment he entered she raised her head, started up and cast herself upon his bosom, murmuring, "Oh, Algernon, Algernon!"

He saw that all had been told, and for his sole reply he pressed her to his heart in silence.

"Where have they taken him?" she asked, at length, wiping away the tears that flowed fast again as soon as dried.

"To the gardener's house," he answered, "to the right of the great casemate."

"I must go thither," she said, "I must go thither. Come with me, dear Algernon; I have none but you to support me now." And she moved towards the door, dressed as she was at the moment.

"Nay, throw this veil over you, my love," he said, taking up one that lay near and putting it over her head. Then, drawing her arm through his own, he led her down, and, choosing the least frequented paths, proceeded towards the gardener's house.

The sun was setting in the mellow evening of an early autumn day; the sky was clear and bright; the aspect of all nature sparkling and beautiful; peace and tranquillity breathed forth from the fair face of all inanimate things; while the tiger in man's heart was defiling with blood the noblest work of the Creator. The contrast rendered that whole day more dark, more sad, more terrible than if heavy thunder-clouds had brooded over the devoted city, or storm and tempest had swept the valley, overrunning with massacre and crime.

They met several of the soldiery, as they walked on; but, with an instinctive reverence for sorrow, the men made large way for them to pass; and Agnes, with trembling steps and weeping eyes, approached the house where her father's body lay, and entered the room of death. For an instant she clung almost convulsively to her lover's bosom, when the fearful sight of the inanimate clay, streaked with the dark blood of the death-wound, appeared before her; but then, loosening her hold, with a wild gasp she crept towards the bed, as if afraid to wake him; and, kneeling down, kissed the cold hand and cheek. She knelt there long, till the daylight faded, and Algernon gently laid his hand upon her arm, saying, "Rouse yourself, dearest Agnes! We have his last commands to obey. He has given you to me for ever; but has charged me to convey you hence, if it be possible, before a new assault has been made upon the place, hinting that you could point out the means of flight. Come, then, into another room, and let us speak of these things."

Agnes rose more calm than he had expected. and, laying her hand on his, she answered, "Whatever you ask me, I will do, Algernon; but you must let me watch here this night; I will come now, but it will be to return again soon; and I will try to clear my thoughts, and tell you what were the wishes and intentions of him who lies there so sadly still."

She turned her head from the bed, and, with her eyes cast down, withdrew into the outer room of the gardener's dwelling, where there was no one but an old servant; for the chief gardener himself had removed some weeks before to a more secure abode; and there seating herself near the window, she seemed to watch with eyes half overflowing the last faint streaks of light that hung upon the western sky.

"He felt that it would end thus, Algernon," she said at length, "and often talked to me of such evil chances, as if he would prepare my mind for the event. But it went worse with him lately; for something, I know not what, had disturbed and grieved him. He spoke then of sending me to the Electress mother, and seemed doubtful and anxious; whereas before he had always seemed to feel that if it were God's will he should fall, you would protect and defend me."

"It was, my love, that he heard suddenly, and from one who knew not all the facts," Algernon replied, "that which he would not listen to from me."

"I fear it embittered his last hour," said Agnes gloomily; "for he left me this morning more sad and careworn than ever. I fear that doubts and apprehensions for his child troubled him in the hour of death."

"Not so, dear one," replied her lover; "by a happy chance, my page found means this morning to force his way into the town, having been sent by me to England; and thus I was enabled to assure him that every obstacle between me and you was removed forever. It is a sad and horrible tale, Agnes, not fitted for ears so pure as yours to hear; but of this, at all events, be assured, that on that score, at least, your father's heart was at rest, and that our union has his blessing."

"Oh, thank God!" said Agnes, with a deep-drawn breath, as if the bitterest part of her sorrow was withdrawn. "These are balmy tidings, indeed, Algernon. But I recollect not what I was saying. Yes; it was that he wished me to go to the Electress Louisa; but, ere his messenger could return, the passage from the other side was cut off; and then he would have sent me forth by the passages which lead out through the rocks towards the Wolf's Well, beyond the enemy's post. But I could not go alone, and there was no single one with whom he would trust my safety. If many went, we were sure to be discovered and stopped, and the peril seemed too great for the occasion."

"Such is not the case, now," answered Algernon, the meaning of Herbert's words breaking upon him. "You are in far more peril here than anywhere in the open country. There we should but be made prisoners. But the storming of a fortress is an awful thing, Agnes, and there are fates worse than death. However," he continued, as she bent down her head with a pale cheek, "it is well to be prepared for any event. Know you the way, dear one? Have you the keys?"

"This is all that is needful," answered Agnes, drawing a key from her bosom. "He has made me wear this ever since the siege began, and long ago he taught me all the ways, with a prophetic warning that I might one day need them."

"I remember your telling me so when first we met," answered her lover; and they went

on to speak of many things connected with their past, their present, and their future fate, with that desultory discursiveness in which the mind is fond to indulge in moments of deep grief. The old servant of the gardener came in upon them to light a lamp, and recalled them to the present; and the night-drum beating reminded Algernon Grey that his men were probably still in the outworks. He loved not to leave Agnes there alone; but she herself was the first to propose it. "I must go and take my place in that room," she said; "and there I will spend the night in prayer. You will leave me, dear Algernon, for you must be sadly weary. You were in arms all last night, I know."

"I will leave you for an hour, Agnes, for I must visit the posts," he answered; "but then I will return and keep watch beside you—here, if you would be alone, for there are no feelings between you and me that the living eyes of him whom we shall watch in death might not have seen and sanctioned."

"No," she said; "no; you shall stay here, if you will, when you return. I own that to have you near me will be a comfort and a support, but for the time I am there I would fain be alone. Yet come with me to the door; I am very weak and foolish, but it is the first night of the cold and motionless clay of those we once loved so dearly that unnerves the heart."

Algernon Grey took the lamp and guided her to the door, paused when she hesitated for an instant, gazing forward, and then, when she advanced steadily, carrying the lamp which he had given her, he closed the door and left her, telling the old man to remain in the outer room till he returned.

With a quick step the young Englishman hurried up first to the block-house, and thence, by the same paths he had pursued in the morning, to the terrace and the cavalier. Everywhere he found the soldiers dull, heavy, and dispirited. They seemed to mourn for Herbert as if he had been a father, and to look upon the defence of the castle as hopeless without him to lead and guide them. In a brief conversation, the officer commanding the cavalier mentioned the facts which he had himself observed, and besought him to return to the castle and tell the Governor the state of things at the outworks.

"It would be better," he said, "to relieve the men at once, and send troops that have not been accustomed to fight under the poor Colonel's command. If need be, we can serve elsewhere, but the men are much fatigued."

There was much reason in what he said, and Algernon, speeding back to the castle, made his report to the Governor in person. Merven saw at once the expediency of the arrangements proposed, and promised they should be made, adding, "Tilly has allowed me to send an officer to Horace Vere to state exactly our situation, and to ask his commands; but this fierce Bavarian would not grant a suspension of arms even till our messenger's return, thinking, I believe, to wear us out with watching and anxiety, without any intention of renewing the assault for some days."

Some officers came in at the moment with reports; and Algernon Grey withdrew to return to the gardener's house. All was quiet and still within; and advancing to the door of the room where he had left Agnes, he opened it partially, saying, "I have returned, dear girl." He saw that she was kneeling and in prayer; and, closing the door again, he dismissed the old man to bed, wrapped his cloak round him, and seated himself to think. For more than an hour he remained in meditation; but he was wearied with long watching and great exertion for the last few days. His eyes felt heavy; and ere he had power to resist the influence, he slept. He was awoke by a quick, sharp, measured tramp; and, turning his ear, he listened. "Fresh men going down to relieve the people at the outworks," he said—"I cannot have slept long;" and, seating himself again in the chair from which he had risen, he began to meditate once more upon his situation. Three minutes had scarcely elapsed when the report of a cannon or arquebuse made him start up. Then came a rattling fire of small arms, and then a cannon-shot from the inner works of the castle. Springing to the door, he ran out, ascended an outer staircase which led to a high balcony above; there the view was clear over the young, lately planted trees of the garden towards the castle; and, though the night was somewhat dark, it was soon brightened by a long line of fire that ran along between him and the great casemate. At the same instant he heard shouts and shouts from the side of the cavalier; and the terrible truth burst upon his mind, that he was there alone with her he loved best on earth, between two large parties of the enemy's troops. By some means the Imperialists had passed the outworks, and gained the very foot of the inner defences. All return to the castle was cut off; and it was vain to hope, that, though they might be repulsed from the walls of the castle itself, the enemy could ever be dislodged from the advantageous position they had gained. Thought was vain. There was no room for exertion. Courage and daring could do nothing; and all that remained was to save Agnes by flight, if flight were yet possible.

Hurrying down as speedily as possible, he reentered the house and found her he loved in the outer room. "What is it?" she cried, with eyes full of terror.

"The enemy have gained the whole gardens," answered Algernon Grey; "they are between us and the castle on the one side, and in the Pheasant-garden on the other. Instant flight, dear Agnes, is our only chance—you must not hesitate, dear girl—life is but a small consideration in comparison with what may happen, if we stay—you must not hesitate."

"Not for an instant," she answered; "it was his command, it is your wish, and I am ready; —one last look, and I go."

She returned to the room where her father's body lay; and then, after pressing her lips upon his, came forth, and joined her lover. She wept not, she trembled not—she was calm and firm; and they issued forth together, gazing on into the darkness. "This way," said Agnes, in a low tone; "it is not far. Hark! how fiercely they are firing; they will not mind us. Let us pass through the labyrinth of clipped hornbeams. Under the arches we shall escape all eyes."

Hurrying on through narrow rows of shrubs cut into the form of arcades, without missing

one path or turning, they came to the top of a large flight of steps, where the whole magnificent scene of a night attack upon a fortress was displayed to their eyes, by the continual flashing of the cannon from the bastions, and the long, sudden blaze of the small-arms discharged by the regiments of arquebusiers below. Ever and anon the vast masses of the castle started out from the darkness, illuminated by the broad glare, and then were covered with a black veil again; while the thunder of the artillery broke, with awful grandeur, the stillness of the night. The fugitives paused only for a moment, however; but Agnes whispered, "Let us make haste—day will soon break;" and the castle clock, almost at the same moment, struck the hour of four. Algernon Grey counted but three, for the cannon interrupted the sound again; but, hurrying down the steps, they walked along in the direction of the great terrace, till, in the front of the rock which had been hewn away nearly into a wall, they came to a niche, before which was placed the statue of a water-god in the midst of a marble bason.

"Here," said Agnes, "here is the place. Let me feel, where is the lock!" and she ran her hand over the face of the niche. For nearly a minute she could not find the key-hole, but at length succeeded, and the stone door at once gave way, opening the mouth of a narrow passage.

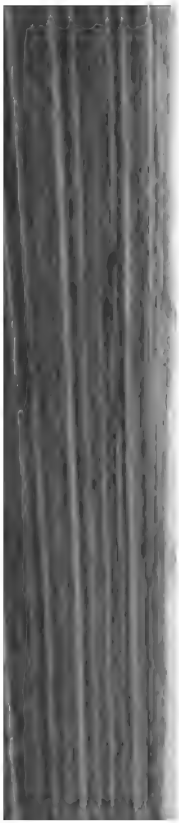
"Take the key and lock it," she said, passing in first. Algernon Grey followed, and closed the door.

"You are safe; I trust you are safe, my beloved!" he cried, throwing his arms around her. Agnes made no answer; but he could feel her sob violently upon his bosom, now that the extreme peril which had roused all her energies had ceased. He soothed and consoled her to the best of his power; and then, to engage her mind with other things, inquired, "Whither does this lead, dear girl!"

"Up into the [illegible]," she answered, "above the Wolf's-well. It was intended for an aqueduct, I believe, to bring the waters of the stream down to the castle; but it has never been so used. Let us on, Algernon, the bitter parting is over."

Gently and kindly he led her on, feeling the way before him with his sheathed sword, and supporting the gentle being by his side with his left arm passed round her. The way was steep, and in some places rugged; for full half an hour they went slowly on, hearing from time to time the tramp of men above them, and the constant roar of the artillery, showing the castle had not yet fallen. Sometimes the air was close; but very frequently a spot of dim light was seen [illegible] just above the level of their heads, and the cool air blew in from without. At length the grey dawn could be seen streaming in through the apertures made to ventilate the conduit; and in a quarter of an hour after, a door presented itself before them—was easily unlocked, and Agnes and her lover stood upon the side of the mountain out of sight of Heidelberg. The fresh grey morning rested soberly upon the hills. The cannonade had ceased. No sounds broke the stillness of the scene around. The [illegible] Neckar flowed glistening on below. All bore the aspect of peace and tranquillity; and, pressed in each other's arms, they thanked God for deliverance, allayed by some sorrow, but still merciful and sweet.

THE END



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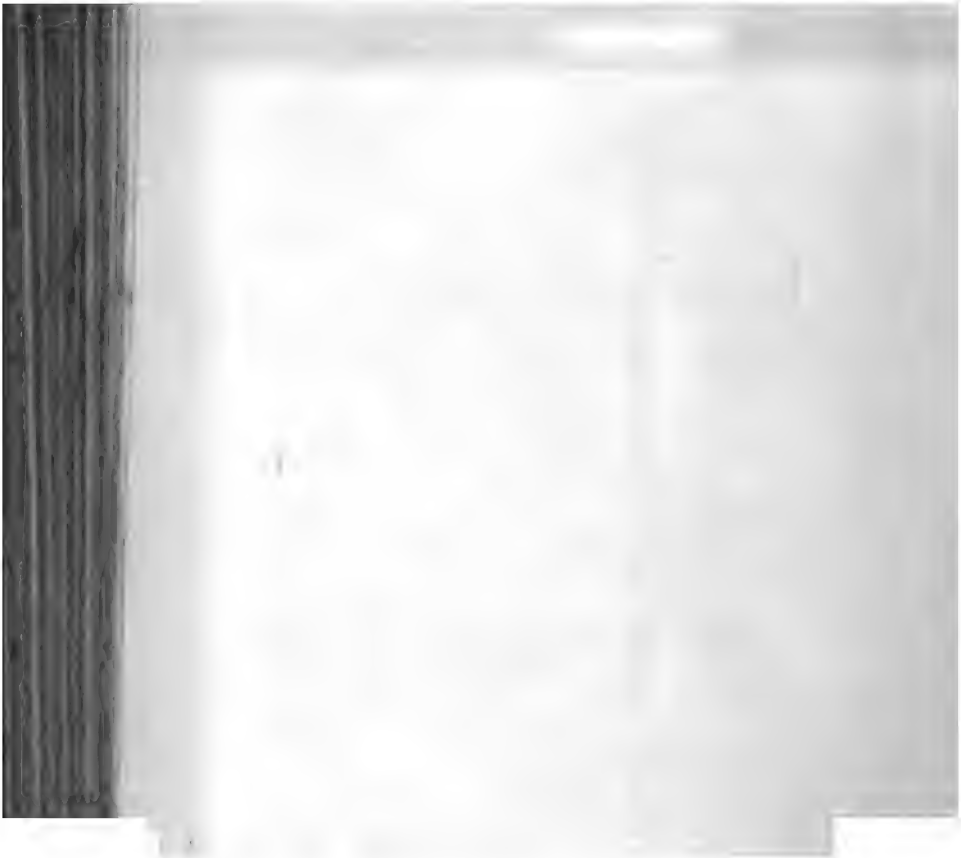

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